

# Olympia/Santo Tomás Update

**US/Nicaragua Solidarity—Since 1989**  
**Spring 2018**

An update  
from the  
Thurston–Santo Tomás  
Sister County  
Association

## **Please welcome our visitors from Nicaragua!** **20th Anniversary of Sister Schools: Lincoln and Ruben Darío**

The Thurston-Santo Tomás Sister County Association is pleased to announce the upcoming visit of Marily Aguilar, Yessenia Solís, Elvis Aguilar, and Cruz Murillo as the 12th community delegation since 1990, in the spirit of hermanamiento. Please read about our visitors in this issue. Numerous delegation exchanges have taken place between our communities, giving students, teachers, doctors, organizers and other professionals the opportunity to interact and learn alongside international counterparts doing similar work. We see the connections across the planet, of sovereign peoples reclaiming their land and resources, reclaiming their cultural heritage and pride, and reclaiming their destinies. We, in the global North, look for and create strategies to do the same.

Now that our guests have finally received their travel visas, we are finalizing each visitor's itinerary. Please contact us if you'd like to get involved or have ideas or questions. We will

need additional strong Spanish/English language interpreters, as well as support with transportation and events. Thank you to our homestay hosts!

These four visitors follow in the footsteps of 35 other people from Santo Tomás who have been to Olympia in the last 28 years! All are committed to strengthening their community in Nicaragua and the sister ties with the greater Olympia area. Our visitors will participate in a nationwide student walk out, Procession of the Species, visit Comunidad a Comunidad and Familias

Unidas in Bellingham, El Centro de la Raza and Casa Latina in Seattle, the Neighbors for Immigration Rights March in Shelton, and all kinds of other visits in school classrooms, farms, and organizations in the Olympia area. Email [tstsca@gmail.com](mailto:tstsca@gmail.com) for more info, check our webpage: <http://oly-wa.us/TSTS-CA/> and our Facebook page: Tstsca Thurston-Santo Tomás



**Direct from  
Santo Tomás  
to Olympia**

**April 17 to  
May 11, 2018**

**Marily Aguilar Oporta,  
educator**

**Yessenia Solís Miranda,  
1998 visitor and educator  
Principal at Ruben Darío**

**Elvis Javier Aguilar,  
agro-industrial engineer**

**Cruz Murillo Sandoval,  
engaged  
community member**

# The Reciprocity of Intergenerational Solidarity and the 12th Delegation from Santo Tomás!

by Diego López, with support from Ana Beatriz Gaspar, Yazna Ruiz, Jean Eberhardt, Rose Fox

In the spring quarter of 2017, I travelled with four other Evergreen students to Santo Tomás, Chontales, Nicaragua as part of a college student delegation. While there, we were embedded in various social projects to learn about the work that is done in this community. I worked in the *Clínica Popular*, where I learned basic patient intake, filing systems, using basic medical equipment and techniques like taking pulse with a stethoscope and taking blood pressure. I also learned about the hard work and years of dedication that go into successful revolutionary social projects. It was an eye-opening experience to see such inspiring workers in action. One of the things that stood out to me the most was the diversity in ages of the people doing this work; there were children, their parents, and even grandparents all working together. We, a group of college kids, had the benefit of so much wisdom from people who had lived through a variety of economic and political upheavals. To continue that spirit of intergenerational solidarity and the hospitality I received, I have committed to helping host a small delegation of Nicaraguans when they come to visit Olympia, Washington this April 17 to May 11, 2018. That spirit of reciprocity is another reason this relationship is so important to me; it's not volunteering as I had understood it before. We weren't going there because "they needed our help."

We are two communities working together to achieve common goals. Both sides are able to learn things by meeting people doing similar work in a different situation. People from Olympia are able to learn first hand from some of the most effective anti-imperialist organizers in recent memory, and the Tomasinos and Tomasinas gain a platform to speak in the country that has repeatedly violated their country's sovereignty. To be clear, we always have a lot of fun together too; that is part of community building after all! To prepare our newsletter readers for this special visit of our organization's 12th delegation from Santo Tomás, I've extracted the following profiles

from Skype interviews with each visitor.

