

Olympia/Santo Tomás Update

US/Nicaragua Solidarity—Since 1988

December 2013

An update
from the
Thurston–Santo Tomás
Sister County
Association

A new roof to keep the women dry!

By Grace Cox

Olympia's sister city organization in Santo Tomás, Chontales, Nicaragua has requested our support to raise funds to make critical repairs to the Women's Sewing Co-op building in order to continue to provide this safe space for women. We need to raise \$8,000 to pay for the building repairs. Repairs include electrical, plumbing, windows and casings, and a new roof. We need your enthusiastic financial support to keep this important project going strong.

This building has a long-standing connection with our two communities. For many women, the Sewing Co-op and School was the first place where they could gather, talk and find commonalities in their lives, while learning a marketable skill.



In 1988 a crew of volunteers from Olympia, Washington, raised funds and traveled to Santo Tomás to build the Women's Sewing Co-op and School (see Jean Eberhardt's article in this newsletter). In the middle of the U.S. funded *contra* war, members of the Olympia to Nicaragua Construction Brigade worked side-by-side with the people of Santo Tomás to create the *Casa de Costura*. In 2013 our sister organization, the Committee for Community Development, acquired the title to the property and has elected to broaden the scope of services being offered to create a community center for women in addition to the Sewing School. Original members of the Sewing Cooperative are helping to make this transition.

Student Delegate to Santo Tomás Patty Otero spent spring quarter working at the Sewing Co-op. "My time

What we do...

Projects in Santo Tomás

TSTSCA works with a sister community organization in Santo Tomás, the *Comité para Desarrollo Comunal* (Committee for Community Development or CDC) on projects that support basic needs, education, and human dignity. TSTSCA provides ongoing financial and other support for these CDC projects:

- ▶ **Comedor Infantil:** Children's Free Lunch Program
- ▶ **Biblioteca:** Library
- ▶ **Becas:** Scholarships for Higher Education

Sister School Relationship:

TSTSCA helps facilitate a sister school relationship between Lincoln Elementary School in Olympia and

Escuela Rubén Datrio in Santo Tomás. Students and faculty from both schools correspond and families, teachers, and administrators have been part of exchange delegations. The Lincoln Site Council sends periodic financial support and materials.

Delegations

Thurston-Santo Tomás Sister County Association has led self-supporting Olympia area student and community delegations to learn, volunteer, and build mutually supportive friendships in Santo Tomás—over 130 people from the Olympia area have personally visited Santo Tomás. We have also supported and welcomed ten delegations of 30 *tomasinos* to learn, educate, and build mutually supportive friendships in the Olympia area. For more information, see our website at <http://www.oly-wa.us/tstsc/>

at the *Casa de Costura* was spent working around fun and empowering women taking advantage of an irreplaceable resource in Santo Tomás. The Sewing School provides the opportunity to learn a skill that could bring in extra income and a community that supports women and understands the challenges they face.”

Safety for the women working in the building is of primary importance. Sewing Co-ops are one way to make the garment industry fair. Most clothing is made in sweatshops worldwide, and twice this year buildings that house these sweatshops have collapsed or burned, each incident killing hundreds of workers, mostly women and children. Supporting this project is one way to improve the working conditions for a small group of garment makers.

In the decades prior to the Nicaraguan revolution, opportunities for women were virtually non-existent. Lack of opportunities for education or to develop job skills combined with domestic violence drove many women to the streets to support themselves and their families. The Sewing Co-op and School provided the first real gathering place where women shared their stories and learned they were not alone. This support helps women find the strength to take action on behalf of themselves and their children.



Twenty-four years ago several participants from the Olympia to Nicaragua Construction Brigade, along with other interested community members, formed the Thurston/Santo Tomás Sister County Association (TSTSCA). Our local non-profit organization works with the Committee for Community Development (CDC) in Santo Tomás. The CDC sponsors numerous projects in Santo Tomás, including a preschool, health clinic, children’s free lunch program, model farm, micro lending program, university scholarship program and activities for youth. TSTSCA supports modest salaries for women coordinating the public library and free lunch program, funds the scholarship program and raises funds for specific projects as requested by the CDC. We also sponsor people-to-people exchanges by bringing and sending delegations to and from Olympia.

