



Durham - San Ramón Sister Communities

Hermanamiento News

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Health Odyssey 2001

by Jonathan Sheline

A health delegation, tabbed "Health Odyssey 2001", visited Nicaragua in April. Eleven people made the trip, including two physicians, two nurse practitioners, two nurses, a naturopathic physician, a health administrator, a public health student, and two children. Our group included: Andrea Carpenter, Laurie Frarey, Sally Gillooly, Marni Gwyther, Wyler Hecht, Ann Koons, Barbara, Jenny, Jonathan, and Sam Sheline, and Jimmy Wallace. Seven of the group spoke passable to excellent Spanish. The group rendezvoused in Matagalpa on Easter Sunday at the bus station, and managed to cram ourselves plus suitcases into two taxis for the short trip to San Ramón. (One of the group leaders, who shall remain unnamed, thought this would be a good Nicaraguan experience). We had brought eleven large suitcases filled with donated medications and medical supplies.

The next morning, Monday, half of the group went off to do "consultas" (medical outpatient visits) at the town of El Jicaro, while the other half stayed in San Ramón to run an eyeglass fitting clinic plus provide consultas to a group of seniors ("ancianos").

The group in El Jicaro saw about 90 patients in a half day, by breaking into teams. One of the nurses saw patients first for "triage," deciding if their problem needed to be seen by a doctor or a nurse. The Sheline children served as excellent translators for those providers who needed language help. Wyler Hecht, ND, LAc, did quite a few acupuncture sessions using supplies she brought, with the help of her personal translator, Jenny Sheline. We set up a pharmacy station which was ably staffed by those with less medical expertise.

On Tuesday, we toured the government health center in San Ramón. The deputy director explained what services are provided and also showed us their broken nebulizer (used for treatment of asthma), and asked if we could provide a new one. The health committee later decided to buy two nebulizers, so they would always have a backup machine, because indoor air pollution and asthma are such common problems. The administrator of the clinic showed us a file containing all of the receipts for money spent on repairing the health center's ambulance. The current fourth year medical students at the UNC School of

Medicine had provided the major funding for this repair. The ambulance is now running again, thanks to this assistance.

After the health center, the group visited the Los Pepitos project, which provides services including physical therapy for a group of physically and mentally handicapped children from the San Ramón district.

Next we followed two teenaged guides from the "Club de Guias," to visit the famous large Guanacaste tree that is filled with the beautiful long hanging nests of the oropendula (gold tailed) birds. And finally, still on Tuesday, we visited the "Huerto," where the Casa del Niño (a local organization) grows all the herbs and plants for their natural pharmacy, and raises chickens to sell eggs cheaply to the community. That night, we had a wonderful meal of traditional nacata-



San Ramónian receives prescription medicine and instructions from Jonathan Sheline. The monthly medicine allotment the public health center receives from the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health lasts only half the month at best

males preceded by a demonstration of how they're made. After dinner we were entertained by a local folk guitarist.

On Wednesday, the whole group went to the small village of Bilguas to provide consultas to over 100 patients, which took most of the day.

Thursday morning, early, we all went to the Finca

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Esperanza Verde. All six of the newcomers to Nicaragua were amazed by the lush trees, the exotic birds, the beautiful butterfly house, and the nice eco-tourist facilities. We left before noon to drive to Matagalpa where we had a very interesting visit at the Casa Materna, a house where high risk pregnant women from all over the Matagalpa district come to spend their last few weeks of pregnancy so they can deliver their babies at the maternity ward in the hospital. This very successful program has lowered both the maternal and infant mortality rates in the area.

Later that day we traveled to Managua and Friday we helped out all day doing consultas at the health clinic built by the Jubilee House Community from Statesville, NC in the Hurricane Mitch refugee community of Nueva Vida.

We each returned with inspiration to continue to work on health related projects.

Jonathan Sheline, a Durham physician at Bridges to Health, carried out a medical mission in San Ramón in 1998-99 with his wife Barbara, a Duke physician and their children Jennifer and Sam.



Jenny Sheline reassures an elderly patient who awaits acupuncture treatment by Wyler Hecte.

If you'd like to help, contact the health committee, Jonathan Sheline, (919) 490-8620

Vision Screening and Eyeglasses Project Brought to San Ramón

by Marni Gwyther

As part of the Spring 2001 Health Delegation to San Ramón, organizers planned a vision screening and eyeglasses project. Like many living in developing nations, many in San Ramón lack access to basic vision care.

