

# Olympia/Santo Tomás Update

US/Nicaragua Solidarity—Since 1989  
Spring 2016



## 11th Delegation from Santo Tomás to visit Olympia! Connect with our visitors April 20 to May 11, 2016

In the midst of many critical challenges in both of our countries, we are honored to host the eleventh community exchange delegation from Santo Tomás (since 1990!), which will be largely focused on education with a good dose of cultural pride. In photo from left to right:

**Thelma Castillo Suarez** is the librarian at Rubén Darío, Lincoln Elementary's sister school. Thelma will be the 7th teacher to visit from the sister school. She will spend much of her visit at Lincoln, getting to know students, parents and staff.

**María Isabel Ruíz Taleno** was denied a travel visa by the US Embassy. She was planning to focus on learning about community museums and interactive exhibits in support of the local museum in Santo Tomás. She was also going to connect with Evergreen students and college professors who support students in traveling to Nicaragua to study.

**César Castillo Bermúdez** is an elementary school teacher in a rural community outside of Santo Tomás, who earned his teaching certificate while completing high school! He enjoys performing traditional dances from Nicaragua and all kinds of dancing.



*From left to right: Thelma Castillo, María Isabel Ruíz Taleno, César Castillo Bermúdez, Amilta Rocha, and Yuri Alfaro López.*

**Amilta Rocha** is a recent recipient of the College Scholarship Program. After completing a five year university program in nursing, she has secured full time employment in a private clinic in Santo Tomás and supports her younger siblings, inspiring them to continue their studies. One of her interests is equine therapy for people with disabilities.

**Yuri Alfaro López** is an accountant and the

volunteer coordinator of the College Scholarship Program that TSTSCA has supported for the last six years, helping young people become professionals dedicated to serving their community. Yuri came to Olympia in 2002 on another delegation and has since hosted several Evergreen students in her family home.



**Look inside** for the delegates' autobiographical reflections, the calendar of public events to post on your fridge, and a request for your financial support of this delegation and the exchanges and projects the TSTSCA supports. **Thank you** for responding generously with the enclosed envelope.

The Thurston-Santo Tomás Sister County Association (TSTSCA) has organized numerous community exchanges as part of our sister relationship with Santo Tomás, Chontales, Nicaragua. Since 1988, over 150 people from Thurston County have visited Santo Tomás, and 35 Tomásin@s, as of this delegation, have visited Olympia. Sometimes the visits include volunteering alongside people in community development projects and schools, and they always include learning about reality on the ground, be it here or there. Throughout the typical three-week long delegation visits to Olympia, TSTSCA members, and maybe *you*, will accompany our guests to Artswalk, Procession of the Species, local public schools and colleges, Safeplace, Planned Parenthood, and other relevant organizations in the greater Olympia area. Contact us to get involved!

TSTSCA began as a part of the decentralized sister city movement that sought to “sister” with communities in Central American countries with which the US was at war, overtly or covertly. During the 70s and 80s in Nicaragua, a vicious dictatorship of 43 years was overthrown, followed by an impressive social and economic revolution that was brutally attacked by the US funded contra war and trade embargo. All of this drew the attention of many people in the US (and across the world) who demanded an end to funding the war that caused incalculable amounts of death and suffering, while demanding respect for the sovereignty of Nicaragua. After the war ended and Nicaragua shifted into

a long period of disastrous neoliberal economics, TSTSCA maintained its relationship with Santo Tomás by supporting people-to-people exchanges and projects including a children’s free lunch program, small public library, and the construction of different educational and health care facilities. Nicaragua entered yet another era seven years ago with the re-election of the Sandinista Party, access to cheap Venezuelan oil making possible the financing of poverty reduction projects, signing on to the CAFTA-DR Free Trade Agreement and a further opening of export markets (coffee, textiles, gold, beef, sugar, seafood). A controversial inter-oceanic canal has been given the green light to proceed, displacing farmers and inviting environmental disaster, provoking volatile reactions from people all across the country. A new law is in effect to squelch dissent and prohibit demonstrations.

