

# Olympia/Santo Tomás Update

US/Nicaragua Solidarity—Since 1988

October 2014

An update  
from the  
Thurston—Santo Tomás  
Sister County  
Association

## Evergreen Students

Students from The Evergreen State College are invited to participate in the 11th student delegation to Santo Tomás, Chontales, Nicaragua for ten weeks in spring quarter. Students with at least an intermediate level of Spanish language skills and a desire to put their education into action can apply to study abroad in the context of the long standing relationship between Santo Tomás and Olympia. One central purpose of these delegations is to strengthen the sister county relationship and students are expected to represent the spirit of cooperation embodied in that connection.

There will be a community service component, continuing language and literature study, seminars and a substantial academic project. Students will live with families and participate fully in daily life in a small town in rural Nicaragua. There will be an info session on Thursday, Oct. 2nd and again on Oct. 22nd, both on campus at 4pm in Sem II A2109. Applications are due by November 10th. Please email [tstsca@gmail.com](mailto:tstsca@gmail.com) for more details.

Students selected will participate in a winter series of trainings covering subjects key to our organization (consensus building, privilege/anti-oppression, history of the CDC / TSTSCA), subjects pertaining to academic success while in Nicaragua (ethnographic writing, free trade policy, Nicaraguan history, current Nicaraguan politics), as well as other pre-departure issues related to health (immunizations, etc) and safety. ♦

## Travel with a Purpose

The Thurston-Santo Tomás Sister County Association is pleased to announce that we will be hosting another Community Delegation to Nicaragua in the summer of 2015.

Delegates will spend up to 3 weeks in Nicaragua, the majority of which will be spent in Santo Tomás. We will visit and volunteer in projects such as the children's free lunch program, the library, several preschools, the health clinic, the model farm, youth programs and Lincoln Elementary's sister school Rúben Darío. Homestays provide the visitors opportunities to share in the daily lives of Nicaraguan families; many previous delegates have maintained lifelong relationships with their hosts. Delegations from Santo Tomás

to Olympia have provided Olympians the opportunity to reciprocate hospitality.

Got kids? Children who've traveled with us to Santo Tomás have had particularly wonderful experiences, with many of them returning as young adults to rekindle the friendships they formed years earlier.

Interested? To find out more, attend our introductory presentation on

Wednesday, October 22, from 7-9 pm, at the Olympia Community Center 222 N. Columbia, Room 101. You'll see photos and hear stories from previous delegations, as well as dates and costs of the trip. No RSVP is needed, but if you have questions in the meantime you can e-mail us at [tstsca@gmail.com](mailto:tstsca@gmail.com). ♦



Evergreen students and friends from Santo Tomás visit the Casa Miriam Project in Managua in 2013

## Please Support Our Scholars!

Hello, I'm Kenia Lopez, one of the college scholarship students in Santo Tomás. I write out of a great desire to thank you for the valuable support you lend us.

It could be said that I'm not a very good writer, but I'll make use of this opportunity to talk about some of the things that happened last year. I am studying public accounting and finances on Sundays and recently finished my third year of study, during which I was challenged with many difficulties. For example, I remember one time a colleague and I were up until ten at night in search of someone who would lend us their PC. This was because the work in question was extensive/took a long time, and few people lend out their computers. Those who have computers got them at great expense and take good care of their machines. Our only option was the cyber cafe, but they are very expensive because the longer we stay there, the more we have to pay and we don't have extra resources.

I am someone very interested in self-improvement and continually evaluate myself; I believe I am capable of doing better this year and that applying myself/more effort is the key to come out ahead in any crisis.

At the beginning of last year, I practiced doing accounting in the *Clínica Popular* [run by the CDC]. I consider it a great benefit for my position that it related to the core of what I needed to know about ac-



counting. In addition, during the time that Yuri Alfaro [delegation to Olympia in 2002] was on maternity leave they gave me the opportunity take over some of her functions. I also participated in a seminar sponsored by one of the suppliers for the [clinic's] pharmacy. I learned many important things about leadership and teamwork. I found these programs excellent for personal and organizational development. I also took an advanced Excel class.