Will you help us do right by the women of our sister town in Nicaragua by contributing generously towards repairs on their building? Twenty-five years ago the people of Olympia raised over \$30,000 to support the vision of a place for women to come together and learn skills. Please help us continue the vision by starting with these critical repairs. ♦

Memories of the Olympia to Nicaragua Construction Brigade, 25 years later

by Jean Eberhardt

In 1979 the *Frente Sandinista para la Liberación Nacional* (FSLN) was victorious in their protracted revolution against the U.S. backed dictator Anastasio Somoza. Under the guise of the red scare, the U.S. funded a counterrevolution (*contra* war) that cost tens of thousands of Nicaraguan lives and prevented the country from flourishing in its newfound democracy.

During the *contra* war, an estimated 100,000 people from the U.S. visited Nicaragua. Many of us traveled and volunteered with purpose: delegations of elected officials organized by progressive organizations, ecumenical study tour groups, long-term volunteers with Witness for Peace, caravans with Pastors for Peace, medical teams, coffee and cotton harvest brigades, and journalists. Construction brigades self-organized to build in

Nicaragua while our government financed undeclared wars of “low-intensity conflict” across Central America (low on US military deaths, but “high-intensity” with incalculable death and terror on everyone else).

I participated in a construction brigade from Seattle to Nicaragua in 1985-86, which profoundly changed my life. My host family was attacked by *contra* forces one month after our group finished building a two room grade school in a rural community outside of Santo Tomás, Chontales. Don Gregorio Ruíz Borge was stabbed repeatedly and left for dead, but miraculously survived. The history of that brigade, the war and two families we knew that were attacked, is documented in the film “*Vamos a Hacer un País*” by Moving Images.

Two years later, with the tremendous support of many people from Thurston County and beyond,

we launched a 14-person construction brigade from Olympia to Santo Tomás. We marched in the Lakefair Parade to make clear that we stood with Nicaragua and not with the U.S. position. We raised \$30,000, and carried it in cash to Nicaragua to finance construction of a two-story building for a humble, yet powerful group of women who created a sewing cooperative and sewing school. Thank you if you helped us then and thank you if you've supported our on-going projects since! We ask now for your support to replace the roof and make other needed repairs on the 25-year old building.



Georgina Warmoth and I traveled to Nicaragua in January 1988 to prepare for the arrival of the construction brigade in February; it was three months after a *contra* attack on the town. On the day we landed in Santo Tomás, Georgina and I met the women of the sewing coop in a very small room next to the *Comedor Infantil* (Children's Free Lunch Program). The space was packed with treadle machines; women's feet rocked back and forth as their hands pushed fabric under the needles pumping up and down. After introductions, conversation quickly went to the war and first hand accounts of their terror. Each *costurera* recounted where they were when the attack began and how they scrambled to get their children to safety. They told of brave townspeople, young and old, who fought back the 300 *contra*, street by street, until free of the attackers. The *costureras* named the men who died defending the town; one died right in front of the building site where we would soon be working. Soon enough, we were all crying together, in the helpless horror of it all. Later that windy night at the Ruiz home, mangoes rained down on the sheet metal roof over our heads, falling like bombs. Georgina didn't sleep; she became deeply distressed about being in a war zone and putting her children at risk of losing their mother. It dawned on me, over time, that

the three parents on the construction brigade felt the danger in a different way than did the rest of our childless group of brigadistas. It was Georgina's first and last night in Santo Tomás.

Upon arrival, Jeff, Bob, Shoshana, Peter, Kari, Steve, Ted, Carolyn, Donn and I met with the FSLN political secretary of Santo Tomás, who laid out possible risks. He could not guarantee our safety, but promised to notify us if the *contra* came close to town again, in hopes of helping us evacuate should we decide to leave. We were told to stay away from the edge of town at night and certainly never to travel on the highway after dark. "Understood."