**Yuri Alfaro writes:**

“As the coordinator of the scholarship project, I see reflected in every young person the sacrifice they make to have a career and achieve their dreams of helping their families and community. It is through education that many Tomásinos are fulfilling their dreams without having to leave their country. I also believe that Nicaragua will progress only when our people have the knowledge to confront the injustices in which we live.”

**I support the volunteer-run TSTSCA in strengthening our sister ties with Santo Tomás.**

I’ll send my tax-deductible donation right away in the return envelope provided.

I want to support this people-to-people exchange with our sister community!

I will send  \$25  \$50  \$75  \$200  \$480

I want to support the College Scholarship Project in Santo Tomás (\$40 monthly, \$480 yearly for each of the current 13 scholars)

I want to support the Children’s Free Lunch Center and Library in Santo Tomás (\$200 monthly salaries for each of the three staff members)

I will make a monthly donation through the WA State Combined Fund Drive - code 0315175

I would like to be contacted about making a bequest to TSTSCA in my will

I would like to know more about visiting Santo Tomás with a delegation from Olympia

I’ll write and send a note with my email address and phone number

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address please: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please make checks payable to: TSTSCA • PO Box 561 • Olympia, WA 98507**

## Yuri

I'm Yuri Alfaro López and I live in Santo Tomás Chontales, Nicaragua. I am the treasurer of the Comité Para Desarrollo Comunal (CDC), the accountant for the Clínica Popular run by the CDC, and the coordinator of the scholarship program supported by TSTSCA.

I was born on May 5th, 1981, the oldest daughter of eight siblings. I am from a poor family and I assumed responsibility for taking care of my siblings when I was very young because my mom worked all the time and my father was almost never around. I started going to the *comedor infantil*, a social project that benefits Santo Tomás by offering the poorest kids in town a free lunch every day. I continued to go there well into my adolescence and received understanding and affection from the coordinator of the project who taught me to love myself and, above all, help others. With great sacrifice, I studied and graduated from the primary and secondary schools. I had to take three years off before going to college because of my economic situation. I applied for scholarships but, at that time, the government in power did not offer such benefits to known Sandinistas like me.

I worked with the Sandinista Youth, representing women, and I met a party leader who motivated me to study and paid for my first year of university studies. I chose accounting because it was the least expensive discipline although my dream was to study psychology. At that time, I volunteered in the library at the *comedor infantil* but was offered a paid position in the carpentry workshop, another project of the CDC. This paid position made it possible for me to pay my tuition.

I married at 23 and my husband Jaime supported my studies. I became pregnant with our daughter Lindsay and I had to stop my studies because it was too difficult to pay for tuition. In 2007, when Lindsay was nine months old, I became the assistant accountant at the *Clínica Popular*. With this job I was able to go back to school and in 2012 I graduated with a degree in Public Accounting. Looking back, I think it was worth the sacrifices to reach my goal. Thanks to my education, I have a job and am helpful to those in need. If I can be of service, I don't even think about it,



I just help people. Now we have two children: Lindsay, who is 9, and James, who is 3 years old. My goal is to see them graduate from college as well.

In 1997 I began to serve my community as a CDC member. In 1999 I worked with other young people in the CDC to bring all the young activists in Santo Tomás together for a common good and thus the CDC's youth group was formed. Santo Tomás' other sister city of Mol, Belgium also founded a group for young people the same year and invited us to publicize the role of youth in the future of the sister city relationship. So it was in 1999 that I first traveled out of my country to represent the young people of Santo Tomás in Belgium. Our goal was to achieve a strong partnership between Tomásinos and Belgian youth to exchange cultural experiences and build friendships. This partnership still exists to support at-risk youth 17 years later.

