

An **update** from the Thurston–Santo Tomás Sister County Association

US/Nicaragua Solidarity—Since 1989



What is our role in creating positive change?

A new year: what to say in reflection on the state of the world, the state of Nicaragua and the state of the US? We are living in undeniably challenging times with unprecedented climate change and environmental destruction, a deadly pandemic, food insecurity and crushing poverty, massive refugee crises, increasing voter suppression, and a racist carceral state. Courageous people here and all over the world demand change and take action. May we each find our best way to engage, whether your commitment is to direct service, pushing for legislative progress, educating yourself and the public, or monkey-wrenching what must be stopped.



Grace Cox, tomasina scholars and sisters Ana Vielka and Yerlin Matus Lacayo, Alessia Murillo Mejia and Jean Eberhardt in Dec. of 2019 in the library at the Comedor Infantil

The members of TSTSCA entered into a long-term relationship with a community in Nicaragua during the heinous Contra War, which was fueled and orchestrated by the US. In 2022, we still stand against US economic and military intervention in Nicaragua. When and where have we ever seen those interventions and invasions have results other than high human death counts and massive destruction? The peoples of each country must determine their own futures. In the interest of maintaining our commitment to the now 23 uni-

versity scholars as well as the free lunch program for kids and the free rehabilitation center in Santo Tomás, we will not be adding our varied opinions to the wide range of viewpoints about what is taking place in Nicaragua. There is plenty of information available on websites of differing perspectives for you to draw your own conclusions.

We support life-changing social programs in Santo Tomas and invite you to join us. We hope to someday continue the people-to-people exchanges we began in 1990. We reiterate that TSTSCA does not support US government intervention of any kind in Nicaragua.



We have decided this will be our final paper print version of the newsletter and ask that you send us your email address to receive future updates. In this issue, you'll hear from our sister partners about all of their programs in Santo Tomás and you'll read Audrey Levine's enthusiastic article on the scholarship



Pinata time at a December 2019 celebration at the Comedor Infantil in Santo Tomas.

project and meet the latest university scholars. We then invite you to participate in the preparations for the annual plant sale fundraiser. Save the dates of April 29, 30 and May 1st! We've not been able to hold the winter rummage sales because of the pandemic. The virus-safe plant sale is our most visible outreach these years. Thank you for your continuing support!

An update from our sister organization in Santo Tomás

From Yuri Alfaro [visitor to Olympia on community delegations in 2002 and 2016]

Translated by Emily Calhoun Petrie and additional context added by Jean Eberhardt

Hello to all our friends in TSTSCA,

On behalf of the Committee for Community Development (El Comité para Desarrollo Comunal, el CDC) I want to say thank you for all the support you in Olympia have provided and for your consistent interest in the CDC's socially beneficial projects in Santo Tomás. [The CDC is a Nicaraguan non-profit organization that provides critical support to the people in the small town and surrounding rural communities.]

We've made some changes in administration of the projects of the CDC. For those of you who have visited here, you might like to know Yuri Alfaro [writing this letter] is responsible for the community services offered at the CDC and facilitator of the scholarship project. Yorleni Velasquez is our Compliance Officer, Anielka Lampin is our Loan and Agricultural Technician, and Isaida Mejia has assumed the role of General Accountant for the whole of the CDC. The new health clinic administrator is María Azucena Alvarado and the new accountant there is Yerlin Matus, a former TSTSCA/CDC scholarship recipient and recent university graduate!

In consideration of the contagion level of Covid-19 in our community, we suspended the CDC monthly meetings after August of 2021. We will only meet if necessary for the organization. Despite the many challenges associated with the pandemic, our normal work in the CDC projects continues, as you will read below. A change to our normal operating procedure - the Nicaraguan Ministry of the Interior is now monitoring all foreign agents [which includes TSTSCA and the CDC's sister city committee in Mol. Belgium. Both had to submit articles of incorporation, etc. and passport images of all officers]. On a monthly basis, CDC representatives must travel to Managua to present our monthly expense reports for the financial donations from each of our

two sister-city associations and pay \$50 to submit each report. One more order of business - we have a new CDC member in Professor Osmar Rocha. He is the Director [principal] at Ruben Dario [Elementary] sister school with Lincoln Options in Olympia].