We scattered across town to live with the *costureras* and their families, me to my original host family who had moved to town for its relative safety. We shared meals of thick hand made *tortillas de maiz*, eaten with boiled *frijoles*, with boiled green bananas or yuca or *quequisque*. The U.S. imposed trade embargo as well as Nicaragua's hyper-inflation and prioritization on defending the country against military aggression manifested in shortages of cooking oil (and soap and car parts and medical exam gloves and syringes and toilet paper and school pencils and many other things we take for granted). Some *tomasinos* and *tomasinas* complained of having to eat boiled beans, without frying them. Beans, rice, corn, cooking oil, sugar and coffee were rationed and there didn't seem to be enough to last until the next ration date. The refrain in stores, when searching for goods to buy was "*no hay*" over and over. "There isn't any." I remember seeing used latex gloves washed and hung to dry on laundry lines outside the mini-hospital. There just weren't any more. *No hay*.



Continued on page 8

“So many of us have felt the desire to *do something* when we travel. Few of us have had the tenacity, courage, commitment, and chops to do what TSTSCA has done. I am deeply moved by the decades of effort.”

—Becky Liebman, longtime Olympia activist, librarian and musician

Planting trees and volunteering on the model farm in Santo Tomás

By Cliff Mountjoy-Venning, 2013 volunteer and 2011 community delegation member

I had the pleasure of working on the CDC's model farm project for about three weeks this summer. This project actually comprises two locations. There is the original *Finca Modelo* in Santo Tomás, and the newer *Finca La Caponera* about 14 km out of town. Pedro Rios, the man who runs the project, works at both, and there is one other worker at each farm, so my help was much appreciated! Both farms are divided into parts for crops and parts for dairy cattle. *La Caponera* has an additional part dedicated just to the natural forest, showing the commitment of the farm to sustainability and the environment. My work days started around 8 am and ended around noon, generally working with the plants, rather than the animals. I did a variety of tasks, including planting ayote (a squash), cucumber, sugar cane, *Cratylia* (a legume used to feed cattle), weeding pineapple, and other non-crop related things.

My favorite work was planting citrus trees on a hillside at the *Finca Modelo*. This involved loading the seedlings (which had been sprouted in small black plastic bags) into a wheelbarrow at one part of the farm, pushing them over to the hillside, removing the plastic and putting them into holes that had been dug by the other man who worked there, and filling the rest of the hole in with dirt. Water, and repeat for a total of about 100 trees per day. The work was very rewarding, since I knew the trees would be there for a long time to come. Other crops are equally important, but the ephemeral nature of seasonal crops makes planting trees seem like a more permanent contribution to Santo Tomás. The next time I return, those trees will still be there, and I will see the results of our efforts. This was also combined with the fun, play-in-the-dirt



nature of the work. Interestingly, 'fun' is not a word I would use for a lot of the work I did there. The work was often tiring, and I would be sweaty, wet (we worked rain or shine), and uncomfortable. Despite that, however, my experience with farming was a great one, and I would gladly go back and do it again. I would always feel accomplished after a day of work, and the necessity of farming leads to great satisfaction and a sense of purpose, even if the work itself isn't always exciting. That was my first time doing actual farm work, but I know that it won't be my last. ♦

The farm project produces the milk and some of the foods prepared and served in the Children's Free Lunch Program. The proceeds from the sale of other farm products offsets the salaries of the three fulltime workers.

Stories from the Clínica Popular

By James Hibbs, 2013 Evergreen Student Delegation

Volunteering in the *Clínica Popular* was the best part of my ten weeks in Santo Tomás. I began working there in the laboratory, doing blood and urine tests with Dr. Luís Felipe. I didn't have the finesse required to do these tests, so I transferred to reception and triage, where I took vital signs and managed patient records with the nurses, Gladys and Agustina. Agustina thought of me as an extra son. The four things we asked of everyone during intake were: name, place of origin, date of birth, weight and temperature. Adults had their blood pressure taken, and children their height. Patient records were stored in file folders on six shelves to the ceiling in the archive. The file numbers, names, and DOBs of patients were on a computer where we searched by name, and then by DOB, in case there was more than one Juan Pablo

“I support TSTSCA because this is a genuine community-to-community exchange of knowledge and experiences equally beneficial to both communities. Unlike the TSTSCA, many cultural exchanges primarily benefit individuals, businesses or governments, and too often the primary beneficiaries are the northern ‘partners.’”