In 2002, I went on a life changing delegation to Olympia, Washington. My goal was to educate people in the U.S about the reality of life in Nicaragua. There are many people who dream of going to America for work but I never thought I would touch American soil because of the poverty and misery that the U.S. caused in my home country of Nicaragua.

My visit to the United States made me realize that many people do not agree with the injustices that the U.S. government commits. I realized that the bonds of love and friendship between cities can not be broken by time, distance, or governmental systems. Values such as solidarity and honesty are strong pillars which allow us to break down every barrier that stand between us. I am grateful for the opportunities TSTSCA provides for cultural exchanges because they are a starting point for achieving long-lasting ties and give us the chance to understand each other better. Thanks to people like those I have met in Olympia, there are fewer injustices in the world today.

With affection, see you soon! *Yuri*

## Aminta

Hi! My name is Aminta Rocha and I live in the city of Santo Tomás, Chontales, Nicaragua. I am 23 years old and I earned my degree in nursing through the five year program at the *Universidad Martín Lútero de Santo Tomás*. Because of my studies, I've been able to get ahead. I now work as a nurse in a private clinic in my city. I have six brothers and sisters, half are married and living with their families. I live with my three younger siblings and, after my mother died, I assumed responsibility for supporting our household. I can't speak of my father because he left when I was a baby.

I remember going to the *comedor infantil* as a child to eat with my siblings. My mother would send us there

since she didn't have the resources to feed us. Even though we were in economic poverty, I can say that my childhood was the best phase of my life. I studied at the *escuela Rubén Darío* and one of my teachers was Thelma Castillo, who I appreciate very much. I remember going to the library at the comedor to do research for my class homework. I remember not being a very good student at first, but turning into one as I became motivated to be a person with options. I began to long for university studies, to be someone, to help my family and better the conditions of my life.

When I graduated from high school, I asked God to help me study nursing but I didn't know how to get there. Even so, no one could shake me of my enthusiasm for this career. One day as I was listening to the radio, I heard an announcement about a new scholarship program but couldn't imagine being selected. A friend of mine who is a member of the CDC gave me information and encouraged me to apply, which I did and I got the scholarship! With great happiness, I started my university studies.



*Mi hermano Ariel y yo. En equinoterapia.*

Becoming a member of the scholarship youth group has been a blessing in my life, because with the help of the CDC and Olympia, I've not only paid for my studies, but I've shared with other students who are now my friends. I have a job and feel blessed. I work Sundays through Fridays and I've been finishing up the final bit of my university studies on Saturdays.

I like to visit places, go on walks, dance even though I don't do it well (ha ha!), and go to the Catholic Church. I belong to a Christian group and support an equine therapy project that we have here in Santo Tomás. I am really proud of this project because it's a beautiful social project in my community and my brother participates in it.

I love to eat fruit like grapes and guayaba. Here in my country, the culinary culture is varied and my favorite meal is *quesillo* and I like to drink coffee. I am a person with dreams and hopes.

I would like to work in the public sector, have my own family, and continue helping my younger siblings and community, especially the people with few economic resources and with the desire to improve their lives. I am happy to soon be visiting a new country and I will share with people who want to know me.

## César

My name is César Enrique Castillo Bermúdez and I was born in Santo Tomás in 1996. I am the son of Rosa and Julio; my humble parents are hardworking, kind and, above all, united.

In my childhood, I learned good habits from my family and developed not only solid academic skills but also other talents such as dancing, speaking, and acting. When I finished my last year of primary school, I felt a huge curiosity to know what it was like to teach others. I helped my teachers direct different kinds of activities. Little by little, this became a calling for me. Upon graduation, I expected to attend high school, but a new opportunity arose to pursue university studies through a scholarship offered to the best students of the school by the government and the Ministry of Education. I made the decision to pursue teacher certification at the *Escuela Normal* in Juigalpa at 12 years of age! I left home for five days each week to live at the school, returning home to Santo Tomás to study in an accelerated high school program on Saturdays.