The health delegation teamed with several groups to implement the project. First, the Durham Chapter



Marni Gwyther enjoys the fruits of organizing the eye glass project when many of the town's old timers are able to see clearly again.

of the Lions Club, an international service organization dedicated to aiding the blind and visually impaired, donated a supply of used eyeglasses to the project. Volunteers from the Duke Eye Center determined the prescription on each pair of donated eyeglasses, and the Center also donated some basic ophthalmic medications for distribution. Finally, health delegation members worked with staff at In-FOCUS, Inc. (Interprofessional Fostering of Ophthalmic Care for Under served Sectors), to assure they had the necessary supplies for basic vision screening, as well as a portable visual refraction device developed for use in remote communities called a FOCOMETERTM.

Members of the San Ramón based Sister Committee arranged for a group of elderly community members and a group of school children identified by their teachers to come to the screening program. The group assembled in San Ramón's Casa del Niño, where each was screened first using a basic Snellen eye chart. Those who demonstrated problems with visual acuity were referred to a delegation member who used the FOCOMETERTM to refract their vision and determine an eyeglass prescription. Almost all were able to leave with a free pair of eyeglasses. In total, 61 individuals were screened.

Marni Gwyther is a family nurse practitioner who works at the Prospect Hill Community Health Center in Prospect Hill, NC.

'Who Really Benefits from American Aid?'

by Laurie Frarey

It had been a great week. Nine of us had been in Nicaragua delivering health care in rural mountain communities in the municipality of San Ramón. Sure, we had witnessed poverty unlike any I had seen in the US. It was the first time I had ever listened to heart and lung sounds while kittens, dogs and the occasional chicken scurried under my feet on the dirt floor of our "clinic." In spite of the poverty, I felt these country folks had dignity, perhaps grounded in a sense of community and connection with their land. Besides, I was loving it! I had always had Joan of Arc fantasies. Here I was, waging war on microbes in a foreign country!

Nicaraguans had every right to hate Americans. But where I would have expected hostility, we were met with kindness. Everyone embraced us with warmth and I felt gratitude, compassion and humility.

I began to feel "connected" to Nicaraguans when I met the old woman in Managua. The clinic facility in Nueva Vida refugee city was much nicer than those in the rural communities. The floor was clean concrete. The staff even had access to some medical equipment and a fairly well stocked pharmacy. However, the patients appeared to share a general hopelessness. Their houses were constructed of tin and cement practically on top of one another. The streets were dusty and unpaved. Garbage was everywhere. There were no lush mountains on which to cultivate crops.

It was the last afternoon of our last clinic when an old woman walked in to my examining room. She was about 4'6" and maybe 80 pounds. Her eight-year-old granddaughter followed her into the room. They both looked dirtier and more downtrodden in appearance than anyone I had met so far. The grandmother shuffled slowly but directly towards me. She took both of my clean, white, healthy American hands in her wrinkled brown ones and looked me straight in the eye. "God brought you to us and we are grateful. We are so lucky. Bless you." How could she possibly be grateful given her obvious poverty and ill health? She flooded me!

Fighting back tears, I asked her what we could do for her and her granddaughter. "Well, my granddaughter is so thin. I think she has parasites." I replied that we had a good supply of medications to help with that. I asked her if she needed medicine for parasites, and vitamins as well. She readily accepted and went on to tell me her joints were painful most of the time. Yes, we could give her some medication that would help (at least for awhile). Finally she said her stomach hurt most of the time. I went into my usual routine: "Does it hurt more before or after meals, at night? Do certain foods bother it more than others?" She listened to me patiently and after some thought replied "You know, I think my stomach hurts because I do not have enough to eat." I had never felt more helpless in my life! What Western medication could cure this ailment? I wrote the prescriptions for her and her granddaughter. They both hugged me before leaving the room. I did not hold back the tears anymore.

Fortunately, the young woman acting as my interpreter knew about a project, affiliated with the clinic, which

provided organic soy beans to residents of Nueva Vida. It was a temporary fix, but maybe at least that night her stomach would not hurt.

I went to Nicaragua prepared to give of myself, but received far more than I could have imagined. The experience with the grandmother reminded me of a quote from James O' Reilly: "...a volume was spoken across a chasm. I loved her and she loved me, but this moment was all the script-allowed. She smiled, I smiled and I was gone, aglow from the blessing and touch of another being."

Laurie Frarey is a family nurse practitioner with the Department of Medicine, Infectious Disease Division at the University of North Carolina.



Laurie Frarey treats a mother and child in El Jicaro, a mountain community of San Ramón.

Thanks to your support...

