

SISTER CITY UPDATE

Issue 37

Richland Center - Santa Teresa Sister City Project

April 2012

Our Scholarship Program Expands

A Secondary Chance

by Janet and Derrick Gee

Two years ago, as we struggled along November's muddy trail to El Terrero, we came across Walter Jiménez on his way to the new secondary school at La Pitilla – the closest one to his village but still a two-hour hike each way. This chance encounter started us thinking about the difficulty of access to secondary education.

In the remote communities within the Chacocente Wildlife Refuge, where the Sister City Project (SCP) works, the family unit is very strong. Add to this SCP support with school supplies and lunches, and you have an elementary school graduation rate of over 85%. But the high school graduation rate in these communities is basically zero percent! That's because secondary (middle plus high) schools have been physically and financially inaccessible. Over the years, we've been approached by tearful mothers crying, "My daughter has top grades but there's no way for me to pay for secondary school." There is little chance of these students realizing their full potential if school ends after the sixth grade.

SCP started a conversation with our local facilitator, Alma Susana Chávez, and the villagers about how we might help them make this giant step towards advancement that a secondary education represents. Two issues stood in the way – logistics and expense. Our first thought was to find host families near the La Pitilla school to whom SCP would pay a lodging fee for housing students during the week. This is how the elementary school teachers handle the journey from Santa Teresa to teach in Chacocente from Monday through Friday. However, if the number of students that go to secondary school increased significantly, this might not be practical.

During the 2011 school year, we tested a different concept. We would make a cash payment to the student's family that could be used to pay for school supplies, for bus fare to take at least thirty minutes off the daily journey, for lunch before the journey home, for possible lodging, or for other purposes that the family could decide



Marilyn Rinehart

On the completion of his first scholarship year, Walter Jiménez receives a certificate and a first-aid kit from SCP President Linda Stadler.

for themselves. This payment – \$320 per student per year, is similar to the "Conditional Cash Transfer" (CCT) concept that is growing in popularity in less-developed countries. CCT gives a cash reward to a family in return for specified family activities – in this case the student must attend school regularly, earn grades of at least 80%, and perform ten hours of community service each semester in his or her own village.

The three students, our friend Walter Jiménez, Marili Bravo from La Chota, and Noyling Reyes from La Poma, who entered the trial program a year ago, all met these standards. Their grades were validated by the teacher and their community service by a village elder. Based on this success, we had sixteen applications for 2012. Nine of those were approved. We think we're onto something!

However, we're also getting ourselves into a potentially significant financial commitment. The villagers said that they would prefer to receive a smaller scholarship amount if that meant awarding more scholarships.

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Secondary Chance, continued

So, we've lowered the amount from \$320 to \$250 per student per year. There are five grades in the secondary system. If this year's nine students continue to meet the standards, we'll feel obliged to continue to support them. Multiplying five years times nine students times \$250 means that at "maturity" we'll need over \$11,000 per year (more than half our annual budget) – and that's just for nine students per year out of a Chacocente graduating class of about 20 students.

We'd like your help. One suggestion is that you, or your church or service organization, might make a contribution this year of \$250 with the intention (but not an obligation) of continuing the generosity for a further four years, thus helping one student into a life of much greater opportunity.

The La Farge, Wisconsin, Lions Club has kicked off the process with a \$500 per year commitment. With a little help from other generous donors, the strong families of Chacocente can open doors for their children into a promising future. 🌿



Marilyn Rinehart

A proud father and his daughter enter the El Terrero classroom for the sixth grade graduation ceremony. The Nicaraguan flag flies overhead.

Donations to support the work of the Sister City Project are always gratefully accepted. They may be sent to the Sister City Project, PO Box 483, Richland Center, WI 53581.

2011 Project Summary

Last year we started three successful new programs:

- **School Gardens** – were planted in each of the five schools. Led by SCP Ag technician Everth Torrez, students learned hands-on gardening and compost making. They grew vegetables for school lunches, and planted trees for fruit and shade.
- **Farmer-to Farmer Program** – 40 farmers, working in pairs to help and learn from each other, received some fertilizer and training in prevention of soil erosion, ecological fertilizers, and other subjects from Everth Torrez.
- **Secondary School Scholarships** – Three scholarships were awarded, enabling Chacocente young people to attend secondary school in 2011.

