Las Brisas Gets a School!

For the second year in a row, Lasell visited a community far off the beaten path, called Las Brisas Numero Dos.

Last year what impacted us the most was hearing that children here walked 3 miles to go to school, and were unable to go at all during rainy season when rivers become impassable!

Lasell and the Newton/San Juan Del Sur Sister City Project have kept in touch with this community and offered assistance, and in March we got to see the results of our collaboration.

Fidel Pavon of the Workshop for Appropriate Technology showed us a preschool under construction, on donated land that will also have a primary school. In total, about 30 children will attend the two schoolhouses, taught by two teachers.

Las Brisas Numero Dos has already received water filters and Eco-Stoves of the type we help construct at the workshop. The quiet village, accessible only by dirt roads though the jungle, has become a model for others in the area.

The health benefits of clean water and properly vented stoves, along with increased access to elementary education, will surely improve the quality of life and the range of opportunities for residents of Las Brisas.

This transformation results from the combined efforts of the residents themselves, local organizers such as Fidel, and donors and volunteers like us, who work together to find solutions and bring about change.

Fidel Pavon shows us the new preschool under construction

“7 Days in Nica” Student-made Documentary

Last year’s Nicaragua Shoulder to Shoulder participant, Andrew Mayer ’11, went above and beyond the call of duty for his academic component. Andrew captured video coverage during our March trip and put together a 40 minute documentary showing the Nicaragua experience from a student’s point of view.

The upbeat film shows our activities and work projects, narrated by Andrew with his reflections along the way.

Andrew sold copies of the DVD to raise funds to help the people he met in Nicaragua. This allowed us to help with the Las Brisas school along with other valuable projects.

More DVD’s are for sale at Lasell’s bookstore, or by email request. Get your copy today!

Inside this issue:

- Eco-Stoves Save Lives
- Academic Connections
- Lions Club Partnership
- The Battle for Literacy
- New Women’s Shelter
- What Can You Do To Help?
- Hungry Caterpillar Annual Book

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Announcements:

- The next Nicaragua service-learning experience will be during Spring Break, 2011. Apply this fall!
- Check out our website at: http://shouldertoshoulder.lasell.edu
- Contact Lydia Pittman at LPittman@Lasell.edu with any questions about Nicaragua Shoulder to Shoulder
Shoulder to Shoulder Builds Life-Saving Eco-Stoves

In Nicaragua most people cook over open fires in their humble kitchens, every day inhaling smoke that blackens the walls and ceilings. The smoke also fills the lungs of women and their children, leading to high rates of asthma and other respiratory diseases.

To combat this problem, the Newton Workshop for Appropriate Technology provides “Eco-Stoves,” made of cement, which direct the smoke outside via chimneys, and use half the wood of the traditional cooking method.

The Workshop was created as a project of the Newton/San Juan Del Sur Sister City Project in 1996. It also produces water filters, and latrines. Its Director, Fidel Pavon, gave us a lesson on low-cost, low-tech solutions to public health problems, and instructed Lasell’s crew on making stoves.

Over the course of two days we cut and bent wire frames, mixed and poured cement, and mingled with Fidel’s family members and other visitors.

Families in need will receive Eco-Stoves at discounted rates, or in exchange for labor. Making stoves left our muscles sore, but it was worthwhile to know that some families will breathe cleaner air as a result of our efforts.

Alana practices her troweling skills

Something for Everyone in San Juan Del Sur

This year’s batch of Nicaragua Shoulder to Shoulder recruits included a diverse group of students, as reflected in their academic projects.

Marketing major Zachary Lambert examined sustainable and responsible tourism in SJDS, and is keeping in touch and working with our partner Jane Mirandette, hotel owner and library founder.

First Year student Caitlin Holmes, and Senior, Breanna Liggan both undertook photography projects. Bre showed off her photos and a book she created from them at the Senior Art Show.

Junior, Jessica Wood earned a linked credit for her paper about sweatshops in Nicaragua, in conjunction with her Fashion and Society class.

Chelsea Bothen studied the pre-Columbian origins of Nicaraguan culture and gave our group a pre-trip lesson on this topic.

Our two Education majors, Alana Hueston and Ginelle Gaulin-McKenzie got to visit schools very different from those here in the U.S. and learn about the Nicaraguan education system. Ginelle returned and gave a lesson to her own students about how different things are in Nicaragua.