—Russ Fox, retired faculty of planning community development studies at The Evergreen State College and board chair of the South of the Sound Community Farm Land Trust

Sanchez Romero (as there inevitably were). Sometimes Juan Pablo went by Juan, sometimes by Pablo or sometimes Pablo Juan instead. Sometimes people's names changed between visits, or no longer used their mother's surname. We always tried to prevent creating new files for old patients, but some fell through the cracks. Some people had as many as three or five files in the system. About 400 new patients joined the system over the course of my time there.

Some patients were regulars, and came at least once a week. Sometimes it was for follow-up care, sometimes it seemed they may have been seeking reassurance in a supportive environment. Most of the repeat customers wanted their blood pressure checked. A blood pressure check cost 5 córdobas (about 20 cents), a full medical consultation for 30 córdobas (\$1.20). One patient wanted to compare the blood pressure measurement I got with one from their fancy electric blood pressure cuff. There was one man who came in at least once a week for blood pressure checks. His blood pressure was usually fine. I suspected he came to the clinic because he had a crush on one of the staff. She was very patient with him.

One of the most memorable cross-cultural experiences for me came from a conversation about a transgender person. Another person was telling me that they were not really the gender they appeared and was *un gay*. But trying to explain how being trans didn't automatically also mean being gay was beyond my level of Spanish



and cultural exchange.

One time I tried harder to communicate cultural differences came in regard to a young child I got to know. I loved playing with her when there weren't patients at intake. The girl often ran out into the rain during the last few weeks of my stay (when the rainy season arrived in full force) and got soaking wet to ruin her dress and hair. Then her mother would spank her. I found this very distressing, since I don't believe in beating children for discipline. The mother thought the idea of sending the child to her room was inhumane and that spanking now and kisses later was good enough. I pointed out that this made the child associate attention and kisses with being spanked, that she'd misbehave just for the attention. All the other many mothers in the clinic scoffed at me. What do I know, a childless guy from the U. S.?

The other favorite procedure or test in addition to blood pressure was getting an injection. Many patients seemed to feel that an injection or an IV was the most effective treatment. Sometimes a patient came to get an injection because of a cold. Usually it was a vitamin B12 shot. There were boxes and boxes of them in the pharmacy. Sometimes people were busy and couldn't afford to stay in the clinic's beds to receive the IV drip, so they'd hustle out the door, some relative holding the IV bag aloft. One time in particular, I remember an old man getting into the front seat of a taxi while his daughter or granddaughter held the IV bag out the window from the back seat. And so they went off into the rain and the mud. ♦

“I continue to support TSTSCA for almost twenty five years. I know that, with the exception of very limited costs for doing the business of a not-for-profit corporation, my donation goes directly to support critical projects selected by our sister community in Nicaragua.”

—Maureen Hill, founding and active member of the TSTSCA

Study Abroad in Santo Tomás

By Patty Rose Otero, 2013 Evergreen Student Delegation

My experience in Nicaragua was really great and also really challenging. I suppose that's the perfect study abroad experience.

The best parts of my time there were spending time with my host family, volunteering with the women at the Casa de Costura, and working on my academic project. My project was about the inequality between men and women in Nicaragua. This really centered

my entire experience in Nicaragua and to my delight connected to everything I was doing.

I worked in the *Casa de Costura*, and I totally loved everything about that! Working with women fueled questions and answers to my interviews. Learning about the type of work they do to support families or supplement incomes was exciting and learning about this labor while working at their sides and hearing their stories was fun and heart-warming. They were very welcoming. Plus, I met a lot of really rad and industrious women!