And continued projects from previous years:

- **School Supplies** – were provided for 216 students and their teachers in five Chacocente schools, plus extra food to supplement the government lunch program.
- **Water Projects** – 13 water filters for home and school use, five well rope pumps, materials for seven community-built wells, seven well lids, and 13 latrines were funded, plus extension of water piping for seven families in La Poma and La Chota.
- **Health** – Six community visits were made by rural doctor and nurse (365 consultations). Basic medicines provided. Training sessions for community health promoters (subjects included childbirth, emergency accident care, and uterine and cervical cancer/PAP tests). Working with the SCP, Rivas Lions Club mobile eye clinic provided free eye exams and glasses for over 100 Chacocente people.
- **Environment** – support for the hatchery for leatherback sea turtles, equipment for sea turtle monitoring program and beach guards at the arribada beach, environmental education workshops in Chacocente schools, nesting beach clean-up by Santa Teresa secondary school students.
- **SCP Board Visits** – Jane Furchgott visited Santa Teresa and the Chacocente projects in February; President Linda Stadler, Elizabeth Froh, and Marilyn Rinehart in December, all at their own expense. 🌿



Farmer-to-Farmer program participants Umberto Reyes and his brother in Umberto's grain sorghum field.

Farmer-to-Farmer Program

The Farmer-to-Farmer program has been successful. Envisioned as a program where recognized good farmers could help other farmers in their communities improve their techniques and crop yields, it has evolved as a sort of buddy system, where two farmers pair up to help and learn from one another. About 40 Chacocente farmers are participating in the program.

The participants promise to use soil conservation techniques. The SCP is helping by supplying them with technical assistance, on-site evaluation, and urea fertilizer, although Everth Torrez, the technician, is stressing organic self-produced fertilizers. He has encouraged side-by-side tests to show farmers the differences between the yields with urea, no fertilizer, and manure compost. Everth has held demonstrations, with much farmer interest and discussion, on making organic fertilizers.

Most of the farmers accompanied Everth on a tour of the participants' fields to look at the results and make comparisons of the season's crops. The late planting season went well, SCP board members visiting in December noting good corn, rice, and grain sorghum crops. The farmers said the program had increased their crop yield per acre.

The Chacocente villagers are subsistence farmers, living off their own crops and, if the weather cooperates, having some left over to sell or trade.

The Returned Peace Corps Volunteers/Madison helped fund this program, as well as the school garden program. Both these new projects will be continuing in 2012. 🌱

Thank You for 25 Years of Support!

Richland Center and Santa Teresa have been Sister Cities for 25 years! We began this friendship in 1987, and have kept it up through a quarter century of political and personal changes. And we have been able to do this because of you, our supporters. Our thanks to all the people who have been active SCP members over the years, and those of you who help with our fundraisers. And to our wonderful donors who have helped us maintain the humanitarian and environmental programs, even in these recession years!



Our Nicaraguan facilitator, Alma Susana Chávez, and the SCP board of directors are the workers. Currently, Linda Stadler is board president, José Marroquin vice president, Janet Gee secretary, Stein Goering treasurer, with board members Elizabeth Froh, Jane Furchgott, Derrick Gee, Maggie May, Marilyn Rinehart, and Aaron Wunnicke. Most of us speak Spanish, essential in Nicaragua, notably José (originally from El Salvador), and Elizabeth (from Venezuela). 🌱



Umberto Reyes shows his many sacks of harvested basic grains to Ag technician Everth Torrez, Alma Susana Chávez, and Elizabeth Froh.

Why Chacocente?

In 1997 the Santa Teresa mayor asked the SCP's help for the sea turtles and the poor communities in Chacocente Wildlife Refuge. This Nicaraguan national reserve, mostly in the southern part of the Santa Teresa municipality, borders the Pacific Ocean. Since then, our projects have focused on Chacocente's villages, turtle beaches and tropical dry forest.

“Sisters” in Our Sister City

by Marilyn Rinehart, new SCP Board member

Two fellow hikers on the Mombacho volcano and cloud forest trail asked us – Marilyn Rinehart, Elizabeth Froh, and Linda Stadler – if we were sisters. Whether he meant that in the biological sense or the religious sense, we weren't sure. By the end of our ten-day visit to Nicaragua in early December 2011, we did become sisters!