After the time I was in the clinic, I was unemployed so I took an internship at Social Security (INSS). My purpose there was to learn more about subjects indispensable to accounting. I wanted to know about the insurance laws, the benefits for the employees, the obligations of employers from Social Security. In the INSS they manage and pay out the pensions of many kinds for disability, for orphans, for old age, but the most impressive were those of the fallen in war. There I heard powerful stories from people who described the struggles they've lived through and from the relatives of those who didn't live to tell the tale.

The last class I took this year was Research Methodology, a class that brought me many sleepless nights, but I liked it a lot and I know it will be very useful. My challenge this year is to learn as much as I can and be more passionate about my studies. After finishing my degree I really want to do graduate school in finance.

Thank you for being interested in us. God bless you...

Kenia Lopez ♦

[Translated by James Hibbs]

### 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. TSTSA 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-Stanto 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 *Tomásinos* 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/>

## ¡Saludos from our Nicaraguan Pen-Pals!

By Heather, Tim and Zoe McLeod

With the support and well-wishes of the TSTSCA, the McLeod family had an amazing opportunity this past summer to spend time in Santo Tomás. We were met with smiles and laughter, *quesillo* and *gallo pinto*, and a wealth of information about the multitude of projects in which the *Comité para Desarrollo Comunal* and the TSTSCA are involved. We met with the college scholarship recipients, who told us about their studies and hopes for their futures while expressing their deep appreciation for support from Olympia. We visited the *comedor infantil*, watching children laugh and play as they ate a nourishing free lunch. Heather visited with the staff in the *Clínica Popular*, Tim toured the model farm project, and Zoe made fast friends with neighborhood kids in spite of having only the barest of common language. The care and generosity we received in Santo Tomás was truly humbling and, even in a short while, we felt the seeds of friendship take root.

One of our main hopes for our visit with the *Tomásinos* was to spend time with the directors, teachers, and students of *Escuela Rubén Darío*. Zoe is now entering her second year at Lincoln Elementary, and a chance for her to experience her sister school so far away was a dream come true.

We were hosted by the lovely Valecillo Castillo family, headed up by Gina, who teaches pre-school at *Rubén Darío*. In spite of our arrival coinciding with the school's vacation week, we were able to meet with the entire school staff together, giving Tim a chance to lead us all in "ice-breaker" group games that had every single one of us laughing. Gricelda

and Facunda (delegation to Olympia in 2010), the Director and Sub-Director of the school, gave us extra time on their own for thoughts about the Lincoln/*Rubén Darío* connection. While chatting with Gricelda (delegation to Olympia in 2008) in her home about the history of this sisterhood, her little friend Sandra came in and treated us to a performance of a fully choreo-

graphed dance, after which Zoe rose to the task and performed her recent ballet recital moves for Sandra. Cookies and stickers were exchanged between the two girls, while thoughts about our school connections were exchanged between adults. Later during school hours, we played in spontaneous schoolyard *fútbol* games, were treated to impromptu singing performances by Martha and her class (perhaps you met Martha when she and colleague Heyling visited Olympia in 2012), and had time to visit all of the classes at *Rubén Darío* to watch the teachers and students in action. We were thanked over and over again for the roof that the Lincoln Parent Council funding made possible over the outdoor play area in 2007, and for the assistance that has been given with providing for school supplies over the years. We experienced some of the torrential tropical rains and could see how important that large covered area is as a dry place to play and well as a place to gather the school community together.

And here is the best part: the hard-working students of *Rubén Darío* gifted us with over 200 pen-pal letters and drawings to bring back to the students of Lincoln!