Paso a Paso

The new "Step by Step" Rehabilitation Center is dedicated to serving anyone living with disabilities in Santo Tomás and surrounding areas. [They opened their doors in June of 2021] We offer physical, speech, occupational and equine therapies to children, young people, and adults of any age—free of charge. Because of the level of Covid infections, our client base has only grown to about 30 children and adults, declining a bit when outbreaks surge.

Thanks go to the CDC for providing Paso a Paso a safe and comfortable space with all the basic utilities provided. Thanks to financial support from the Committee from Olympia [TSTSCA], the center's rooms have been equipped for different kinds of patient care, and salary support provided for two staff members

for the first year. There is a permanent staff of four: Walkiria, a physical therapist and graduate of the TSTSCA/CDC scholarship program, Yeraldine- the program coordinator, Reynita [visitor to Olympia in 1996 and a retired teacher]- speech therapy and developmental stimulation, and Vanesa; the facilitator for the occupational

therapy room. We have commitments from 13 local donors to provide a monthly stipend to Vanesa of \$3,000 córdobas (\$83) to promote disability awareness through community workshops and handicraft making. Vanesa is the mother of two girls with disabilities. She also cares for her brother who is living with disabilities as well. Vanesa and her children are participants of the Comedor Infantil.

Equine therapy takes place at the Finca Modelo every Wednesday. We are pleased by the impact Paso a Paso has had on the people of our city and in the



The new Paso a Paso project being blessed and celebrated by the local priest, center staff and community members in Dec. of 2021



Welcoming mural in the entrance to Paso a Paso, the free rehab center in Santo Tomás.

surrounding areas such as La Gateada, Acoyapa, Villa Sandino - our doors are open to all. [If this project appeals to you, the reader, and you would like to support it, let us know!]

La Casa de Mujer

In other news - the Casa de la Mujer received funds from Mol, Belgium for repairs and maintenance throughout the CDC projects. The infrastructure of this building has been improved - including the connection to the city's new sewer system, improvements to the potable water system, filling in of the rafter bays to keep pigeons out of the second floor rooms where the sewing classes are held, a ramp to access the building from the street and new locking metal gates in front of the wooden doors. [This was the two-story project of the Olympia Construction Brigade in 1988, built to house a women's sewing cooperative and sewing school. The year-long sewing and pattern-making classes still exist, though the coop has disbanded. The Paso a Paso project now occupies the first floor of the building originally named La Casa de Costura.]

El Comedor Infantil y La Biblioteca

130 children from every corner of the city continue to receive a free mid-day meal at the Comedor. There, the children also engage in hygiene and educational workshops, and extracurricular activities such as art projects and traditional folkdance. The two activities promoters at the Comedor also offer support to the 120 students sponsored by the sister city committee in Mol, Belgium, which provides them with school supplies. This past year, the library (attached to the Comedor Infantil) documented 2,140 student visits. TSTSCA recently provided for metal shelving units, a filing cabinet



Physical therapy in the new Paso a Paso rehabilitation center

and the librarian's new desk. Unfortunately, several workers at the Comedor and library contracted COVID. To avoid contagion, we had to close the Comedor Infantil and the Library for two weeks in September. [TSTSCA funds three modest salaries at the Comedor and Library: coordinator, librarian, and night watchwoman; Mol, Belgium also funds three salaries: a psychologist, and two activities promoters called monitores.]

La Clínica Popular

The CDC's health clinic is operated as a non-profit, supplementing services offered by the crowded public health centers in town. This clinic has two doctors who, between them, average seeing almost 500 patients per month. There are three lab technicians who analyze over 1,700 blood, stool and urine samples each month, two nurses, one pharmacist/administrator, one cashier and one bookkeeper. Their clientele seem to be mostly from the countryside surrounding Santo Tomás, coming in for minor surgeries, to treat infections, broken bones, diabetes, etc. Hospitalizations average at least one person daily.

Specialists arrive for scheduled weekly and monthly visits to offer OBGYN services including Papanicolaou exams, Ear/Nose/Throat consultations, Orthopedist support, Ultrasound, EKG, and X-Rays.