The household that I was living with, of course, was so much inspiration for celebrating women of Nicaragua as it was filled daily with the women from the Plata family. Damaris, Isabel's niece worked with her in the home café. We became really close. We genuinely got along well and it brought so much fun and laughter to my time there. Also, she really opened up to me about her life story and that kept my feet planted in my academic project. Other notable friendships were with Isabel, my mother who was very generous and hard-working; Yorleni, my sister; Ysaida, who leads the children's painting workshop; and of course Maria Isabel Ruiz. Maria Isabel is so brave and personally committed to self-teaching, self-improvement, and not settling with the traditional role of wife and mother that is imposed on many Nicaraguan women. Maria Isabel was

wonderfully helpful when I was finalizing my academic project, and was our connection to all of the women's organizations in Managua. I should also mention here that Heather Earp, the TSTSCA liaison and coordinator of our delegation, was a sort of rock for me while we were there; I spent a lot of time organizing my thoughts and experiences with her sage guidance!

Being abroad can feel lonely and I think that feeling sometimes came up for me because our student delegation was very small and filled with very different personalities; this was really valuable but felt challenging sometimes. Even with this challenge, I found my time in Santo Tomás to be very valuable and enriching. I truly loved the people that I became friends and family with while I was there and hope to return in the future. ♦

“Over the previous century, Nicaragua has been the target of military invasions and proxy wars by our government. Contributing to TSTSCA gives me a real and material people-to-people means of opposing our misguided foreign policy.”

—George Hartwell, member of the Olympia to
Nicaragua Construction Brigade of 1988

Dinner with the College Scholarship Students in Santo Tomás

By James Hibbs, 2013 Evergreen Student
Delegation

The twelve tomasino and tomasina college students seemed stunned. Nobody said anything for a minute, then someone laughed and we moved on. Florence, another Evergreen student, had just explained her area of study. Part of introducing ourselves to each other was saying what we studied. The Nicaraguans spoke of specific careers, of becoming a doctor, an agricultural engineer, a lawyer, and so on. Flor said something about global capitalism and NAFTA. It wasn't an explanation that translated into a specific career or made sense culturally. Patty was home sick that night, so Flor, Heather, and I attended the dinner with the recipients of the college scholarships from the TSTSCA. It was very nice to meet them, but at the beginning they were awkwardly deferential and thanked us often, because we represented the organization that was helping support their costs of attending college. They were eager to prove the TSTSCA money was going to good use. As college students ourselves, they were

our peers, and to see them act this way was very unsettling for me. The Nicaraguan youth were dressed very neatly and on their best behavior, even when we played group games like the “Pin The Tail On the Unicorn” and name games for the benefit of the “foreigners” from Olympia.

Eventually we settled down to eat and relax. We had grilled chicken with watermelon, *tostones* and *tostadas*. *Tostones* are medallions of plantain that are hammered flat and wide before being fried. I'd never had them, and they are now one of my favorite foods. *Tostadas* are crisp-fried tortillas, and were accompanied by cabbage, beans and rice in addition to the chicken.

After we'd eaten, the scholarship recipients began to recite poetry and sing songs. When the Evergreen students were asked for contributions, I recited “Cultivo una rosa blanca” by Jose Marti. When I was in high school, “Cultivo una rosa blanca” was printed on a poster in my Spanish teacher's classroom. I read that poem every day for two years. It was a lucky break for me to remember that poem! ♦

Interoceanic Canal: Path to Prosperity or Disaster?

By *Emily Callhoun Petrie*

As early as December 2014, digging could begin on a massive canal cutting up to 178 miles through Nicaragua to join the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. The proposal was rushed through the National Assembly; lawmakers introduced it on June 7th, 2013 and it was signed by President Daniel Ortega. Asking for little to nothing in return, the Nicaraguan government illegally sold indigenous land and privatized a wide swath of Nicaraguan territory for the benefit of a private, foreign investment firm. The canal—if realized—will forever change the ecosystem, water reserves, and geography of Nicaragua.