At a Lincoln assembly this October, our family will present stories and images from our sister school. We'll encourage Lincoln students to respond by writing letters of their own, in this way sharing a little bit of our own community with the students of *Rubén Darío*.

This renewal of the pen-pal connection between the two schools is a great opportunity for the families of Lincoln to be reminded of the bond we share with a little school both similar to and different from our own. We hope that the parents and staff of Lincoln can take this opportunity along with the students to learn more about Nicaragua and Santo Tomás, to have stimulating discussions about this big, diverse world we live in, and



*Rubén Darío students and Zoe write pen-pal letters*

to embrace the beauty of good old-fashioned letter-writing as a tool for communication and friendship. For our family, this connection to Santo Tomás has already enriched our lives, and we hope that our own excitement will help to strengthen the connection between the two schools, and to contribute to the bond between our two greater communities as well. ♦

## West Olympia Rotary member impressed with Santo Tomás community library

*Contributed by Dirk Havlak*

In 2007, my wife, Dixie Havlak, returned from her three week trip with the TSTSCA community delegation to Santo Tomás, Chontales, Nicaragua. She was truly energized by her experience and had really bonded with her “host mother” Facunda Zeledon and other Santo Tomás residents, and hoped that we both might return someday.

At that time, I was literacy chair of the West Olympia Rotary Club, and with the help of Dixie and Jean Eberhardt, I convinced our club to contribute \$1000 toward the purchase of primary and secondary school textbooks for the small community library housed in the Comedor Infantil building. Since schools in Nicaragua do not provide textbooks for their students, this library quickly became an important resource for student success. Our Rotary Club felt its donation had been put to excellent use.

Fast forward six years to 2013: a number of events came together to allow us to make that return visit for Dixie and to introduce me to the country; I retired from my 30-year family medicine practice; Dixie closed her private dietitian practice; Dixie had a commitment in another community in Nicaragua in March 2014 for the second year of her 3-year grant from the American Academy of Pediatrics *and* the West Olympia Rotary obtained a matching grant from Rotary District 5020 for replenishing and updating the collecting at the Comedor’s Library and was hoping for put “boots on the ground” to check on the project. Hence our decision to visit Santo Tomás for a week in March 2014.

By the time we arrived, the Rotary funds had been used by librarians Normantina and Milagros to purchase about 200 new textbooks in Managua, just in time for the start of the school year in February.

The highlight of the trip for me was visiting the library housed at the *Comedor* and seeing our Rotary dona-

tions put to such good use. The librarians Normantina and Milagros are both dedicated and conscientious women who take excellent care of the books and the library. The library itself is small, contained in an approximately 8’ x 12’ room with several floor to ceiling shelves full of books. During our initial visit, it was heartwarming and impressive to see all the newly purchased books laid out in a very organized fashion on five large tables. We met with the librarians with stand-in interpretation by Ella, a visiting art teacher from the sister city in Mol, Belgium. Normantina and Milagros



*Librarian Milagros, Rotarian Dirk, Doña Aurora, Julio Cesar and librarian Normantina look over new acquisitions*

explained how the books had been selected and purchased, and how student usage was recorded carefully in ledgers. The books never leave the library building, so the library collection stayed intact. It was evident from the records that 20-30 students used the library daily, coming before or after classes to complete homework or research. The students go to class either in the morning or afternoon, so the library stays busy all day. I was in the library several times that week, and there were 4-15 students there at any given time. A librarian

was always there to assist students with book selections and homework.

We visited other CDC and other community projects as representatives of TSTSCA. Without an interpreter, Dixie was pressed into action to be the Spanish language communicator for both of us. We visited the *Comedor Infantil* several times and helped with food prep and serving. I especially enjoyed observing and helping the kids play Monopoly(!) and puzzle games while waiting to eat. We also visited a preschool, a special education class, an elementary school and its library, the model *finca* (farm), an archeological museum, and vocational classes in cake making and cosmetology. Dixie visited clinics as a dietitian, while I had daily Spanish tutoring by Yessenia, who works with the Evergreen students every other year.