Weekly equine therapy for a young tomasino boy living with disabilities,

[Various students and doctors from The Evergreen State College and Olympia have volunteered across many years in this clinic in different capacities. Let us know if you'd be interested in volunteering someday. TSTSCA has funded modest contributions such as dental and laboratory equipment, exam tables and hospital beds, partial roof replacement, medical supplies and equipment]

La Escuela Hermandad

The Escuela Hermandad is offering practical enrichment classes under the direction of four teachers. Fancunda, Angela and Juana are teaching hair styling, beauty classes, baking and cake decoration. Thanks to donations from our brothers and sisters in Mol, Belgium, Jaime is teaching painting classes. He led his students in the creation of a mural [see photo above] on a prominent wall in the Casa de la Mujer. The Escuela Hermandad is also home to a preschool, a community health post, and Los Pepitos, the well-known national program for developmentally disabled children and youth. [This two-story building was built with funding from Mol, Belgium and Olympia WA two decades ago.]



Year-long course in cake making and decorating for aspiring home-based entrepreneurs

El Proyecto de Microcrédito:

The Microcredit loan program is now operating out of the CDC headquarters. Loan services have been diversified to benefit a variety of economic activities including agriculture, commerce, consumable goods, and housing. One-hundred-and-sixty local producers and entrepreneurs have received loans and support services thanks to Mol, Belgium, which financed the project. The interest payments for the individual loans are returned to CDC coffers from which we pay the salaries of personnel and make contributions to a fund for social relief. So far, we have had no problems with the operation of the microcredit project. Both the clinic and microcredit program are self-sustaining and contribute to the overall functioning of the CDC.



Year-long painting class at the Escuela Hermandad. Students collaborated on the mural for the Paso a Paso project.

La Finca Modelo y Caponera

Currently we are maintaining typical activities at the farm and harvesting produce such as bananas, vegetables, beans (modest harvests) to augment the nutritional food made available to children at the Comedor Infantil. The model farm is also a training center for local dairy and agricultural producers [to learn innovative techniques to improve their herds and farms]. Demonstration projects are paid for with funds from a Nicaraguan federal program. Projects have included the construction of coops and pens for animals - including pigs, hens, fish farming and dairy cows.

Taller de Carpinteria

The carpentry shop is being rented out to a local carpenter who pays a modest fee plus all utilities. [This is a large shop that was built and furnished with industrial equipment by Basque revolutionaries in solidarity with the Nicaraguan revolution in the early-mid 80's. What Jean remembers is that it was built for young men to learn a trade as they mostly produced coffins needed locally during the contra war.]

Proyecto de Becas

The scholarship project, created in 2010, is more fully described in another article, with brief profiles and photos of nine students who started receiving their scholar-

ships in 2021. There will be 23 students in this program by the end of February when the universities in Nicaragua begin their academic year!

TSTSCA typically raises and sends about \$25,000 each year to support scholars and three modest salaries at the *Comedor Infantil*. In 2020, we sent an additional \$17,500 to help launch the Paso a Paso project. As an all-volunteer organization in Thurston County, we depend on your support with our creative fundraising efforts such as the annual spring plant sale and annual rummage sale (cancelled due to Covid) and generous donations from you! Please look for the donate icon at oly-wa.us/tstsc for a Paypal link, or mail a check to **TSTSCA, PO Box 561 Olympia WA 98507. Thank you!**

Help Us Build the Future in Santo Tomás by Supporting Scholarships

Audrey Levine

During our last visit to Santo Tomás back in August 2014, my husband Nels and I were invited to attend a celebration at the *Comedor Infantil*, one of the long-standing projects that TSTSCA has supported for many years. That evening, the building, typically noisy with the laughter of children who come there for the free lunch program and for help with their schoolwork, was buzzing with a different kind of energy. We were there to celebrate five of



Nels and Audrey with Kilyer and Ivania and their children in 2014

the recent TSTSCA scholarship recipients and to learn about their goals and the impact that having access to a professional education would have on their families and on their community. Most movingly, three of the five scholars spoke of having benefited from the free lunch program at the *Comedor Infantil* as children—and not just from the food assistance, but from all the support and encouragement from the staff and volunteers to be life-long learners and to follow their dreams. And here they were, pursuing their education and making their dreams come true. The hope that these young people embodied inspired and delighted us.