## Yessenia

Yessenia Solís Miranda grew up sharing in the hardships of all Nicaraguans who knew what life was like before the revolution. Her father died when she was 7, leaving only her mother to care for her and her four siblings. Her mother's strength served as an inspiration to her and she is grateful that she still has her

in her life. Yessenia always sought to emulate that strength as she continually works to improve the lives of children around her. During the hardest times in her country, she saw classes of 60 students with only one teacher. She sparingly used school supplies that were very difficult to get in the country during the United



*Santo Tomás teachers Juana Rodríguez and Yessenia Solís at Tumwater Falls in 1998*

States economic blockade. The times have improved, the war is long over, but they still want for basic tools such as computers, dry erase and permanent markers, a variety of books, and construction paper.

In the cold winter of 1998, she was invited to be one of two Nicaraguan educators (the 4th delegation from Santo Tomás) to travel to Olympia, Washington, sponsored by the TSTSCA. She met Marcela Abadi, another dedicated teacher here. On the suggestion of TSTSCA organizers, they began to develop a Sister School relationship that was connected to the TSTSCA. The relationship grew and grew, and both teachers eventually became the principals of their schools.

20 years ago, in the United States, Yessenia saw and felt the high contrast disparity with classrooms in

Nicaragua. The teachers and students had so many more resources here. The Nicaraguan teachers were just as dedicated, but couldn't give students the same individual attention that the smaller, better equipped U.S. classrooms afforded.



*Evergreen State College students and Nicaraguan colleagues in 2017*

For Yessenia, this sister school relationship is important because it gives her students and teachers the chance to learn from the perspectives of others. This fuels students' curiosity. Teachers learn from the strategies of their U.S. counterparts and they've received critical material aid. Lincoln students, parents and teachers have sent supplies and raised funds that have been invaluable in facilitating the goals of the teachers at Ruben Dario. Yessenia's current goal is to bring back funds to purchase and augment the quantity of books her school has in its tiny library.



*Yessenia with Lincoln Elementary School Students in 1998*

**When she travels once again to the US, we will help her celebrate the 20th anniversary of the sister schools relationship she and Marcela started.** Yessenia wants to continue to strengthen this relationship, and to show the importance of these kinds of mutually beneficial relationships to people in the US and Nicaragua. She is especially pleased that Marily Aguilar, a former 6th grade student of hers, has followed the calling to teach children and they will be here together. Yessenia is proud of the full circle she's been part of, with students becoming teachers, of sister schools continuing after she retires, of people working together to build the world we desperately need.

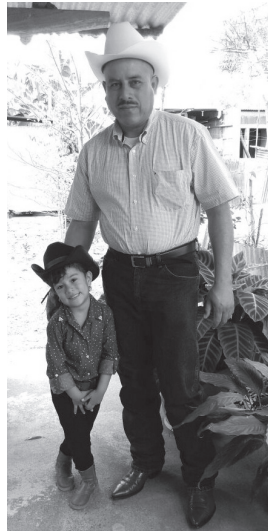
Yessenia looks back fondly on all of the Evergreen students she has worked with over the last 22 years in Santo Tomás. She taught them about her favorite Latin American authors, helped them improve their grammar and vocabulary, she supported their confidence in speaking, and truly appreciated their solidarity through community service in her town. She hopes to see many of those approximately 60-70 Greeners, as well as their faculty.

## Cruz

Cruz Murillo Sandoval was born in 1971 to a family of hardworking farmworkers, 7 kilometers from Santo Tomás on the steep hill called La Ñambar on the highway heading West. Early on, he learned how to milk cows, prepare the soil to plant beans and corn, and then harvest them for family consumption. Bananas and yuca/cassava

were staples in their diet too. He walked 12 km. round trip to go to school in a one room schoolhouse and was a dedicated student, until the civil war threatened their safety and the school was closed. At 8 years old, he heard the excitement of the people saying the triumph had come, but he didn't yet understand that meant the dictatorship was over and the national guard was no more. Cruz watched as new national programs like the literacy crusade pulled on students in the high schools and universities to go into the countryside for months on end to teach campesinos to read and write. They went into poor areas of the cities too. Education, which so many had been excluded from, became available to people all around him. Cruz was excited about the new opportunities made possible by the social and economic revolution. But as the

US backed counter-revolutionary forces (the *Contra*) came and attacked, Cruz, like many others, saw the progress of the revolution in jeopardy. At 14 years of age, Cruz realized his country and his hopes for his future needed to be protected from this new threat. Much to his family's dismay, Cruz joined the army, to defend the revolution's gains, the bridges, the grain silos, the schools, the clinics and the people.



