Lasell Outfits Nicaraguan Softball Teams

Shortly before Nicaragua Shoulder to Shoulder’s fourth annual trip to San Juan Del Sur, our long-time partner Fidel Pavon sent a plea via email. He explained that the thriving league of men’s, women’s and kids’ softball and baseball teams in the SJDS region were desperately lacking in uniforms and equipment. Although it was short notice, Lasell’s Student-Athlete Advisory Committee came to the rescue. Within a few weeks, SAAC President Ashley Laramee organized the donation of almost 200 pounds of supplies. We report this by weight, because each participant in our program agrees to carry a suitcase full of donations, packed to weigh the maximum 50 pounds allowed by airlines.

On the ground in Nicaragua, Fidel and his daughter Idalia (a softball player) helped us to organize the clothing, softballs, and bats for distribution. Lasell’s group had the joy of watching two afternoon games and presenting five balls and a bat to each team. We gave San Rafael matching shirts, Cebadilla matching shorts, and Ojotal matching pants. Larger shirts will go to men’s teams. Fidel gathered the coaches and explained that all donations are “league property” and will be returned if not in use or shared with other teams in need. The players thanked Lasell for the assistance, but in reality our reward was the invitation into rural communities, where we made friends and learned so much about the importance of physical fitness and team sport in Nicaraguan culture.

Team San Rafael, excited to have matching uniforms

Lions Club Partnership

Over the past three years the Lions Club of Hanover, MA has donated approximately 3,800 pair of prescription eyeglasses to Nicaragua Shoulder to Shoulder for us to deliver to our partners in Nicaragua. Again this March, we met with the Lions Club of Rivas and handed over 1,400 pair of glasses, to be distributed for free or low-cost, via their state-of-the art clinic, which Lasell visited last year. We take pride in partnering with local organizations here at home, and connecting them with community organizers in Nicaragua, serving as liaisons and ambassadors of goodwill.

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Announcements:

• The next Nicaragua service-learning experience will be during Spring Break, 2012.
• Check out our website at: http://shouldertoshoulder.lasell.edu
• Contact Lydia Pittman at LPittman@Lasell.edu with any questions about Nicaragua Shoulder to Shoulder
Compressed Earth Bricks for an Earth-Friendly Preschool

Lasell’s volunteers worked their muscles hard while learning how to make bricks using the land around them, and a strange yellow machine.

In the rural community of Cebadilla, expat entrepreneurs Austin and Michelle Drill, and their local partner Jordan taught us how to gather clay, sand, and water from the surrounding earth, and then prepare them using the proper “recipe” for making bricks.

After mixing the components by hand like making bread dough, we learned how to stuff the mix into a Compressed Earth Brick Press, (a portable, but heavy, metal machine) using pressure to form one brick at a time, that would then dry in the sun.

Cebadilla has a one-room school that serves as an elementary school every morning, and a high school in the afternoon. The community wants a separate preschool for its youngest residents.

We saw the enthusiasm of the locals as they joined in helping make bricks. Our assistants ranged in age from adult women to curious little boys.

Although building one brick at a time proved slow and frustrating at points, we took satisfaction in knowing the process was earth-friendly, sustainable, and used materials available to the community for free. When the preschool gets built, all the hard work will definitely seem worth it.

Solidarity House Offers Hope for Domestic Violence Victims

During last year’s trip to San Juan Del Sur, Lasell students volunteered to help paint a still under-construction shelter for battered women.

Since then, the Solidarity House officially opened and offers temporary shelter, and health and psychiatric support to abused women and their children. This is only one out of three domestic violence shelters in the country of Nicaragua.

Although our entire 2011 group listened to a talk by Dr. Rosa Elena Bello about the shelter’s founding, development, and services, we decided that only Lasell students previously trained in working with abuse victims would actually volunteer at the shelter.

Nisha Cirino, Teresa Medeiros, and Jessica Auger, who have all worked with Second Step at Lasell, spent a day at the shelter and interacted with the current residents. The experience had a profound impact.

This Year’s (More Than) 550 Pounds of Donations

In addition to every participant checking a 50 pound suitcase full of donations, some students volunteered to pack extra light in order to check a second suitcase, or carry on even more donations!

Along with the softball and baseball equipment donated by SAAC, and the glasses from the Lions Club, both described on page 1, we brought much more to our partners this year.

Thank you once again to Lasell’s Graphic Design League for arts and crafts supplies distributed to schools via the Bookmobile.