If you've participated in any of the activities TSTSCA has sponsored here in Olympia during the north-bound delegations since 2010, you've probably encountered several of the scholarship recipients and were likely just as impressed as we were by their irrepressible spirit and dedication to service. Beyond their intention to help lift their own families out of poverty, they've demonstrated a deep commitment to improving and giving back to their whole community.

Below are brief profiles of the nine scholarship recipients who just began their five-year undergraduate studies in 2021 and whose futures depend on our continued support. Please keep their stories—and their beautiful faces—in your heart, and contribute

as generously as you are able. We are committed to each of the current 16 students receiving \$600 per year to cover their basic expenses for five years. Consider a monthly donation of \$50 (or any amount) for one of these students through our Paypal account (hit the donate button on our website <https://oly-wa.us/tstsc>) or by check to **TSTSCA, PO Box 561, Olympia WA 98507** or in the return envelope if you've received this in hard copy. When the Nicaraguan university academic calendar begins again at the end of February 2022, another seven students will begin their studies, thanks to a new, five-year grant from the Yip Harburg Foundation. We will be supporting 23 scholars at that point! Thank you for helping these young people reach their dreams and make a difference in their community.

Joselyng Karelia Miranda Espinoza

Career: Psychology
at Martin Luther King Jr. University, Managua

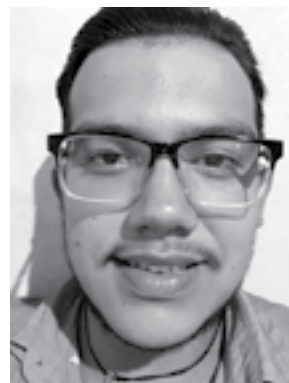


Joselyng is 21 years old; has 3 brothers and 2 sisters. Attended primary school at Rubén Darío (Lincoln Elementary's sister school), and secondary school at the Instituto Nacional 21 de Junio, Santo Tomás, Chontales.

Her dream: To study psychology, to socialize with people, especially with children, and help vulnerable families in the municipality. Her greatest aspiration is to be able to help the children of the Comedor Infantil. "I hope to have my own office and be able to help all the families that need it."

Orlando Fabian Rosa Plata

Career: Nursing
at University Martín Lutero, Santo Tomás



Orlando is 19 years old; has 4 siblings; attended primary school at Rigoberto Cabezas and secondary school at the Instituto Nacional 21 de Junio, Santo Tomás, Chontales; his mother is a single mom and has been solely responsible for the education of her children; Orlando is her youngest.

His dream: To become a professional nurse; "I love helping people and, in the

future, I want to work in this profession and help the people in my family and in the community.”

Javiera Gissell Sandoval Morales

Career: Pharmaceutical chemistry
at UNIJAR, Managua

Javiera is 18 years old; has 3 siblings; attended primary school at Rigoberto Cabezas and secondary school at the Instituto Nacional 21 de Junio, Santo Tomás, Chontales.

Her dream: To become a pharmaceutical chemist, not only to improve our economic future but also to be part of the sustainable development of humanity, health, and the country in this realm of knowledge, in different areas such as medicine, disease prevention, manufacturing and marketing of products, among others.



Marialy Maggaly Orozco González

Career: Nursing
at Martín Lutero,
Santo Tomás

Marialy is 19 years old; has 2 siblings; is the daughter of a single mother; attended primary school at Rubén Darío and secondary school at the Instituto Nacional 21 de Junio, Santo Tomás, Chontales.

Her dream: To become a professional to better serve society, to help her family and community, and to be able to humanize healthcare for the sick.



Yisbi Wilmary Mejia Murillo

Career: Environmental Science
at UNAN, Managua

Yisbi is 21 years old; has one sister; her father died in July 2020 from COVID-19; she now lives alone with her mother. Yisbi attended primary and secondary school at the private Colegio Cristo Rey in Santo Tomás, where she was a scholar-



ship recipient for most of her studies.

Her dream: She considers herself a young woman sensitive to the environmental crises that Mother Earth faces; for that reason, she was motivated to study this career; her greatest aspirations are to complete her degree and contribute knowledge to the country, contribute to changes in the environment, and to be self-sufficient, contributing financially to her future and to the future of her family.