Toward the end of our stay, we attended another potluck for us to meet twelve of the college scholarship recipients supported by contributors to TSTSCA For-

tunately Ciano (a former Evergreen student who has married and settled in Santo Tomás) of *Gringolandia* fame interpreted the stories which were moving and inspirational—demonstrating how just \$30 per month each allowed them to continue their studies, mainly by helping pay for travel to and from their colleges. When asked their opinion of the library in the Comedor, they stated that the books were not high level enough for them to use now, but that they had spent many hours using the library as secondary students and felt it greatly helped them succeed in school. Some also commented that their younger siblings used the library a lot.



*School children working together in the library*

While I did not become the slightest proficient in Spanish during my stay (bless Yessenia's heart for trying), I did become quite proficient in the Nicaraguan bucket shower (not unlike our RV shower technique), playing the card games *Desmoche* and *Ultima* with host father Jose Maria, and taking siestas in the hammock (just awesome).

I very much appreciated the friendliness and dedication of the CDC staff and everyone associated with its programs, as they made my first trip to Nicaragua and Santo Tomás very enjoyable and inspiring. ♦

## Nicaraguans not among Central American children to flee violence

*Alan Mountjoy-Venning*

This summer's heart-wrenching reports in the mainstream media about tens of thousands of unaccompanied children attempting to cross the Mexico-United States border eventually reported that common among these refugees' stories was the need to escape violence in their home countries. Some sources connected the dots to the export of the US war on drugs and the gang- and violence-breeding conditions in US prisons where many incarcerated Central Americans festered, only to be deported to their country of origin upon release. A very few media outlets investigated further into contrasting the conditions and, importantly, the policies in the countries not represented in this distressing rise, including notably Nicaragua.

Violence is confirmed as a cause of these children leaving their home countries, not economic migration or other dubious notions like those blaming 2012's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals changes to US immigration policies for inducing unaccompanied children to seek entry. The Center for American Progress reported on analyses that showed strong historical correlation between homicide rates and unaccompanied children fleeing. Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico, the four countries from which the most unaccompanied children have arrived in the US, have very high murder rates up to nine times as high as Nicaragua's homicide rate.

In the current Federal fiscal year through August, the US Border Patrol reported only 208 unaccompanied Nicaraguan children compared to a total of 66,127 mostly from Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, the countries on top of the rankings for violence and insecurity. In fact immigration to Nicaragua from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras has increased in recent years.

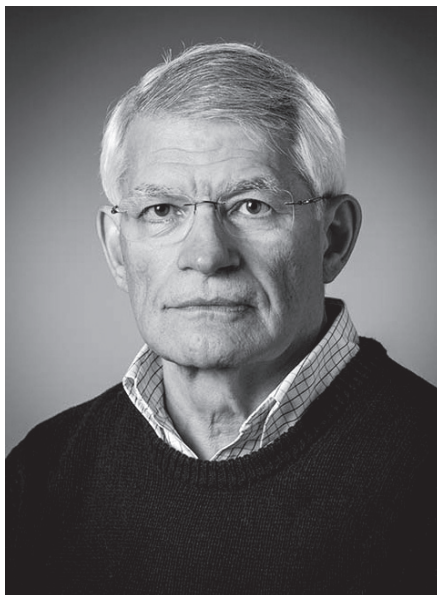
There are logical reasons other than just national policies that explain the relatively low numbers of Nicaraguans attempting to enter the US. Most Nicaraguans who emigrate head south to Costa Rica but the phenomena of unaccompanied Nicaraguan minors is not widely seen there either.

One could argue further that a government explicitly committed to social programs addressing the needs of poor children, such the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, are helping keep those children from the terrible risks of solo migration to the US. But the clearest link to the upsurge in unaccompanied children at the US southern border is present-day violence in their home countries.