*Allesia with her father Cruz Murillo, Santo Tomás, 2018*

of international solidarity that also gave birth to the TSTSCA. He joined the cooperative there and learned how to make prefabricated houses for many people



*Cruz, Alessia and Isaida on their porch 2018*

Four years later in 1989, as the *Contra* were mostly defeated and disbanding, Cruz's stint in the military came to an end. Knowing little beyond the world of farming and fighting, he signed up for a carpentry school founded with the support of a group of revolutionary Basques, who traveled to Nicaragua to be a part of the wave

who had fled the countryside where the effects of the *Contra* War were the most horrific. After the war, when the need for emergency housing subsided, the cooperative hired cabinet makers to teach them how to make furniture. The Basque woodshop eventually lost its economic viability and was converted into a warehouse

for consumer staples and that's how Cruz ended up as a product distributor. He drives his truck all across the country for various companies. This has given him the opportunity to really get to know the whole country, including the Autonomous Indigenous Zones, located on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast. For most Spanish speaking Nicaraguans living in the more populated, Western half of the country, the Atlantic Coast seems like an entirely different world.

Cruz is raising his delightful three year old daughter with his wife Isaida. She's an administrator at the *Clínica Popular*, which offers many health services for the community. They are both members of the *Comité para Desarrollo Comunal* (the Committee for Community Development), our sister organization, and are directly involved with many of the Tomasino community projects the TSTSCA supports. Cruz brings his passion and wisdom for nature, and the outdoors, to volunteer with the *Finca Modelo*, an educational farm and eco-tourism destination in Santo Tomás.

## Elvis

Elvis Aguilar is a well known and beloved fixture of his Santo Tomás. As a child, the economic situation in Nicaragua drove part of his family to work in Costa Rica and the remaining kids to seek the support of the *Comedor Infantil* (children's free lunch program). There he developed his strong loyalty and sense of community that would drive him as he supported other social projects later in his young life. Elvis would also continue volunteering in the *Comedor Infantil*, working to support kids in similar hard situations to his own growing up.

In high school Elvis developed an interest in chemistry. His childhood in the *Comedor Infantil* left him con-



*Farm mural in Estelí, Nicaragua*

scientious about the needs around nutrition in his community. When he reached college age and applied for a scholarship, he was selected by the local committee to be one of the TSTSCA supported *becados* (scholarship students). He enjoyed studying chemistry but didn't want to work in health care, so he pursued studies in agro-industrial engineering and became the first in his family to graduate from college.

During his high school years, he further developed his sense of civic duty. He volunteered with an environ-



*Elvis (center with bag) and other youth at the Congreso Nacional de Movimiento Ambientalista Guardabarranco in Managua*

mental youth program called *Movimiento Ambientalista Guardabarranco*, named after the national bird of Nicaragua. This program attracted a group of youth who traveled to different sites in neighborhoods full of litter and river

beds and swimming holes that were tainted with pollution. They were successful in cleaning up various sites around town, and when youth from other neighborhoods asked *Guardabarranco* to come clean with them, they came and worked in solidarity. The youth also participated in extensive tree seedling production followed by tree planting, to counter the deforestation and droughts they experience.

After college he briefly worked for the Mayor's office, interacting with other youth groups similar to *Guardabarranco*. Now he has a position in his field. He works in quality control at a local dairy plant, owned by a Salvadoran company, overseeing the production of various cheeses. Santo Tomás, Chontales seems to be the dairy capital of Nicaragua. He anticipates visiting and learning about cheese making operations here, as well as other value-added farm enterprises.



*Elvis in the campo outside of Santo Tomás*

On several delegations to Santo Tomás, his family hosted Emily Calhoun Petrie, a Lincoln Elementary school teacher. When he visits the U.S., he will stay in his host sister's home with her family!

## Marily

One of four daughters, the economic hardships of Nicaragua strained Marily Aguilar Oporta's family, as it did so many others. Her mother, the sole provider, left to find work in Costa Rica. Marily and her siblings were raised by their paternal grandparents until their mom returned and set up a small business selling used clothing from compressed bundles imported from the US. Once reunited, the siblings were better able to focus on their education.