Melvin Aimar Rivas Bravo

Career: Graphic Design and Multimedia
at UNAN, Chontales



Melvin is 17 years old; has one younger brother; his father is a teacher and his mother takes care of the home, which is not theirs. He attended primary school at the Colegio Miguel de Cervantes and secondary school el Instituto Nacional 21 de Junio, Santo Tomás.

His dream: Melvin considers himself to be an honest, responsible, cheerful young man who practices sports (soccer); his personal goal is to complete his career in Graphic Design and Multimedia to improve the economic situation of his family. “I like this career because of its artistic, visual nature and because it is through creative and technological development that human beings manage to communicate.”

Sharroll Idefonzina Guerrero López

Career: Public Accounting and Finance
at Martín Lutero University, Santo Tomás



Sharroll is 18 years old; has 6 siblings; lives with her father; attended primary school in the city of Rama at Horacio Aguilar and attended secondary school at el Instituto 21 de Junio de Santo Tomás Chontales.

Her dream: Her main motivation is to complete her studies, be a great accounting professional, achieve financial independence as a woman, and be

able to manage her own business. “It will be great to contribute to my family and to my goals as a professional woman.”

Junior Alexander Dávila

Career: Natural Sciences at UNAN, Chontales

Junior is 17 years old; has 6 siblings (4 brothers; 2 sisters); his mother is a single mom who works as a home aide earning less than \$100/month; he participated in the Comedor Infantil throughout his childhood; he attended primary school at la Escuela Rubén Darío and secondary school el Instituto 21 de Junio de Santo Tomás Chontales. He is developing as an excellent student.

His dream: He aspires to be a professional, work in the educational field, improve economically, get ahead and be someone in life, help his family in difficulties, and achieve economic independence, also contributing to society as a good educator.



Belkys Karina Galeano

Career: Public Accounting and Finance at UNAN, Chontales



Belkys is 21 years old; has an older sister; is already married and lives with her mother and her grandparents; her mother is a single mom. She attended primary school at Rigoberto Cabezas and secondary school at el Instituto 21 de Junio de Santo Tomás Chontales.

Her dream: To complete her degree and become a professional, start her own business and have her own home, and be able to help people who need it most.



The scholarship program was created in 2010 as a joint project between TSTSCA and the Comité para Desarrollo Comunal (CDC), our sister organization in Santo Tomás. The CDC advertises the scholarship cycle, receives the applications and forms a local committee to select the scholars. They require annual proof of satisfactory academic progress and request, if possible, the scholars participate in monthly meetings to encourage their success and to volunteer in community service.

We started slowly, with four students in 2010, and have increased the number of scholars over time. 24 have graduated so far, five were unable to finish for different reasons, and most of the graduates are working in their fields! You can make a huge difference in these neighbors' lives by contributing to these modest, but larger impact, life changing scholarships. \$600 per year for each of these first generation college students. Please give what you can.

Thank you!



Nursing scholarship graduate Aminta Rocha, delegate to Olympia in 2016, as she take the blood pressure of a client at the clinic where she works full time in Santo Tomás.

The West Olympia Plant Sale is coming soon!

Donate perennials, join the potting parties and save the date!

Many thanks to many, many people for making our spring plant sale benefit fundraiser such a growing success year after year. In 2021, plant sales and generous donations at that time totaled \$11,000 and we were able to fund the 16 university scholars from Santo Tomas's studies in Nicaragua, and pay graduation fees. This year, we'll grow the project to 23 students with the support of the Yip Harburg Foundation for the additional seven students for five years. Olympian Audrey Levine wrote an article about the project; look for it in another email in the near future.



Save the date!

We will hold our 11th annual plant sale on **April 29th and 30th** and conclude it on **May 1st**. As we learned quickly, in order to continue the sale in pandemic times, we host the sale online and have order pick up times on that very weekend at the same convenient location on the Westside of Olympia. Thank you for your patience as we all get better at using the Square site for posting the photos of plants and their prices, and then you ordering and paying online.