At the *Escuela Normal*, I excelled in my studies and put into practice my talents and skills. We visited pri-



mary schools in the city and I was able to practice what I had learned—to become a teacher. Every experience made me more professional.

In 2014, at 17 years of age, I finished my teaching certification and continued my high school studies on Saturdays. The next

year, at 18, I began my educational service in a rural school and graduated from high school.

I am now 19 years old; I am a teacher and consider myself charismatic, friendly, and fun. I have a positive attitude and a creative spirit and, because of all of this,

*Continued on page 7*

Put this on your refrigerator!

# 11th Delegation from Santo Tomás to visit Olympia! Join US FOR COMMUNITY EVENTS!

## **TSTSCA @ 2ND ANNUAL SOCIAL JUSTICE BLOC PARTY**

**Arts Walk Weekend, April 22 & 23**

Olympia-Rafah Solidarity Mural (119-1/2 Capitol Way North, Olympia)

Art, Music, Poetry, Food, Workshops, and Social Justice! Come see our community working across movements towards collective liberation and celebrate the arrival of the 11th delegation (since 1990) from Thurston County's sister community, Santo Tomás, Chontales, Nicaragua! Stop by to learn about upcoming events and join the festivities. For more information contact Allie at (360) 742-6997

## **OHS ROTARY INTERACT CLUB INTERNATIONAL DINNER**

**Thursday, April 28th 6:00-8:00pm**

Olympia High School Cafeteria (1302 North Street, Olympia)

Come see a variety of performances, including our visitors from Santo Tomás, Nicaragua, at this International Dinner that brings together students, parents, and community members to address current issues impacting Thurston County and the world. Tickets are a suggested donation of \$7. This year, donations will benefit the Tronie Foundation which is a survivor-led organization that advocates on behalf of those at risk of exploitation, human trafficking, and slavery worldwide. For more information contact Rachel at (360) 951-7355

## **A NIGHT WITH NICARAGUAN NEIGHBORS:**

**STORIES, POTLUCK DINNER, AND DANCING**

**Saturday, April 30th 6:00-10:00pm**

**The Abigail Stuart Woman's Club  
(1002 Washington St SE, Olympia)**

TSTSCA supports educational projects in Santo Tomás, Nicaragua including a public library, free lunch program, college scholarships, and don't forget the sister schools connection between Lincoln Elementary and Escuela Rubén Darío. Come spend an evening with our visitors who themselves engage with these projects as students, educators, and community organizers. Please bring a potluck dish to this all ages event where there will be a no-host bar for the 21+ crowd. We suggest a \$5-10 donation at the door to support the great work being done by our Nicaraguan Neighbors.

## **SPANISH-LANGUAGE ACTIVITY NIGHT**

**Thursday, May 5th, 2016, 6:00-9:00pm,  
Lincoln Gym (213 21st Ave SE, Olympia)**

**Food, Music, Spanish, Conversation, Activities, Friendship!**

Join us for an evening with our visitors from Nicaragua & help celebrate our Sister-School Connection! Brought to you by Lincoln Elementary & the Thurston-Santo Tomás Sister County Association. For more information or to volunteer contact Emily at 360-480-8720.

## **4TH ANNUAL BENEFIT SPRING PLANT SALE**

**Saturday, May 7th, 2016, 9:00am-3:00pm  
(117 Thomas St NW, between Harrison & 4th)**

We'll be selling over 50 varieties of native and non-native flowering plants, shrubs, and edibles to raise money for college scholarships for students from Santo Tomás. The Olympia Farmworker Justice Collective will also be selling strawberry starts in support of the international boycott of Driscoll's berries. For more information, to donate plants, or to volunteer, email us at [tstsc@gmail.com](mailto:tstsc@gmail.com)

## **Mount Rainier TRIP**

**Sunday, May 8th, 8:30am**

**Carpool departing from Lincoln Elementary  
(213 21st Ave SE, Olympia)**

Come with us for a day in the snow and perhaps some sledding! Meet at 8:30am in the Lincoln parking lot on Washington Street (bring appropriate clothing, lunch and drinks). For more information, to offer to drive or to seek a spot in the carpool email [tstsc@gmail.com](mailto:tstsc@gmail.com) by May 6th.