Free Eyeglasses Through Lions Club Partnership

Every year each participant of our group carries a fully-loaded 50 lb. suitcase of donated items to San Juan Del Sur.

This year’s 550 pounds included 1200 pair of prescription eyeglasses donated by the Hanover, MA Lions Club!

The Lions routinely collect used glasses to recycle. They have them cleaned and packaged with printed prescription information, for delivery to those in need in developing countries. The Hanover Lions had plenty of glasses, but just needed partners! That’s where we came in...

We contacted the Lions of Rivas Nicaragua and they invited us to see their state of the art eye clinic, where they provide free or low-cost exams and distribute glasses to those who could not afford eye care otherwise. We were happy to supply the glasses from the U.S. and serve as the necessary liaison between two hardworking clubs!
Literacy Efforts Face Uphill Battle in Nicaragua

Each year Lasell students love going out to rural primary schools with San Juan Del Sur’s bookmobile. The trips give a glimpse of children’s love of books and thirst for knowledge, and also the simple conditions of their schools, without indoor plumbing, cafeterias, gymnasiums, libraries or technology.

Unfortunately, many young Nicaraguans must end their schooling to go to work after sixth grade. Literacy advocates including some of our partners try to provide opportunities for education, but seem to end up in battles with the national government itself!

We commend the efforts of students, teachers, and literacy volunteers, but regret that the government is making the quest for an education more difficult than it already is.

A new stand-alone campus for the Free High School for Adults is under construction, after the Ministry of Education sought to prevent it from operating on the grounds of the SJDS public primary school.

Margaret Morganroth Gullette, Director of Development of the free school reports that the Ministry of Education is adding another obstacle in the path of poor Nicaraguans.

It is now slapping schools that hold sessions on weekends and afternoons, or that teach multiple grades in one classroom, with the label “irregular” and limiting their graduates’ access to secondary education.

Students Help Construct Battered Women's Shelter

San Juan Del Sur’s first shelter for abused women and their children is now under construction, and we were able to lend a hand with this important project.

The shelter is attached to the local health center and pharmacy, and will include two women’s bedrooms, a children’s room, cooking and bathing facilities, computers, and common space.

Women and children will receive psychological and medical attention here, in a country where social services are rare or unavailable. In addition to protecting women, the shelter aims to combat “machismo” attitudes that lead to domestic violence and often prevent women from seeking help or leaving abusive situations.

Supervised by the local crew, we painted three rooms, and helped sandpaper the wooden stairway, while sweating buckets in the Nicaragua mid-day heat!

(right) Valentina and Missy working hard

What Can I Do to Help?

The next Nicaragua Shoulder to Shoulder experience will take place during Spring Break (March) 2011. Lasell students interested in participating may apply in the fall.

Contact Lydia Pittman for more information, or visit our booth at the Student Activities Fair. See MyLasell for updates.

Your donations help us do more great work in Nicaragua! If you can help, write a check, in any amount, to “Lasell College Nicaragua fund.”

Sales of “7 Days in Nica” DVD’s also support our efforts. Buy your copy for $12 at the Lasell bookstore, or through Lydia Pittman or Andrew Mayer for $10.

San Juan Del Sur Biblioteca
http://www.sjdsbiblioteca.com

Newton/San Juan Del Sur Sister City
http://www.newtonsanjuan.org/

“Nicaragua’s extreme poverty was exposed firsthand through stories told straight from the Nicaraguans themselves.”

- Jessica Wood ’11
San Juan Del Sur’s librarians have been distributing the book in the library and via the bookmobile. They’ve also come up with an array of craft projects related to the book.

During our visit, Breanna Liggan ’10 read the book aloud (in Spanish) to a visiting school group, and then along with Caitlin Holmes ’13 and Zach Lambert ’10, helped the kids cut, glue, and color in butterflies.

As part of her academic component, Education major Ginelle Gaulin-McKenzie ’10 came up with lesson plans involving Carle’s colorful classic and shared them with the librarians and teachers in San Juan Del Sur.

When our students traveled to elementary schools on the bookmobile route, they also helped kids to make arts and crafts fitting with the theme of the story. These activities are made possible by donations of arts and craft supplies given by groups and individuals including Lasell’s own Graphic Design League.