Throughout this economic adversity, Marily worked hard to pursue her goals. Even in the games she played as a child, Marily would pretend to be a teacher. Her role model was Juanita Rodríguez, her inspiring preschool teacher the TSTSCA invited to Olympia in 1998 with Yessenia Solís. Marily knew that working with children was something that would allow her to contribute to her community and make her feel fulfilled. As a recipient of a TSTSCA sponsored scholarship, she was able to pursue higher education and earn her college degree. She is passionate about pedagogy, the theory and practice of teaching, and she holds an interest in various educational philosophies such as Montessori and Waldorf.

Marily now works at the *Centro de Desarrollo Infantil* (center for infant and child development) where



*Marily with young friends*

she works with infants to children age 5. The center is state funded and serves the children of very low income working mothers without the resources to care for their children while they work. There are 30 children who come to the center all day, every day, and another 10 who come before or after preschool. Marily thinks the teachers do a good job with the few educational supplies they have, but sees a great need for more materials and

a safe outdoor space for the children to exercise in. She works from 7am until 5 or 6pm. She is also active in supporting the youth group at her church. She describes recently leading them into a wealthier neighborhood to ask the kids there for lightly used backpacks, shoes and clothing to share with kids in a marginalized neighborhood. She was pleased that the redistribution of goods went well.

Marily would like us to know what an impact the scholarship project has made in her life and in her community. She hopes we will continue to support low income students in becoming professionals and staying in their country instead of going to neighboring Costa Rica to find menial work. During her trip to the United States, Marily wants to visit day care centers and classrooms, and to bring back songs, games, and educational strategies

she can use and share with other classrooms in Santo Tomás.



*Marily with best friend Aminta, a scholarship alumna and nurse who visited Olympia in 2016*



*Day of the Book Celebration at Escuela Ruben Darío, Marily's alma mater in Santo Tomás*

## Neighbors for Immigrant Rights March La Marcha "Vecinos para los Derechos de los Inmigrantes"

Friday May 4th *Viernes 4 de Mayo*

**Come celebrate with your community.** *Vengan a celebrar con su comunidad.*

**Keep the dream alive! ¡Mantenga vivo el sueño!**

**Gather 4:00pm at Loop Field 1020 W Franklin St. Shelton** *Empezando a las 4pm en el campo Loop Field en el centro 1020 W calle Franklin en Shelton*

Bring Signs of Support *Traiga letreros para apoyar*

Wear Orange in Solidarity *Vista de color anaranjado para la Solidaridad*

This family friendly march will wind peacefully through downtown,  
closing at Kneeland Park (215 Turner Ave. Shelton)

*Esta es una marcha familiar, Juntos marcharemos pacíficamente en el centro hasta el parque Kneeland (215 Turner Ave en Shelton)*

With: children's march & activities *Con: Marcha para los niños y actividades para los niños*

music and speakers • *música y oradores* • food truck & fun • *camión de tacos y diversión*

Hosted by/*Patrocinado por* [elevatemasoncounty.org](http://elevatemasoncounty.org)

### Zahid Chaudhry can stay!

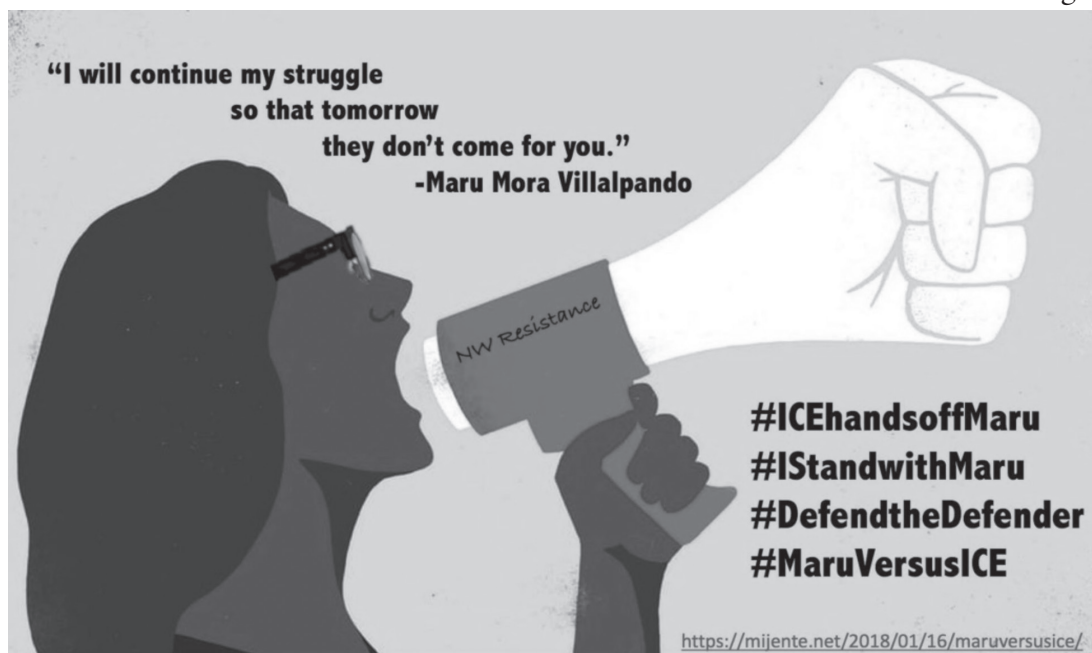
On March 12, Judge Paul DeFonzo restored Zahid Chaudhry, decorated and disabled US Military Veteran, to the legal resident status he had been granted in 2001. Thus ends a 17-year saga of mistreatment and frustration during which Ann and Zahid Chaudhry and a large group of faithful supporters persevered in their opposition to the US government's continuing efforts to deport Zahid. The Immigration Services attorney reserved the right to appeal the decision, but for today, Zahid is home. <https://keepzahidhome.org>