The dream of an interoceanic canal has influenced Nicaraguan politics for hundreds of years. On June 14th, 2013, the HKND Group—a newly formed private corporation led by Chinese billionaire Wang Jing—secured the rights to develop an interoceanic canal that would traverse—and divide—Nicaraguan territory. In addition to the construction of the canal itself, Jing's group could sell the concessions to develop a network of projects that will aid in the transport of goods from coast to coast—including a railroad, an oil pipeline, airports, deep-water seaports, and free-trade zones that are to be built on the Pacific and Atlantic entry points to the canal.

The Nicaraguan business community celebrates the canal proposal as a path to prosperity. This prosperity will not be a result of increased tax revenue generated from the use of the canal—for in their eagerness to make a deal with HKND, legislators wrote “the concessionaire ‘will endeavor’ to give 1% of the shares annually” to the Nicaraguan government for the next 50 years. Any development of the Nicaraguan economy would need to be the result of an increase in trade passing through the country. “A mega-project such as the canal could help provide stable and even accelerated economic growth,” said former Nicaraguan President Enrique Bolaños said in August of this year.

History suggests that fast-acting megaproject solutions like this bring only short-term, low-wage jobs into the country. Economists opposed to the deal believe that after construction is complete, the labor demands plummet. If the Nicaraguan canal is operated under similar standards as the Panama Canal, the operations will depend on a small, self-sufficient workforce employed by a foreign corporation. After de-

acades of structural adjustment and international trade, half of the Nicaraguan workforce is unemployed or underemployed. Economists point to the need for long-term development efforts that will prepare the workforce for sustainable jobs in this rapidly changing global economy.

Whether there is a need for a new interoceanic canal is among the unanswered questions facing the project. The Panama Canal is currently under construction to expand capacity—making it possible for modern, deep-hulled ships to transport goods without the need to transfer cargo onto smaller vessels. The planned Nicaraguan canal has other competitors as well. Plans for dry-canals in both Guatemala and Honduras may have inspired the Sandinista government to offer this hasty sweetheart deal to HKND.

Furthermore, the needs of a changing climate must also be factored into the socio-economic goals and consequences to the construction of the canal. Each of the six proposed canal routes traverses Lake Cocibolca (Lake Nicaragua). Nicaraguan environmentalists offer an impassioned warning against disturbing the ecosystem of this fresh water source. On June 12, a coalition of 30 Nicaraguan environmental organizations wrote that the canal “represents the greatest threat in history to the country’s environmental conditions.” The watershed surrounding the Panama Canal remains largely uninhabited. Compare this to the Nicaraguan plan, which will rely on a watershed already in high demand from the region’s population.

What happens next? There are few points of absolute clarity, but among the possible outcomes are: One, the

Asking for little to nothing in return, the Nicaraguan government illegally sold indigenous land and privatized a wide swath of Nicaraguan territory for the benefit of a private, foreign investment firm.

construction of the canal goes forward as planned. Impacts to the Nicaraguan economy and environment will reveal themselves in time. Two, the Nicaraguan Supreme Court intervenes and recognizes any of the 40-plus constitutional objections that have been

raised, thereby delaying or canceling the project. Or three, the canal construction could prove to be too difficult, and the timeline too ambitious. The ongoing need to dredge Lake Colcibolca “would cost more than the canal construction itself,” says ecologist Salvador Montenegro. Economist Julio Franco Baéz told *La Prensa*, “so far the process has smacked of alarming improvisation. It’ll change the country’s environment, laws, economy and Treasury, yet the way they’re going about it seems like a joke.” ♦

Construction Brigade

From page 3

The sewing school and cooperative provided women

with the opportunity to learn a trade and support their families. Rosaura Robleto, one of the hard working *costureras*, lived with her three children in a bamboo walled home. She was proud of her own piece of land (parcels were given by the FSLN Mayor of Santo Tomás to landless people) and looked forward to making improvements on her house as her finances improved. Rosaura had a clay domed, wood-fired oven that she used every week-end to produce traditional Nicaraguan baked goods: *rosquillas*, *empanadas* and *viejitas*. She also attended high school as a non-traditional age student, along with many other adults struggling to get out of poverty. Years later, she would leave for Costa Rica to find steady work.

