



OCCASIONAL REPORT

November 2009

Here's an update on our school project-Escuela San Miguel (ESM) in Nicaragua. I made a quick trip down to meet and familiarize our new Peace Corps volunteer Mr. John Harrington and to receive our partial container shipment of tools, computers, etc. from the U.S. I also always like to be able to help functionally, administratively and managerially with the operation of the school.

I think I accomplished these and maybe a little more, spending time with the staff, teachers and especially the students when possible. Also, I am a member on the committee of Escuela San Miguel (equivalent to our school board), and we met over budget decisions, graduation, etc.

Luckily, the container shipped by our friends at Wisconsin/Nicaragua Partners of the America's (W/NP) had just been released by customs, allowing us to pick up our six pallets of goods in Managua. This shipment of donations contained much needed computers, printers, sewing machines and a big old heavy duty wood planer. Thanks to all who donated, packed, and delivered the goods and special thanks to Moisés Guillen and Mirna Angulo M. of W/NP in Managua.

In Cárdenas I had a good chance to spend time with John Harrington and to talk about our efforts, the mission of the school and our hopes and desires for the future. I feel comfortable that John will provide valuable assistance to the advancement of the school, the students, staff and faculty as have our other Peace Corps volunteers Melissa Benedict and Henry Greeley. Welcome aboard John!

I also had the opportunity to attend meetings our director Jacobo Sanchez had arranged in small comarca's (region's) throughout the Cárdenas municipality. In Zapotilla thirty people braved a downpour to attend and learn of the school's offerings, to express their desire for new offerings and to sign up for classes. There is much interest and new students we want to bring in.

Financially we are squeaking by, but we do not have what we will need for 2010. The mayor, Rodolfo Pérez gave the school a total of \$4,500 this year; an astounding figure! Nicaragua and especially rural areas like Cárdenas are especially hard hit by the world's economic woes and the mayor could have used the money to give people much-needed jobs, but he chose to fund the school. This is a breakthrough! PFP contributions to the school in 2009 will be approx. \$19,428, which includes \$14,500 for operations (salaries, electricity, supplies), \$1,100 for scholarships and \$3,828 for building maintenance and upkeep (includes wages & transportation for maintenance person).

In 2010 we are budgeting \$13,000 for operations, \$1,200 for scholarships and \$3,650 for building maintenance for a grand total of \$17,850. We are about \$9,000 short of this figure as of now.

I mentioned last report of our hope to establish an Internet connection in the village of Sapoá. While there we worked on setting up that connection. I received an email from the director that we were online in Sapoá as of Nov. 11, 2009! This is a joint ESM/Cárdenas project. Since we were doing a good job of providing Internet access to the school and the public in Cárdenas, the mayor asked ESM to do the same in Sapoá. He has provided the building and the access to the Internet, although we will have to pay the monthly fee. Sapoá is situated directly on the Pan-American Highway so it is great exposure for the school. We may do some teaching at the site as we now have many students from Sapoá traveling to Cárdenas.

The other bit of good news is that we will graduate ninety-four students on Dec. 4th. I attended last year and it was a great feeling and time. By the way any of you out there traveling in the area (the Costa Rican border is only 20 minutes from Cárdenas) are more than welcome to visit. It would be great if someone or more of you could be at the graduation ceremony, but feel free anytime. It is not necessary but would be best if you could contact me first so I could let the director know. Don't worry, you will not get lost in Cárdenas, it is a beautiful place to visit and you will be treated well.

I have heard from some of your interest in another building project (school, homeless shelter, etc.) for PFP to do. I am as interested in this as any of you. However a few things hold us back. First and foremost is PFP's interest in ensuring the long-term success of ESM. During my many visits to Nicaragua I am aware of countless projects now defunct. Well intentioned folks spent lots of time and money building schools, clinics, libraries, etc. and moved on, without providing for or ensuring the long term operation. Sadly many of these facilities are abandoned. Secondly, our finances. We are not in position to start another project. While I feel we could rally the support and money for a building project, it is again the long-term success requiring long-term financial commitment that is hard to sustain. People, and I include myself here are eager and willing to fund the building of an orphanage, school, clinic, etc., but when it comes to paying for electricity bills, teacher's salaries, and facility maintenance the excitement wanes along with donations.

Meanwhile I've been looking for an order of religious to take over the management and administration of such a facility if we were to build, so far without success. If any of you have ideas along these lines let me know. And third, the political climate is not at all conducive to the idea. The government is taking control of and or closing many facilities built and maintained by outside sources. I'm not sure of the reasoning here other than the desire to prove to themselves and the outside world that they are capable of providing for the needs of their own country. A laudable goal though in my estimation they are not yet capable. (ESM is not in danger here. Our decision some time ago to deed the school over to Nicaraguans was a God sent message and is looking awfully good right now.)

Some of you expressed concern about Cárdenas and ESM's danger from Hurricane Ida. While Ida did considerable damage along the Eastern Atlantic or Caribbean Coast, Cárdenas is very near the Pacific Coast and far inland from Ida's now long gone path. Thank goodness.

At the end a short plea for funds. I know it has been a particularly tough financial year, but if you can see a way to send us a donation for 2010 operations we will be most grateful.

Hoping you enjoy your Thanksgiving and the Holy Days ahead.

Blessings Always,
Dean