### Stand with Maru!

<https://mijente.net/2018/03/13/undocumented-activist-targeted-by-ice/>

After supporting countless immigrants in their struggle for freedom and dignity in the United States, undocumented activist Maru Mora-Villalpando is locked in her own face off with Immigration and Customs Enforcement here in Washington State. North West Detention Center Resistance, a group led by Maru has worked tirelessly to bring light to the state sponsored abuse that undocumented immigrants face. Maru, has

lived in the US since 1996, and has a daughter who is a US citizen. Many believe Maru is being targeted as retaliation for her advocacy of others, and a document released by ICE noting her "extensive involvement with anti-ICE protests and Latino advocacy programs" lends credence to this belief.



## **Solidarity Dinner at 6:30pm on Friday, May 4<sup>th</sup>**

Please save the date for our potluck dinner event at the Womans Club (Abigail Stuart House) in Olympia.

We will continue the celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the Sister Schools, with brief presentations by the Rubén Darío School principal Yessenia Solís and members of the Lincoln School community. Some Nicaraguan poetry will be shared in the Spanish, with English language translation. Marily, Cruz and Elvis will perform a national song. Interpreters will accompany each of the visitors from Santo Tomás, so all can engage in conversations. Invitations will be extended to join community and student delegations to travel to Nicaragua. Past participants are especially invited to share their experiences. Expect some salsa dance instruction by 9pm and then dancing into the late evening!

## **Sustaining Our Connections in 2018**

We're organizing not one but TWO community delegations down to Santo Tomás in 2018—one in July, which is when we've typically supported the visits, and another one in late December 2018 and/or early January 2019, in response to requests that we make this cultural and educational exchange opportunity available at a different time of year to accommodate people's schedules.

While in Santo Tomás for two to three weeks, you'll participate in the daily lives of your host family, learn about the culture, politics, and history of the region, see and engage in the various projects that TSTSCA is honored to help support, and form lasting bonds.

Those who have traveled from Olympia to Santo Tomás on previous delegations will tell you that they experienced a welcome unlike any other—decades of friendship between our two communities have laid a foundation of such warmth and shared purpose. You are immediately embraced and treated like family. At this moment in history, reaching across borders to sustain such connection feels vital to our humanity.

## **Plant Donations Wanted (and also come to the sale)**

**For the TSTSCA 6th Annual Spring Plant Sale • Sat., May 5, 2018 9am to 3pm**

**117 Thomas St NW Olympia Westside**

We seek your generous donations of locally-grown vegetable and tomato starts, berry plants and canes, herbs, native and non-native perennials, ground covers, whatever else you may have to offer. Please donate, whether you are a farmer, an avid gardener. All proceeds will benefit college scholarships for students in our sister town of Santo Tomás, Chontales, Nicaragua. The scholarships allow young Nicaraguans to continue their studies in their country, become professionals, and to stay and build a stronger community.

The Thurston-Santo Tomás Sister County Association is a non-profit community organization founded in 1988. We are an entirely volunteer-run organization and rely on the support of our community to keep this exchange alive.