Kari Bown remembers becoming accustomed to hearing machine gun and mortar fire at unpredictable times of day and night. When George, Jodi and Sheryl arrived several weeks later as the final members of

our brigade, Kari remembers them ducking for cover when shots rang out near our job site. The rest of



Foreman Gerardo Sanchez, brigadista Jeff Snyder, and assistant mason Santana.

us kept working; we knew from our Nicaraguan co-workers that we were OK because they didn't miss a beat of what they were doing at the moment. Together we dug the trenches, laid *pedra cantera* (solid rock blocks), cut and tied steel rebar, formed the columns and mixed concrete on the ground to haul by buckets to the right place. Day in and day out, we worked with several of the *costureras* and *albañiles* (masons) to complete the foundation and enclose the first floor walls. There were no such things as concrete delivery trucks 25 years ago, at least not where we were. On days when we ran out of materials, we shifted our labor to the farm project, which produced food for the *comedor infantil* (and still does).

One night the *contra* came in and used plastic explosives to blow up a light post, cutting off power to the town for a long day or two, and making the nights much more tense. No one died from the blast, but someone in their home had been specifically targeted.



Members and supporters of the Olympia to Nicaragua Construction Brigade marching in the 1987 Lakefair Parade.

Our group had an emergency meeting to decide if we would stay or leave. It was obvious the *contra* were too close for anyone's comfort. I stewed on the choice we'd made to walk into a war zone and wondered if we would leave unscathed. If

we were able to get out of this intact, what did it mean that our friends in Santo Tomás did not have that op-

“Connecting people in the South Sound with people in Santo Tomás builds meaningful relationships, and counters in tangible ways the harsh impacts of U.S. intervention over many decades. We support and applaud the work of TSTSCA!”

— Larry and Patty Mosqueda, members of the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador and the Rachel Corrie Foundation for Peace and Justice members, as well as longtime supporters of the TSTSCA

tion? We chose to stay.

During our brigade's six-week stint we were able to get the walls of the 3,000+ square foot building up to chest height. Because of the war and material shortages, it would take the *albañiles* another year and a half to complete the building. Daniel Ortega, the President of Nicaragua, joined the *costureras* for the inauguration of the *Casa de Costura Etelevina Vigil*, named after a local woman who was killed in the fight against the local military forces of the Somoza family dictatorship.

In these last 25 years, after the formation of the Thurston-Santo Tomás Sister County Association, many delegations have come north to visit and volunteer in Olympia and many delegations have traveled south to visit and volunteer in our sister town. Every group that has been to Santo Tomás visited the *Casa de Costura* and many of us have bought hand-made clothing there. Hundreds of women from near and far have graduated from the year-long sewing program at the *Casa de Costura*. The sewing cooperative still makes school and sports uniforms and does custom sewing for *quinceañeras* and weddings. Their vision now is to grow the project to include more support services for women such as capacity building workshops, hiring a psychologist to be available to any woman seeking support, and possibly a pro-bono legal service too. Let's join with these women working towards their vision of expanding the *Casa de Costura* into the Casa de La Mujer, starting with replacing the leaking roof! ♦

More about the Scholarship Program

In 2010, at the request of the *Comité para Desarrollo Comunal* (CDC, the non-profit organization in Santo Tomás that is our main counterpart there), the Thurston Santo Tomás Sister County Association (TSTSCA) committed to funding partial college scholarships in our sister community. A subcommittee of the CDC created a selection process and advertised the availability of the scholarships. TSTSCA currently provides scholarships for 12 low income students to pursue college degrees in Nicaragua. We provide \$30 per month per student and have committed to maintaining this level of support until these current 12 students complete their five years of college studies and graduate. If enough donors step forward to sponsor students, we will consider offering scholarships to additional students. This is a great way to support Nicaraguan youth in building a future for themselves and their families. ♦

Check out our website, www.oly-wa.us/tstsc. There are photos, more information about the projects, and updates on upcoming events. Share the link—let others know what the Thurston Santo Tomás Sister County Association is up to!