Our objectives for the trip were to assure that the funds sent to Santa Teresa were being dispersed as the board intended, that the system for record-keeping was effective, and that people in the communities were active participants in planning and implementing our mutual projects. We hoped to see firsthand the work being done in health, education, agriculture and environmental projects as described elsewhere in this newsletter. We were able to do MOST of what we set out to do, and we were pleased with what we saw.

An incidental objective was to deliver medical supplies to the Centro de Salud, Santa Teresa's public health clinic. We each carried a large bag of medical supplies such as crutches, canes, glucometers, dressings, syringes, gloves, and tubing. These materials were donated by Cornerstone medical mission. In the central hallway of the health center, with mothers and children coming and going from their appointments, we worked with Centro personnel to unload, sort, and store the equipment, and to provide brief instruction as needed. That accomplished, we were ready to get on with our work.



Elizabeth Froh

Dr. Narvaez and nurse Manuel Mercado (modeling a “turtle shell” back brace donated by the SCP) with Marilyn Rinehart. These men staff the rural La Pita clinic, see patients from the Chacocente communities, and train community health promoters.



Everth Torrez

The three “sisters,” Marilyn, Elizabeth and Linda, with Alma Susana Chávez in an El Terrero sorghum field,

We have Alma Susana Chávez, SCP facilitator in Santa Teresa, to thank for a well-organized itinerary. Elizabeth and Linda had been to Santa Teresa before. Both were far more fluent in Spanish than I am. We soon fell into our complementary roles. Elizabeth, a native Spanish speaker, quickly established warm relationships with everyone from Mayor Ivan Dinarte to the children in the local schools. Linda had prepared an agenda for each meeting so that we could focus on our questions and concerns. My experience with Spanish has been in health care settings. I was fearful that I could only talk about sore throats and headaches! I was able eventually to comprehend about 75% of conversations. My role in our day-to-day activities was to be the scribe and the photographer.

Alma included Everth Torrez, the Garden and Ag Tecnico, in many of our visits. Everth was also one of the moto drivers. I was somewhat prepared for the challenges of travel – lots of walking, crowded minibuses, bumpy dirt roads in places. I hadn't ridden on a motorcycle since 1965. On the day we traveled out to the villages, I barely had time to don my helmet before Everth took off. It took a minute to figure out that I had hand holds and foot rests. I envisioned sliding off the back, my head cracking open inside the helmet that was pushing down on my glasses at every bump making a crater in the bridge of my nose. This was before we got out of Santa Teresa! The six or seven miles on the open road went fairly well. The lush green mountains were beautiful! Then we turned off on a dirt road, steep down hill, across a stream, and up a slippery bank on the far side. I'm not sure how many miles were like this, but I felt as if I might be all the way to Panama!

The people in the villages of La Chota, El Terrero, and Escalante warmly welcomed us. We stayed overnight in two homes and conducted community meetings in the three schools. We tromped through fields of rice, corn, and grain sorghum to see the results of their agricultural improvements. We saw a wide variety of plants in the school gardens which supplemented meals and enhanced the nutrition of the children and families. These three days of intense observation reinforced our belief that the Sister City Project is successfully working toward our goal of sustainability and community involvement.

My decision to go to Nicaragua grew out of a little awareness of the SCP over the past several years. I encourage anyone who is intrigued by reading our newsletters or attending our Spring Fling or Burrito Supper to attend our board meetings and/or talk to a board member. If you have a sense of adventure, minimal Spanish, the ability to wade shallows streams, and a commitment to SCP, there may even be an opportunity to join us on a future visit to Santa Teresa. 🌿



Alma Susana Chávez

The school lunch program encourages school attendance. School garden vegetables have added extra nutrition to the meals.

Our SCP website is santa-teresa.wccnica.org – check it out and see the newsletter photos in full color. All our past newsletters are available to read online, along with announcements of upcoming events. If you'd like to receive the electronic Sister City Update (with full color photos!) before the paper copies even arrive, email us at santa-teresa@wccnica.org to let us know.