For an excellent, deep analysis of the surge of unaccompanied Central American children to the US/Mexico border, please read Emily Lardner's article in the September 2014 issue of Works in Progress <http://olywip.org/immigrants-or-refugees-who-are-the-kids-on-the-texasmexico-border/> ♦

## In memoriam

José Gómez, an extraordinary constitutional law professor and union organizer who always stood for justice, recently lost his battle to stay alive, teach, and write his memoirs. He passed away on September 14, 2014 at Virginia Mason Hospital in Seattle, surrounded by family and friends. We have lost a great man who, among his many roles, helped create the Evergreen student study abroad program in Santo Tomás. As Dean of International Studies at Evergreen, he was moved by the 1996 delegation north, Doña Aurora Báez and Reyna Cabrera, and paved the way for Evergreen students to collaborate with the TSTSCA and CDC as they developed skills in Spanish language, Nicaraguan history and literature, and community work.



From José's childhood as a farmworker, to becoming the first in his family to attend and graduate from college; to being a Fulbright Scholar in Nicaragua, Peace Corps volunteer in Brazil, and teacher in Costa Rica; to serving as César Chávez's assistant in the United Farmworkers Union during the crucial boycott years; to creating a gay and lesbian student organization and law journal as he earned his J.D. at Harvard Law School; to serving as the Executive Director of La Raza Centro Legal in San Francisco; to coming to Evergreen as Academic Dean in 1988 and becoming a Member of the Fac-

ulty a decade later, José was an inspiration to literally thousands of people. He was a mentor to many, many first generation college students, and especially Latino/as and Native Americans. One of his signature teaching structures was the Evergreen Supreme Court, where students presented (with robes and all!) their legal arguments on contemporary civil rights issues as a culmination of their studies. José inspired many students to become civil rights lawyers and even more to use their education to further social justice.

With great respect for José's integrity, humor, insight, and commitment to social change, as well as gratitude for all he has so generously given our communities, we extend deepest condolences to his extended family and closest friends.

### To José

"I'll never forget being scared and silent in seminar. You took me aside, looked me square in the eye and asked me if my heart pounds when I have something to say. I said yes. You made me promise to speak every time I felt that pounding. You said those are the most important times to speak. This changed my life so profoundly."

*Dalya Perez, Evergreen student delegate to Santo Tomás in 2001*

José Gómez ¡presente!

José Gómez ¡presente!

*Ahora y siempre. ♦*

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## Memorias Del Fuego

I tend to associate my life with certain details

With things I do, I eat, I feel

If I think of coffee with milk, I think of a first communion.

The light, the light of the days changing.

I think that takes you to different parts of your own life

There are moments of my life that I no longer remember.

The experience of the death of *compañeros*

Is an experience so hard that you have to erase it.

What I mean is: there are two kinds of experiences, the experience of memories

But also the experience of the erasure of the memory.

*(Giaconda Belli, Poet/Novelist/Minister of Communication in the first FSLN Government)*

*Memorias Del Fuego* will be a feature-length documentary about the stories, struggles, and triumphs

of Sandinista women in Nicaragua who refused to

*Continued on next column*

# Mega-canal through Nicaragua Approved and in the works

In our last issue, the hot topic of the pending interoceanic canal across Nicaragua was explored by member Emily Calhoun Petrie. Most of our friends in Santo Tomás eagerly anticipate an economic boom with the construction of a \$50-billion shipping canal that will divide Nicaragua in two. From the Pacific to the Caribbean, it will cross Central America's largest lake and dwarf the 100-year-old Panama Canal. It will cut through tropical Pacific forests; through modest farms on one side of Lake Cocibolca and vast cattle ranches on the other; and, finally, through indigenous communities on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast. The planned canal will be up to 30 yards deep, and extensive dredging will be required, planners say.