“I support TSTSCA because it supports schools, scholarships, and libraries run by the people of Santo Tomás. It feels personal. I have met some of the people who benefit. It is inter-generational with college student energy! It is reciprocal (delegations go south and come north). And it has persevered for a long time and built deep relationships.”

— Susan Kavanaugh, TSTSCA member

Rotary donation

Continued from back page

of \$2,000 for the purchase of new books for the biblioteca—the public library in Santo Tomás. The biblioteca is located in the children's center with the comedor—the children's free lunch program, a pre-school, and after-school children's activities. The modest library is used extensively by students from the elementary and high schools as well as the area's colleges and university branches. The library was created in 1992 with 150 donated books. It now has books of all subject areas and many students come to work on school as-

signments on-site. Library 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.

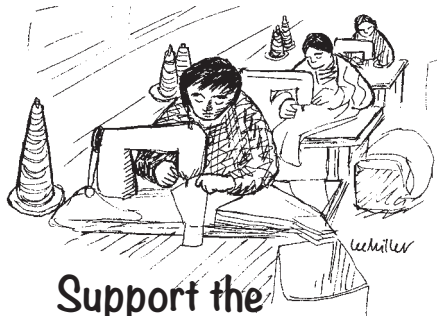
Dixie and Dirk Havlak will visit this project in March 2014. It will be a return trip for Dixie, a nutritionist who gave presentations during the community delegation of 2008. ♦

**Thurston–Santo Tomás
Sister County Association**

PO Box 561
Olympia WA 98507

Nonprofit Org
US Postage
PAID
Olympia WA
Permit # 762

Return service requested



**Support the
Casa de Costura!
See inside.**

**Fantastic Annual Rummage Sale—
Saturday, February 1st: Beat the Winter Blues!**

Our big (and we mean big) annual rummage sale is Saturday, February 1, 2014 from 9:00 am till 3:00 pm at the Lincoln Elementary School gymnasium, located at Washington St. SE and 21st Ave SE. This is our major fundraiser for the year and you can help in the following ways.

- ▶ Bring your donations to the Lincoln gym on Friday, January 31 between 4:00-7:00 pm. We are looking for all kinds of good stuff –art, jewelry, collectables, books, tools, bikes, kitchen and household items, clean clothing, games, toys, knick-knacks, crafts, good rugs, sporting and camping goods, awesome yard and garden stuff, nice wood furniture, and other treasures (please, no large appliances or couches).
- ▶ Tell your friends, family, co-workers, and that person ahead of you in line. No doubt they all have treasures to donate as well! They'll admire your insight when you suggest they bring their good stuff to Lincoln on Friday, Jan. 31.
- ▶ Come shopping on Saturday! Bring a friend. There is sure to be something just right for you.
- ▶ Volunteer to help with the sale. Call (360)786-9505 or e-mail tstca@gmail.com and our vol-

unteer coordinator will find a shift to suit your schedule. We need people on Friday to help set up, on Saturday to help staff the sale, and a crew to come in at the end to clean-up.

- ▶ Help advertise the sale. Tell folks you know, put it on your facebook page, tweet it, hang up a few posters, put an announcement in your favorite newsletter, start a TSTSCA flash mob (follow the zombies to get good deals...?). You are creative – think of some way to get the word out!

And for you gardeners...

We are going to repeat last year's successful spring plant sale on Saturday, May 3rd. As you start seedlings and divide your perennials, please consider potting some (or a lot!) to donate to the second annual TSTSCA plant sale. Call (360) 786-9505 or e-mail tstca@gmail.com to help out and to confirm the location of the sale.

**Rotary Club Supports
Santo Tomás Library (again!)**

A big *thanks* to the West Olympia Rotary Club and the Rotary District 5020. They made a generous donation

Continued on page 9