Visit us on Facebook! (Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project)



Marilyn Rinehart

Alma Susana Chávez with new daughter Danna Samantha

Welcome, Danna Samantha!

Last September SCP Nicaraguan facilitator Alma Susana Chávez gave birth to her second child, Danna Samantha. Danna joins father Berman, big sister Dania Surima, and Alma's extended family in their Santa Teresa home. After a short maternity leave, Alma was back at work visiting the Chacocente villages. 🌿

Nicaragua's Elections

Nicaragua held national elections in November 2012. The incumbent, Daniel Ortega, was reelected president, receiving 62% of the vote. His socialist Sandinista party also won 62 out of the 91 seats in the National Assembly.

The election results were accepted by the world, although there has been much criticism of Ortega for having Nicaragua's Supreme Court change the Constitution so he could run again. Some European countries have withdrawn their aid to protest the lack of transparency in his government.

Nicaragua, although still Latin America's second poorest country, has enjoyed the highest economic expansion of Central America in the past couple of years. Ortega's popularity rests on his focus on improving the life of the poor, while keeping a hands-off approach to business. Free education and health care have returned, along with a doubling of Nicaragua's exports. 🌿

Newsletter Production: Jane Furchgott and Sue Furchgott, with help from Stein Goering and Charles Munch.

A Sense of Gratitude

by Elizabeth Froh

This past December, Linda Stadler, Marilyn Rinehart and I had an opportunity to visit and talk to the villagers of the communities we serve in Nicaragua. I was humbled by the sense of gratitude many villagers felt towards Sister City.

I would like to relate what the villagers told me about how the Sister City Project has improved their lives...

One of the village fathers related that now that each family has a well in their home, they have also built a wash tub and shower house next to the well and no longer use river water for drinking, bathing or washing clothes. He noted that in the past two years in his village, no children had fallen ill from drinking contaminated river water. His wife also mentioned that she is pleased not to have to go down to the river to wash clothes. In fact, when Linda, Marilyn and I wanted to bathe in the river, she was dumbstruck that we would want to do this when she had a shower house with clean well water.

In another village, one gentleman mentioned that now that every family in his village had a latrine, they no longer defecated in the woods. Their pigs were now disease free, which enabled them to sell their pork at market. Not only did this provide them with a source of income, but their families were healthier, too!



A healthy Chacocente hog. Nicaraguan pigs often wear a collar made from three sticks, preventing them from going through fences and into houses.

When we contacted farmers who were participating in the Farmer-to-Farmer program, we were told that they were pleased to be able to learn from each other and to receive instruction from our agricultural agent on soil conservation and fertility. Several proud farmers took us on tours of their healthy fields to demonstrate how they were implementing their newly acquired knowledge.



Children singing at the El Terrero graduation. The blackboard says: Promotion dedicated to God, parents, students, teachers, and especially to the Sister City Project.

Finally, we spoke with the parents of the students who were receiving SCP scholarships. They were very grateful for this opportunity. In fact, many more parents were hopeful that their child would qualify in the future for our scholarship program. And who could forget the grade school children who showed off their scholastic accomplishments and even treated us to an end of school year party? The parents were also thankful for our assistance in building their schoolhouses, providing school materials and supplementing the meager school lunches.

We spoke to so many people that I wish I could relate all their stories. Now, when I attend our Sister City meetings, I feel that we are really helping to make this world better in our own little way.

For that, I am grateful. 🌿

Everyone is welcome to come to SCP meetings, held once a month at the Richland Hospital. Call Janet Gee at (608) 588-3942 for meeting dates or information about the SCP.

Marilyn Rinehart

Marilyn Rinehart



An olive ridley hatchling at Chacocente

The Chacocente Sea Turtle Season

by Jane Furchgott

Olive ridleys holding their own: 2011 was a big year for the nesting olive ridley sea turtles at Chacocente's beach — around 60,000 nests were dug and over 1,000,000 baby turtles hatched. The past ten years have seen the increase of these arribada-nesting turtles at Chacocente, with the last four years showing a continuing high count.

Funding for MARENA (Nicaragua's DNR) dropped significantly in 2011. There were twelve community guards at Chacocente again, but hired for a shorter period of time. A December egg-robbing invasion of the arribada beach by some people from the nearby fishing village was not a big loss of eggs, although it was a step backwards in turtle protection and community relations.