In June 2013, the national assembly controlled by President Daniel Ortega and the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) approved the project with little debate, to "free Nicaragua from global economic imperialism". A 100-year concession controlling a vast swath of Nicaragua was awarded to Chinese telecommunications magnate Wang Jing, giving him broad powers as he and his newly formed Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development Investment Co. (HKND) build and manage the 173-mile-long waterway. He claims it will be finished and operational in five years.

## Memorias Del Fuego

*From previous page*

conform—changing the face of their country. They played a vital role in overthrowing the dictatorship with the Sandinista Revolution of 1979, but four decades later they are still fighting for social equality. Filming will continue in Nicaragua this fall. ♦

Work on the canal as well as a system of seaports, an oil pipeline, airport, free-trade zones and other infrastructure will begin this year. The canal route was

unveiled in July and will pass close to Santo Tomás, raising hopes of desperately needed employment. The FSLN government estimates it will lift more than 400,000 people out of poverty by 2018 with the help of revenues created by the project.

Supporters are calling it the largest construction effort "in the history of mankind" — in one of the hemisphere's poorest countries.

Others worry about the environmental effects. The canal will cut through Lake Cocibolca and skirt below Ometepe Island, Bainbridge's sister island since 1986. "Cocibolca" is an indigenous

word meaning "sweet water"; the 3,000-square-mile inland sea is a major source of drinking water for Nicaragua.

Ocean liners, super tankers and cargo ships much larger than those the Panama Canal can handle will traverse the waterway, raising the risk of oil-spill contamination. The Nicaraguan Academy of Sciences calculated that nearly 1 million acres of tropical forest and wetlands could be destroyed by the project, jeopardizing ecosystems, fishing and wildlife habitats.

"Few people oppose a canal per se," said Jaime Morales, a congressman who served as vice president under Ortega until 2012. "But one that won't harm the lake. Water is Nicaragua's greatest patrimony... Expectation of great wealth makes many ignore what might happen to the lake." ♦

*From the Los Angeles Times, September 9th 2014 article "Secrecy and doubt shroud Nicaragua's huge canal plans" by Tracy Wilkinson*

*For more articles on this complicated issue, we refer you to the Revista Envio of August 2014.*



**Thurston–Santo Tomás  
Sister County Association**

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## **Thank you for the New Roof on the Casa De La Mujer!**

Thank you for keeping the women dry under their new roof on the *Casa de La Mujer* in Santo Tomás!

Last year at this time, we were raising the funds to repair this 25 year old building, the project of the Olympia Construction Brigade of 1988. You helped us reach our goal of \$8,000 and the critical work completed for the two story structure that houses a sewing school for women and a sewing cooperative. **Thank you!** The original roof came off and the new metal one installed, electrical wiring repairs made, glass louvered windows replaced the rotten wooden shutters, and the building was painted inside and out (by *Tomásins* and Belgian youth working together).

### **Classes resume**

The year-long classes have resumed and women continue learning how to draft patterns, cut and assemble clothing. This training prepares some women to be home business entrepreneurs, some to find employment in factories, and others to tend to their family's needs. It also provides a safe space for women to come together and talk about their challenges and to find support.

### **Thank you**

Much appreciation has been sent our way so we pass that on to you including this from Ana Aurora Miranda, sewing school teacher and original member of the cooperative who worked on the construction in 1988: *Gracias por su apoyo incondicional y bien recibido! Hemos logrado mantener este tesoro comunitario y recordamos la brigada con los jovenes que vinieron aqui durante la guerra para trabajar hombro a hombro con nosotras.* Thank you for your unconditional and well received support! We have been able to save this community treasure and we remember the brigade with the youth who came here during the war to work shoulder to shoulder with us.

### **Future Vision**

The women have the vision to expand the building's use to include a psychologist and lawyer who specialize in domestic violence issues. While no immediate progress is pending on this vision, do let us know if supporting such a project is of interest to you. ♦