...we have funded the following in San Ramón during the 12-month period ending June 30:

\$1,200 for high school teacher's salary

\$2,250 to repair the health center ambulance

\$150 nebulizer for health center

\$1,500 school notebooks and pencils

\$250 art supplies for children's art classes

\$50 repainting welcome sign

\$968 four projects for the library

\$550 Folk Music & Dance Group of Cerro Grande

\$168 sewing machine & supplies for Los Pepitos

We are grateful for a donation of \$22,280 to purchase a new truck for Finca Esperanza Verde (Green Hope Farm) and for donations of a microscope, clarinet, and trumpet.

Two dozen loyal volunteers sold 3,400 pounds of Café San Ramón during the past fiscal year. Thank you for your dedication! Income from the sale of coffee supports Finca Esperanza Verde.

We allocated more than \$2,800 of your donations to purchase land needed to rebuild the town's dilapidated water system, a major project for which the SW Durham and Matagalpa Rotaries have made a grant request to Rotary International.

Thanks to Everyone!

You made good things happen in San Ramón.

We especially thank the following, who provided services free of charge:

Michael D. Calhoun, attorney, for creating our liability waiver

Ken Howard, PA, CPA, for filing our tax return

EMJI, Inc., web page designers located in Apex, NC, <<http://www.emji.net/>> for creating and hosting our web page

Counter Culture Coffee, for roasting Café San Ramón each month.

We thank the following for their support:

Congregations:

Duke University Chapel
Durham Friends Meeting

Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
St. Stephens Episcopal Church
Watts Street Baptist Church

Businesses:

GlaxoSmithKline for matching contributions
Durham Coop Grocery
One World Market
Ten Thousand Villages

Organizations:

Duke School for Children Middle School
Durham Academy kindergarten classes
East Chapel Hill High School Spanish Honor Society

Action Alert

Nicaragua is electing a new president November 4. Part of a sign-on letter circulating in the House and Senate protests U.S. Ambassador Garza's interference in the elections by publicly voicing strong reservations about the Sandinista candidate's qualifications. Call our senators and congress people, and the State Department (202 647-6575) to support our democratic ideals by respecting Nicaraguans' rights to non-interference in their elections. If you receive this by the time the elections have passed, please make these calls anyway as the issue is still relevant.

Sen. Helms-202 224-6342; Sen. Edwards 202 224-3154, Rep. Price 202 225-1784; Rep. Etheridge 202 225-4531; Rep. Watt 202 225-1510.

There is a drought in the northwest and Pacific coast, floods on the Atlantic coast, and 300,000 coffee workers were left unemployed following the dramatic fall in coffee prices all of which are contributing to a hunger crisis in Nicaragua. Contributions for hunger relief may be sent to the Nicaragua-U.S. Friendship Office, 337 North Carolina Ave., SE, Washington, D.C. 20003.

Colombia has endured almost four decades of brutal armed conflict between the national army, leftist guerrilla movements, and right-wing paramilitary forces. Overwhelmingly, the victims of this conflict have been civilians. Into this situation, the U.S. Congress has approved over \$1.3 billion in mostly military aid — ostensibly to fight the "war on drugs." \$1 billion more aid to the region is being proposed. Aerial spraying of herbicides in the Amazon basin and Pacific coast regions has obliterated crops and wildlife, populations have fled and many of those who remained have become sick. At least two million people have already lost their homes and livelihoods. Fifty percent of labor leaders

assassinated in the world today are Colombians. Become informed about the conflict at www.colombiamobilization.org. Call your members of congress and senate to say

-NO to more aid for Colombia

-YES to greatly increased funding for drug treatment programs here at home

(A 1994 RAND study found that it is 20 times more effective to increase drug treatment than to eradicate crops.)

Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities

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Tourism: Candace Carraway, Richard and Lonna Harkrader
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Translation: Adriana Oller
Newsletter editor: Jim Jensen

A Letter of Thanks...

...from Oscar Gonzalez, the high school teacher whose salary is paid by a donation from Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities

My name is Oscar Joaquin Gonzalez Valverde. I am the son of Mr. Mario Gonzalez Cruz and Mrs. Luisa Valverde Valverde. I have one sister, Aida Luisa Gonzalez who is eleven years old, and one brother, Mario Felipe who is one-and-a-half years old. I was born on September 23, 1981, in Guadalupe, a rural community in the San Ramón municipality, department of Matagalpa. I come from a peasant family. My father works in farming producing mostly basic grains. My mother was born in the León department and she also descends from farmers. My mother is a housewife.

When I was 4 years old I started elementary school in my village. With serious financial difficulties but wanting to improve my education, I started high school in 1995. I am very grateful to my parents who



Oscar Gonzalez teaches physics at all grade levels of San Ramón High School. Six years ago San Ramón celebrated its first high school graduation thanks to our donations to pay a teacher's salary.

made many sacrifices to support me during these years. My father left very early in the mornings to work in the fields in order to provide for our family and allow me to go to school. I attended a school that was located 5 km from my house. This was very difficult, particularly in winter when the rivers flooded the roads. However, these handicaps did not make me miss any of my classes. While in high school I realized the importance of an education not just for my own future but also to be able to partially re-pay my parents' sacrifices.