*More events are being planned as this publication goes to press. Please like "Thurston/Santo Tomás Sister County Association" on Facebook to be updated on all that will be happening to introduce our visitors to the community and facilitate this educational and cultural exchange. You are also invited to email [tstsc@gmail.com](mailto:tstsc@gmail.com) to find out more about our organization and to get involved.*

## We learn from each other

By Grace Cox

Until 1999, I knew of the work of TSTSCA and the construction brigades that predated the organization, but I was peripherally involved at best. Intellectually I knew that my government's role in was criminal; even the International Court of Justice had found the US guilty of violating international law for funding and training the Contra War and mining Nicaraguan harbors. The Court ordered the U.S. to pay reparations to Nicaragua, but not a dime was ever paid.

It wasn't until I got involved supporting a delegation to Olympia that I first became immersed in the work of TSTSCA. I accompanied Olendia Duarte for several days as we visited local farms and food retailers, as well as having fun at Mt.

Rainier and at the Procession of the Species. This new friendship inspired me to join a Community Delegation to Santo Tomás in February 2000.

I was transformed in many ways by the first month I spent in Santo Tomás, but there are three major realizations that I will carry with me forever.

On a trip to the river with members of the CDC, I rode in the truck with Modesto Narváez. Modesto told me stories from the revolution and the counter revolution, stories of bombs and planes and munitions all labeled U.S.A. It was during this conversation that I realized that in many ways Modesto was more impacted by my government than I ever had been.

In a late night outing a group of us ended up in the office of the Carpentry Shop. After a few minutes Pe-

dro got out the guitar, and we stayed up until dawn singing revolutionary songs, *nueva canciones*, at the top of our lungs.

Here in the U.S. we are too often told that stuff will make us happy. A modern appliance, a new car, nicer clothes will make the difference we seek in our lives. Most of the Nicaraguans I got to meet on that trip had little to show in material goods, but I never met people who could laugh louder or longer, laughing at each other and with each other until our sides hurt.

TSTSCA's mission statement opens with, "International justice and peace depend on the friendships of people across national, cultural and ethnic boundaries." Smarter people than I am have said that peace is more than the absence of war. We can have cease-fires and still stay in the dichotomy of us versus them. True peace requires us understanding our shared humanity. We all need shelter and sustenance. We all need laughter and song. And we all need to live without the threat of imperial wars. People to people exchanges provide us with the opportunity to know faces and names, and to come together across borders to stand up in unity and peace.

As we prepare to welcome our 11th delegation from Santo Tomás to Olympia, I am excited to think of all the opportunities to learn together with our delegates, from the educational exchange between Lincoln Elementary and *Escuela Ruben Dario*, to bringing to Equine Therapy programs (Olympia and Santo Tomás) together, to cultural exchanges of arts and dance. And I look forward to laughing together, and to deepen our relationship with our sister community.

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## Food Sovereignty & Agroecology in Nicaragua: June 20 – July 1, 2016 Delegation

In addition to coordinating a West Coast speaking tour, Friends of the ATC is working in partnership with the *Via Campesina* organizations of Nicaragua and the Alliance for Global Justice to arrange a delegation to Nicaragua June 20–July 1, 2016. This delegation will study how *La Via Campesina* is working to achieve food sovereignty within the particular context of Nicaragua. Our delegation will include visits to ag-

ricultural cooperatives in rural communities, peasant schools that provide political and technical training in agroecology, and the site in Santo Tomás where IALA Mesoamerica is being constructed.