Huge thank you to the 60 volunteers: the enthusiastic gardeners who dug up lots of cool perennials from their yards for the plant potters to divide

and pot up, to the organizers who figured out how to publicize this community event and get it all to work, and to the crews who boxed up the orders and set them out for you! Phew! Of course, big thanks to all those volunteers, everyone who made purchases AND to the folks who decided to “round up” as well as write large checks to support students in our sister town in Nicaragua.

We hear that our prices are the best in town and way below the nurseries, so be sure to check out our sale of native and non-native flowering plants, tomato and vegetable starts, annuals, grasses, and a large variety of fancy hybrid and heirloom bearded irises.



We'll start the potting parties in earnest once or twice per week by mid-February (weather permitting). It's a lot of fun to get grubby together while staying physically safely separated outside at different work tables. Jean will reach out to last year's volunteers, but be sure to let her know if you want to join

in the fun. We will need lots of great plants to sell, so please email tstsca@gmail.com or text (360) 259-2974 to get in touch about what you might have to contribute.

Visit our webpage <https://oly-wa.us/tstsca> to read longer interviews with the Nicaraguan students in past newsletters to see what a difference these scholarships make in their lives, family and community. Then find the donate button to get to the Paypal link. Some folks choose to give a modest recurring donations. Scholars receive \$50 per month (\$600 annually for the five years of their undergraduate programs). Alternatively, you can still snail mail a check to TSTSCA, PO Box 561 Olympia WA 98507

Thank you!

Being Connected:

Consider that most (not all) of this 37 year-old volunteer run organization's active members are in our 60s, 70s and 80s! How long can we keep this momentum up? As we think about even these next 5 years, we are wondering how to keep this relationship with a community in Nicaragua going and even more vibrant. Have you wanted to be more involved but didn't have time until now? Do you find yourself inspired to help this connection continue? Come to our quarterly retreats and/or our monthly meetings. Even if you do not feel able to become part of the organizing group, we'd love to see you as we prepare for the plant sale at fun outdoor plant potting parties on the westside of Olympia. Of course we will always need help at specific fundraising activities which we hope to restart this year. Please reach out with your questions or for more information on what volunteering could look like at tstsc@gmail.com or text/call (360) 259-2974

What we do...

Projects in Santo Tomás

Since 1989, The TSTSCA, an all-volunteer non-profit org. in Olympia, WA, works with a sister 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:** Public Library (small but mighty!)
- ▶ **Becas:** 16 University Scholarships

Sister School Relationship:

TSTSCA helps facilitate a sister school relationship between Lincoln Elementary School in Olympia and Escuela Rubén Darío 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 150 people from the Olympia area have personally visited Santo Tomás. We have also supported and welcomed twelve delegations of 40 *Tomásinos/as* to learn, educate, and build mutually supportive relationships in the Olympia area. For more information, see our website at <http://www.oly-wa.us/tstsc/> or email tstsc@gmail.com



I support the 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 the College Scholarship Project in Santo Tomás (\$40 monthly, \$480 yearly for each of the current 16 scholars)
- I want to support the Children's Free Lunch Center and Library in Santo Tomás (approximately \$350 monthly for each of the three staff members)
- I will make a monthly donation through the WA State Combined Fund Drive—code 0315175. This will help sustain the organization year-round!
- 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 send a note with my email address and phone number.





**Thurston-Santo Tomás
Sister County Associa-
tion**

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website: oly-wa.us/tstsca/

Phone: 360-943-8642

facebook: Tstsca Thurston-Santo Tomás

Moving to email and abandoning printed newsletters!

Dear faithful readers of our infrequent TSTSCA newsletter/updates:

After launching and then shape shifting for over 37 years we have decided to finally move with the times and for reasons of cost, saving paper, hoping to reach an even wider audience and even adding color(!), we've decided this will be our last paper edition mailed out. For those folks who've previously supplied your email addresses, you have likely already received the three main articles with fabulous color images in your inbox. If you haven't yet sent us your email address, please do so and we promise to neither inundate you with updates nor leave you wondering for so long as to what has become of this Olympia-based non-profit organization sistered with a non-governmental organization in Santo Tomás Chontales, Nicaragua. We do not share our lists with other orgs. nor businesses. Please stay in touch, support our work as you are able, and send your email address to tstsca@gmail.com