When I was a junior in high school I had the honor of participating in the Math Olympics and in the following year (1999) I was chosen to represent our institution in a contest of best students in the department of Matagalpa. These events reinforced even more my desire to study and try to be the best! However, for people living in a farming community, election of a career is not the most difficult problem we have to face, rather it is the lack of sufficient money to finance an advanced education. Therefore, I had to find a job to provide enough money to support my living expenses while attending the university. This can be quite difficult when you're not used to combine working and studying at the same time. But my vocation to go forwards gave me enough strength to reach my objectives.

Thanks to God, in the year 2000 I was accepted to the UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA DE NICARAGUA (UNAN) in Matagalpa, to study Biology. At present, I am working in the INSTITUTO AUTONOMO DE SAN RAMÓN, teaching the subject of PHYSICS.

Finally, I have to thank God, my parents' efforts under difficult circumstances, and now the DURHAM-SAN RAMÓN SISTER COMMUNITIES for the opportunity to apply my knowledge to the professional improvement of my fellow Nicaraguans and also continue my studies at the university. Many thanks for everything.

Come with us to San Ramón and support the local economy...

...while you enjoy a fascinating tropical adventure.

January 3-10 Especially for college students

January 19-26 Life of coffee from harvest to cup

Jan. 26-Feb. 2 Bird watchers

February 2-9 Cultural immersion ecotour

February 9-16 Parents and kids

March 9-16 Cultural immersion ecotour

March 16-23 Returned Peace Corps Volunteers

March 30-April 6 High school students & families

"I had avoided traveling to 'third world' countries, but being in San Ramón and at Finca Esperanza Verde was a guilt-free trip, knowing of the great work you have been doing there and that profits from my travel go back to the people."

— Marion Menapace, Catawissa, PA

Learn about ecotours on our web page: www.durham-sanramon.org — or call (919) 489-1656

You can help: If you or an organization you are part of wishes to be involved with a third-world project, please speak with us. We offer you ways to be part of our people-to-people project that suit your special needs and goals. Whether you have lots of time or only a little, lots of money or none at all, we can help you participate in a way that brings you joy and the satisfaction of caring for others.

Include me as a Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities partner. Enclosed is \$ _____ to support community and economic development projects in San Ramón. A minimum contribution of \$25 ensures that you receive the newsletter.

Please use my donation for:

- funds to pay attendant to keep town library open on Saturdays
- renovation of the town's dilapidated water system
- school supplies

- I would like to see a slide show
- I can supply a frequent flier certificate
- I would like to join an ecotourist trip to San Ramón in 2002
- I have an accordion, tuba, or saxophone to donate to the youth band
- I can sell a few pounds of Cafe San Ramón from time to time

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

The Durham-San Ramón, Nicaragua, Sister Communities is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Please make tax-deductible donations payable to:
Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities, 1320 Shepherd Street, Durham, NC 27707

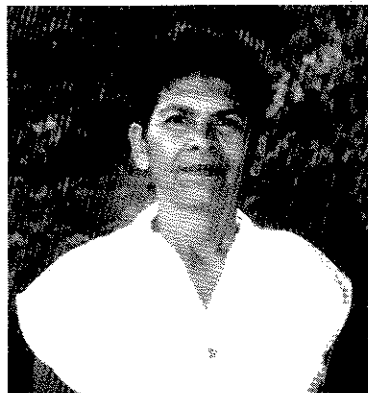
Call to get involved: (919) 489-1656

We welcome you to join us at our monthly meeting the 4th Monday of each month at 7:30 p.m., January through October, at the Eno River Unitarian Fellowship, 4907 Garrett Road, Durham (on the left 1/2 mile from Darryls and 15-501). Our mission is to strengthen awareness, friendship, and cooperation between San Ramón, Nicaragua, and Durham, NC, through people-to-people exchanges and social and economic development projects that support justice and our belief in an interdependent, one-world family.



Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities
1320 Shepherd Street, Durham, NC 27707

Check out our gorgeous web page:
<http://www.durham-sanramon.org>



Sept. 14, 2001.

To our friends in our Sister Community,
It makes me very sad what has happened, such a sad tragedy. Even though we are far away our hearts are closely tied because of our friendship and being sister communities. The sadness of your people is ours also. I am keeping all of you in my heart.

With strong embraces,
Marina Escorcía, President, Sister Community Committee.