For an application (due April 15) or more information, please visit the delegations page on our website ([friendsatc.org](http://friendsatc.org)) or email Erika Takeo at [erikatakeo.atc@gmail.com](mailto:erikatakeo.atc@gmail.com).

## CESAR

*Continued from page 4*

my parents are proud of me.

I like to talk with my friends, play, get together with my family, share ideas, and represent my culture and traditions through dance.

I am proud of what I have accomplished and I thank God for giving me strength, intelligence and life. I thank my parents for giving me their support and for always being at my side.

I have a favorite memory of my mom with this saying: "If you don't live to serve, life is not worth living".

## Thelma

My name is Thelma Nubia Castillo Suárez; I was born in Santo Tomás, Chontales, Nicaragua on October 2nd, 1962.

The memories of my childhood include the care and attention of my teachers in grade school, instilling values to develop into a useful member of society. I didn't imagine that I would become a teacher like them!

In that time, I studied folkloric dancing and performed a lot. While in high school in Santo Tomás, I married young and become pregnant, delaying my graduation. Eventually I returned and excelled in my studies, especially Spanish language literature. I even won a city-wide literary contest.

I entered the "Escuela Normal Regional Gregorio Aguilar Barea" in the department seat of Juigalpa in 1991, to earn my teaching certificate in elementary education. Two teachers had persuaded me to study and they provided financial support as I had very few resources. Though I endured many problems, I graduated with honors. In years to come, I studied keyboarding, accounting and participated in many workshops to support children and youth in their development. I've been involved in primary school education for 18 years now: teaching, working in administration, and running the school library for the last eight years.

I feel very satisfied and proud of my work teaching and being the librarian at the Rubén Darío school. I've had the opportunity to not only instruct but also to imbue social and moral values in the children.

I had many struggles in my youth when I was a young mother and studying, suffering also a terrible illness that almost took my life. God intervened and cured me and now I serve him and the church with gratitude.

I have four children and all are married. Two are involved with the church as pastors, as I am. My youngest daughter recently lost her 14 month old baby and we all suffer much grief. I am going through a lot of trials with the death of my granddaughter and dealing with divorce from my ex-husband. I now live alone but have the pleasure of being a pastor in the *Iglesia Centro Cristiano Emanuel Misiones Transmundoiales*. God willing, I will retire in 2018 from my career in education but continue to serve my community through the church. Today I am happy and I consider it a miracle that you decided to invite me to Olympia. This is a big honor for me and my school. The students and their families, the teachers and I all thank you.

I look forward to sharing our reality, stories and culture with my brothers and sisters at Lincoln Elementary. May God bless and protect you with his love, goodness and mercy.



*Thelma with her daughters*

## María Isabel

Hello, my name is María Isabel Ruíz Taleno. I'm 38 years old and from Santo Tomás. My mother is Isidora Taleno and I come from a large family. My father José Gregorio Ruíz Borge died eight years ago. I lived part of my childhood in the rural community of Tierra Blanca. It was there in 1985, that I met Jean Eberhardt. She came to build a school with a delegation from Seattle, and has since been apart of my family. She went on to found what we know now as the sister relationship between Olympia and Santo Tomás (TSTSCA).

I am part of a revolutionary Sandinista family. My father and mother were recognized as historic collaborators (of the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship). Because of their participation with the Sandinista government programs, we were attacked in March of 1986 by a group of contras. They came with the intention of killing everyone, but they took only my father to stab him in the throat and leave him for dead. By the grace of God, my father survived this tragic attack. This was traumatic for everyone and because they said they would come back to kill all of us, we gave up our life on the farm and moved to Santo

## MARÍA ISABEL

*From previous page*

Tomás. Because it was a time of war and economic crisis provoked by the trade embargo by the US against Nicaragua, there were days when there wasn't much to eat. In spite of everything, the move allowed us to continue studying.