We also took suitcases full of clothing, games and toys, public health supplies, shoes, and computer equipment, and distributed them to appropriate partners at the Solidarity House, the SJDS Biblioteca, the public health clinic, and the Free High School for Adults.

“Gracias” to all of the individual donors whose generosity made this possible.
EcoStoves Improve Health and the Environment in Nicaragua

For the second year in a row Lasell’s Nicaragua Shoulder to Shoulder group visited the Newton Workshop for Appropriate Technology and helped construct “EcoStoves.”

The country faces a major problem because women (with their children often underfoot) cook over open fires in small huts, constantly inhaling smoke which leads to asthma and other respiratory health issues.

One solution is the EcoStove, essentially a cement rectangular box with holes for cooking pots, and a chimney that vents smoke outside. In addition to the health benefits, EcoStoves use less wood than open fires, thereby lessening deforestation, which causes flooding and other environmental problems in rural Nicaragua.

Fidel Pavon and his son Lester supervised the Lasell crew and taught us how to first build frames out of iron rods and wire, and then to mix cement to form “planchetas” which are installed in homes.

The workshop, originally created by the Union Church in Waban and supported with help from the Newton Sister City Project, also includes a set-up for building water filters.

Families that have received water filters and demonstrate proper use and maintenance of them may receive EcoStoves for free or at discounted rates as incentive for promoting proper upkeep of appropriate technologies.

Meet the Nicaragua Shoulder to Shoulder 2011 All-Stars

Freshman Ashley Jimenez returned to her high school and convinced the “Interact Club” to engage in a candy-sale fundraiser to support the San Juan del Sur Biblioteca.

Senior Nisha Cirino is working to provide feedback and recommendations to benefit the new domestic violence shelter in SJDS.

Freshman Terri Moody integrated her trip to Nicaragua with her photography class and has a selection of photos on display in the Brennan Library. Another freshman, Jessica Auger presented about Nicaragua’s education system at a spring honor’s conference.

Samantha LaFrance and Sarah Main both connected the Nicaragua trip to projects for their environmental studies courses.

Teresa Medeiros is using Nicaragua as a case study for her Eco-Tourism class, and Hugh McIntyre is also studying sustainable and responsible business and tourism.

Samantha Crisman will earn an Honors component for a Nica-inspired 3-D design project.

What Can I Do to Help?

The next Nicaragua Shoulder to Shoulder experience will take place during Spring Break (March) 2012. Lasell students interested in participating may apply using the application posted on our website.

See the “Nicaragua” section at: http://shouldertoshoulder.lasell.edu

Purchase a copy of our documentary “7 Days in Nica,” by Andrew Mayer ’11, for $10 from Lydia Pittman in the Library.

Donate:
Books, public health supplies, suitcases, school supplies, arts and crafts supplies, sports equipment, money, computer equipment, and so on! Bring donations to Lydia Pittman in the Brennan Library office at Lasell anytime!

“I learned so much from this trip and it was truly an eye-opening experience.”

- Samantha Crisman ’12
Here they come!
One day at recess I heard a beloved sound and it was the bookmobile, it was coming!
I ran towards it very happy and pleased so that Vincent could exchange the books I was returning.
Alondra Lopez, age 7

From the sky
From the sky fell a very lovely library
God has sent it so that all children (boys and girls) could learn to read,
So that all the people could learn to read and write.
Sofia Valentina S. age 8

The SJDS Biblioteca, the first free public lending library in the country, opened 9 years ago. It runs a bookmobile that visits 32 rural villages. A highlight of Lasell’s visit every year is volunteering at the library itself and on the bookmobile.
The importance of the library in the community, however, is best expressed by youngsters entering the library’s annual poetry contest. Here are some of their thoughts (translated into English):

**Corner of Wisdom**
Oh library, corner of wisdom
My friend and favorite library
When I have any doubts in my mind
I am your best customer
On your shelves there are many secrets and things I wish to know
Your best visitors are students eager to discover the excitement of your infinite knowledge, written by scholars and scientists.
You have the gifts of learning history for us and we are able to sound out with its glory.
Teodora Abigail Berroteron Cruz, age 12

San Juan Del Sur Biblioteca Annual Poetry Contest

The Nicaragua Shoulder to Shoulder service-learning experience provides opportunities for students to volunteer for literacy, public health, and social justice, while working side by side with community members, gaining understanding through cultural exchange, and examining issues related to poverty and development. By designing academic components in conjunction with their courses, student participants connect a service trip to Nicaragua with their individual majors and unique interests.