

## Biblioteca - The Library Project

### **Background:**

The Thurston-Santo Tomás Sister County Association (TSTSCA) has enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship with a small town in south central Nicaragua since 1988. Santo Tomás, Chontales, Nicaragua has a population of approximately 15,000 people with an additional 8,000 people living in the nearby countryside. Many of these people are marginally employed or are self-employed and earn less than \$2 per day. Illiteracy is high, especially among farm workers.

### **Library Project :**

TSTSCA is sistered with the Committee for Community Development (CDC) in Santo Tomás, which is an umbrella non-profit organization. One of the CDC's projects is a children's center which houses a feeding program, a pre-school, after-school activities and a very modest public library. The library is used extensively by students from the elementary and high schools and the area's colleges and university branches.

This library was created in 1992 with 150 locally donated books. In the late 90's, a Peace Corp volunteer helped raise funds for bookcases, chairs and tables, and a wider range of books. TSTSCA began to provide a stipend to the volunteer coordinators of the project, which facilitated a predictable schedule for patrons. A small delegation of Evergreen students spent Spring Quarter of 1998 in Santo Tomás; some of these students volunteered in the library and donated grammar texts and dictionaries. Initially, we collected books to bring down with each future delegation but soon determined that it was more cost effective and productive to send funds so our partners could buy books in Nicaragua based on what they needed. At this point, the library has books of all subject areas and many students come to work on school assignments on-site. The staff visit local schools to promote reading and use of the library, and they also provide homework support to school children. In one recent year, there were 665 visits by students from the four elementary schools, 2,731 visits from high school students, and 657 visits from area university students. The local schools and universities have few resources to offer their students, making this tiny library project an invaluable resource in Santo Tomás.

Over the last decade, the TSTSCA has provided special project funding for such things as new corrugated metal roofing and gutters, paint for the building inside and outside, and replacement furniture. Annually, the largest expense associated with keeping the doors open to the modest library is staff salaries. TSTSCA has moved from providing stipends to now providing minimum wage salaries and benefits to two part-time volunteer coordinators who oversee youth volunteers and maintain a steady schedule.

In 2013, the West Olympia Rotary Club and the Rotary District 5020 have donated \$2,000 for the purchase of new books for the library. Two members of the Rotary are expected to visit the library in Santo Tomás in February 2014.

Each book will acknowledge the generous donation of Rotarians from Olympia and the District.



West Olympia Rotary Club

## **Contribuyendo a la alfabetización del pueblo Nicaragüense**

Este libro fue donado en 2013 por el Club Rotario de West Olympia, Washington, más el Rotario Distrito 5020, de los Estados Unidos, a la biblioteca del Comedor Infantil de Santo Tomás, Chontales, Nicaragua a través de la Asociación de Hermandad (Olympia) Thurston con Santo Tomás y el Comité para Desarrollo Comunal de Sto. Tomás.