I studied Computer Science at UNAN in Managua although what I really wanted to study was medicine. Thanks to the financial support from my family, I was able to get my bachelors degree. I also was lucky enough to receive a two year scholarship from Project Miriam (a feminist organization that promotes women's education). Through Project Miriam, I also participated in workshops around topics such as gender, sexuality, women's health, and reproductive rights. These workshops empowered me as a woman and I went on to work as the secretary, vice-coordinator, and even got to coordinate a pilot project about comprehensive education and sustainable development.

I love to read sorts of genres such as motivational books and mysteries. I am a revolutionary feminist who is creative and loves to learn. I also love nature and art in all of its forms such as dance, theater, and poetry.

Because of my love of art, I got involved with the Loviguisca Community Museum. I want to continue to revive and promote our cultural identity, history, and



national pride. I know that in the future, hopefully not too long from now, this idea will become a reality.

Because of the economy, it has been hard for me to find a job in the field I studied. I have worked a number of odd jobs and at times have been unemployed. I also studied English in Managua and I wish to become fluent. I love the idea of working in the cultural education and tourism here in Santo Tomás.

I have had the privilege to work with many student and community delegations over the years. It has been an enriching experience to build friendships and learn from one another. In the past few years, I have taken on more of an organizational role and I have learned a lot from these experiences.

While I'm in Olympia, I'm interested in meeting the Latin American History and Literature professors Alice Nelson, Catalina Ocampo and Diego de Acosta. They are known for their excellent teaching styles and I am excited to learn a lot from them.

**Late BREAKING news:**  
We are extremely disappointed that the US Embassy has denied a non-immigrant visa to Maria Isabel.

## DENIED

## Boycott Driscoll's by Growing Your Own Strawberries!

*"If you want to support the boycott, you better start growing your own strawberries, or find berries that are local and governed by a union contract."*

—Ramon Torres, President of Familias Unidas por la Justicia

In solidarity with the union created to meet the demands of farmworkers employed by Sakuma Berry Bothers, Familias Unidas por la Justicia, and farmworkers in San Quintin, Mexico, TSTSCA is in support of the international boycott of Driscoll's berries. We will be selling non-Driscoll's strawberry and raspberry starts at the 4th An-



nual TSTSCA Plant Sale on Saturday, May 7th to raise money for the scholarship program in Santo Tomas and to support farmworkers in their efforts to negotiate a union contract for better working conditions for their families. For more information about the boycott visit [boycottsakumaberries.com](http://boycottsakumaberries.com), to get involved with the boycott here in Olympia like "Olympia Farmworker Justice Collective" on Facebook, and of course, come buy your berry starts at the plant sale on May 7th from 9am to 3pm at 117 Thomas St. NW Olympia WA 98502.



## Food Sovereignty and Mother Earth!

From April 22nd through April 24th, 2016, two Nicaragua-based representatives of *La Via Campesina* will be Olympia, Washington as part of the “Peasant Agroecology for Food Sovereignty and Mother Earth” speaking tour.

*La Via Campesina* is an international social movement made up of peasants, agricultural workers, women farmers, fishermen and women, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, and migrants around the world that coined the term food sovereignty, or the right of all peoples to define their own local, culturally appropriate food systems. Agroecology, a form of low-input, politicized, context-specific sustainable agriculture, is seen as a key pillar to constructing food sovereignty.

On this tour, delegates Marlen Sánchez and Nils McCune will highlight the work of *Via Campesina* to construct the *Instituto Agroecológico Latinoamericano (IALA) Mesoamérica*, or the Latin American Institute of Agroecology of Mesoamerica in Santo Tomás, Nicaragua (where TSTSCA has had a multi-decade relationship). While IALAs exist in other parts of Latin America, this would be the first regional, agroecology peasant university of its kind for Central America. Sánchez and McCune will also talk about how agroecology can be used as a tool to fight climate change, to create gender equity, resist neoliberal capitalism, and facilitate re-peasantization.