Jeffer Cruz, MARENA's Chacocente director, is doing a good job. The SCP contributed \$500 in 2011 to help with supplies for the turtle protection campaign. We feel we can count on Jeffer, a Santa Teresa native, to make the best use of our funds, as he did to add extra protection during the earlier arribadas last fall.

Leatherbacks losing ground: This has been the worst season for leatherback nesting along the Pacific coast of Central America. At the Veracruz hatchery, partially supported by the SCP, there were only six leatherback nests, all laid at different times by the same female turtle. The life cycle of the long-lived leatherback sea turtle is complex. It will probably be 20 years or more before the first hatchlings from the hatchery return to lay eggs. The hope is that there will still be protection for them. The requirement is to keep the beach intact, waiting for them, despite all the pressure against this.

Perla Torres, FFI's (Fauna and Flora International) coordinator of the leatherback hatchery, recently posted a letter about February's annual leatherback census overflight of Nicaragua's Pacific coast: "We saw very few nests apart from the monitored nesting beaches, giving us an idea of the critical situation this species is going through. This should be an alert for all of us, and points out the possible extirpation of this species. At the same time, it must encourage us to continue protecting each nest, and reduce the causes most affecting this species, such as nest robbing, eating turtle eggs, incidental fishing bycatch, and alteration of its nesting habitat by construction and deforestation.

"In the overflight it was very evident that many beaches are being affected by construction, such as Playa Salamina and Veracruz, as well as the deforestation of a good part of the coastal vegetation. We need to be conscious that the leatherback, like other species of sea turtles, is very sensitive to changes in the nesting habitat, and that these factors increase the risk of its extinction."

Nicaragua's 2005 sea turtle product ban is still on the books. There isn't much pressure to change it, but government enforcement is low. A recent FFI survey found that while 82% of people know selling turtle eggs is illegal, 52% still eat the eggs. Younger adults, however, are not turtle egg consumers. Education and consciousness-raising efforts are reaching the new generation.

Alma Susana Chávez is in charge of the SCP's environmental education efforts. Each year she gives classes on a special theme. The 2011 environmental workshop cycle was "A Happy Day with the Sea Turtles." Children from each of eight Chacocente and buffer zone schools and their families participated. In addition to the lessons, the day included puppets, prizes for turtle-themed artwork and compositions, and a piñata for the young children. 🌿



Alma Susana Chávez

Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project
P.O. Box 483
Richland Center, WI 53581
SCP Website: santa-teresa.wccnica.org

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Marilyn Rinehart

View of the city of Santa Teresa

Our 25th Anniversary!

KICKAPOO SPRING FLING! ☀️ Food, Fun & Music ☀️ Sat. April 28

The Richland Center-Santa Teresa Sister City Project and the Friends of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve invite you to celebrate the season with our annual “**Brats, Burgers & Beer**” Spring Fling! The event will be held on **Saturday, April 28** at the **Kickapoo Valley Reserve**, S3661 State Hwy. 131, north of La Farge, Wisconsin.

Spring Fling Schedule \$10 includes meal and programs:

- 3:00 Guided Bird Walk and Plant Identification Walk
- 4-6:30 Grilled Brats and Burgers, salads, Nicaraguan *gallo pinto*, home made desserts, soft drinks
- 4:30 Live Raptor program
- 5:30 Sea Turtles slideshow
- 6:30 Raffle and Silent Auction results
- 7:00 Music with Dan Sebranek and Mary

In addition, there will be a \$10 Raffle (first prize Wenonah kayak, also Vortex binoculars, and fly rod and fishing gear); a Silent Auction, with items by area artisans; and the famous “**Brew Canoe.**”

The Spring Fling proceeds will be split equally between the Kickapoo Reserve’s education program and the Sister City Project’s education programs in Nicaragua’s Chacocente Wildlife Refuge.

For information contact the Reserve at (608) 625-2960, kickapoo.reserve@krm.state.wi.us or visit <http://kvr.state.wi.us>



Alma Susana Chávez

Two share one desk on environmental education day in El Terrero. The whole family is invited to the school for these creative SCP workshops.