**To plan for early drop off, or for pick up, of plant donations by May 2nd, contact Jean at (360) 943-8642.**

## **Evergreen in Santo Tomás**

The TSTSCA will continue its tradition of preparing and sending Evergreen students to Santo Tomás, in the Spring Quarter of 2019. We seek intermediate to advanced level Spanish Speaking students to study in Nicaragua while engaging in community service projects. We'll host an interest meeting at Evergreen on April 30th from 3 to 5pm, location TBA. Professor Yessenia Solis, one of the Nicaraguan visitors, will present in this session, along with past student participants. If you are, or know of possible Evergreen candidates, interested in going to Nicaragua, consider enrolling in the 2018-19 Spanish Speaking World: Cultural Crossings, taught by Alice Nelson and Diego de Acosta. You can also contact Diego López, an Evergreen student who went to Nicaragua as part of the 2017 delegation, currently an intern with the TSTSCA: email [lop-dun29@evergreen.edu](mailto:lop-dun29@evergreen.edu)

**Support for the Scholars!** The Thurston-Santo Tomás Sister County Association provides modest college scholarships to students in our sister community in Nicaragua who would otherwise be unable to pursue and complete university studies. The volunteer project coordinators there select students who are committed to serving in their community after they graduate and become professionals. Elvis and Marily, on this delegation, are two of those working graduates! For \$40 per month, \$480 per year, you can make a huge difference in a student's life and contribute to strengthening Santo Tomás. Please send your donation to TSTSCA PO Box 561 Olympia WA 98507 or go through Paypal on our webpage: [oly-wa.us/tstsc](http://oly-wa.us/tstsc) (360) 943-8642



## **Thurston–Santo Tomás Sister County Association**

PO Box 561  
Olympia WA 98507

Nonprofit Org  
US Postage  
**PAID**  
Olympia WA  
Permit # 762

**April 17–May 11, 2018**

Please welcome our 12th  
community delegation from  
Nicaragua, since 1990!

Read their stories inside  
and plan to meet them.

20th Anniversary of the  
Sister Schools!

**Return service requested**

### **Contact Info**

email: [tstsca@gmail.com](mailto:tstsca@gmail.com)

website: [oly-wa.us/tstsca/](http://oly-wa.us/tstsca/)

Phone: 360-943-8642

facebook: Tstsca Thurston–Santo Tomás

## **April 17–May 11, 2018 Events with our Nicaraguan delegation**

### **April 20th at 5pm**

20th anniversary of the Lincoln/Rubén Darío sister schools: Fundraiser to purchase books for the Rubén Darío School library in Santo Tomás. Marcela Abadi and Yessenia Solís want to share their long anticipated reunion with you! Light refreshments/bocadillos and drinks, with some dancing later on... Woodard Cohousing Common House, 1620 Woodard Ave. NW Olympia

### **Mt. Rainer day in the snow with delegates**

We've set aside the April 22, 29 and May 6th Sundays as possible dates, depending on the weather. Departure time for the carpool will be 9AM from the Lincoln Elementary parking lot (21st and Washington, Oly). Check for updates on our facebook: Tstsca Thurston-Santo Tomás

### **Procession of the Species with the delegation! April 28 at 4:30pm**

Come watch Procession of the Species with our visitors! NW corner of Sylvester Park, Oly

### **Neighbors for Immigrant Rights March May 4 at 4pm**

Neighbors for Immigrant Rights March, Keep the Dream Alive! 4pm at Loop Field 1020 W. Franklin St. Shelton. Bring signs of support and wear orange in solidarity. Family friendly walk to Kneeland Park, music, speakers, taco truck. [elevatemasoncounty.org](http://elevatemasoncounty.org)

### **Solidarity Dinner May 4th 6:30pm**

Potluck Dinner and engaging conversations with the visiting Tomasinos and Tomasinas. Together, let's celebrate almost 30 years of "sistering" with Santo Tomás, 20 years of sister schools, a bit of Nicaraguan poetry, and eventually break into dancing because that's what we do! Abigail Stuart House 1002 Washington St. SW Olympia

### **6th Annual Plant Sale fundraiser May 5th 9am to 3pm**

Plant Sale fundraiser for college scholarships in Santo Tomás. Come buy locally-grown vegetable starts, tomato plants, strawberries and raspberry canes, native and non-native perennials, ground covers 117 Thomas Street NW (between Harrison and 4th) on Olympia's Westside (details inside)