We are looking forward to the many exchanges that we will make while in Olympia, and are particularly delighted that the visit of Sánchez and McCune to Olympia will coincide with TSTSCA’s education delegation. In addition to spending time with this delegation, we will also be visiting the South of the Sound Community Farm Land Trust, Evergreen State College, the Olympia Farmers Market, and the festivities at the Social Justice Bloc Party and Procession of the Species.

### More information about our delegates:

Marlen Sánchez has been the National Coordinator of Agroecology for the *Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (ATC)*, one of the founding members of *La Via Campesina* since 2013. She has also been a member

of the ATC for 11 years. She was one of the first graduates of IALA Paulo Freire, located in Venezuela. Currently, she is the director for implementation of IALA Mesoamerica in Santo Tomás and coordinates the leadership formations for the Central American region of *La Via Campesina*.



*Entrance to IALA Mesoamerica in Santo Tomás, Nicaragua with agroecology leaders from throughout Central America. Speaking tour delegates Nils McCune and Marlen Sánchez pictured on far left and far right, respectively. Photo credit: Nils McCune*

Nils McCune is a student and researcher in agroecology, as well as a technical team staff member with the ATC. He represented the ATC at the International Forum for Agroecology in Mali in 2015. He is a regular translator at *Via Campesina international* meetings.



*“Lombricultura”:* Marlen Sánchez teaches ATC members how to make worm compost at IALA Mesoamérica in Santo Tomás, Nicaragua. Photo credit: Sandrine Alongi

He is also the liaison to Friends of the ATC, the sister solidarity organization of the ATC.

For more information

about this tour, please visit [friendsatc.org](http://friendsatc.org) or contact Erika Takeo (Friends of the ATC Coordinator) at [erikatakeo.atc@gmail.com](mailto:erikatakeo.atc@gmail.com). We look forward to meeting you!

**Thurston–Santo Tomás  
Sister County Association**

PO Box 561  
Olympia WA 98507

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**11th Delegation from Santo Tomás to visit Olympia!  
Connect with our visitors April 20 to May 11, 2016**

**Join US! MORE info on insert — see page 5.**

**TSTSCA @ 2ND ANNUAL SOCIAL  
JUSTICE BLOC PARTY**

Arts Walk Weekend, April 22 & 23  
Olympia-Rafah Solidarity Mural  
(119-1/2 Capitol Way North, Olympia)

**OHS ROTARY INTERACT CLUB  
INTERNATIONAL DINNER**

Thursday, April 28th 6:00-8:00pm  
Olympia High School Cafeteria  
(1302 North Street, Olympia)

**A NIGHT WITH NICARAGUAN  
NEIGHBORS:**

**STORIES, POTLUCK DINNER, AND DANCING**

Saturday, April 30th 6:00-10:00pm  
The Abigail Stuart Woman's Club  
(1002 Washington St SE, Olympia)  
donation requested to support the delegation

**SPANISH-LANGUAGE ACTIVITY  
NIGHT**

Thursday, May 5th, 2016, 6:00-9:00pm,  
in the Lincoln Gym  
(213 21st Ave SE, Olympia)

**4TH ANNUAL BENEFIT SPRING  
PLANT SALE**

Saturday, May 7th, 2016, 9:00am-3:00pm  
117 Thomas St NW, between Harrison and 4th



**MOUNT RAINIER TRIP**

Sunday, May 8th, 8:30am  
Carpool departing from Lincoln Elementary  
(213 21st Ave SE, Olympia) Please email  
tstsca@gmail.com by May 6 to reserve or to  
offer space.

*More events are being planned as this publication goes to press. Please like "Thurston/Santo Tomás Sister County Association" on Facebook to be updated on all that will be happening to introduce our visitors to the community and facilitate this educational and cultural exchange. You are also invited to email tstsca@gmail.com or call (360) 943-8642 to find out more and to get involved.*