

# November - December 2008 Report

## Taller Artístico Xuchialt

Congratulations to TAX on another successful year! November was the closing month for TAX's third year of operations. They had their last class on the 8<sup>th</sup> and an end-of-the-year cultural presentation on the 16<sup>th</sup>, with performances from their folkloric dance students and an exposition of their art students' final works.



On Nov 23, they had their annual field trip, this year to the Masaya Volcano and the Catarina Overlook. Catarina has a beautiful view of the Laguna de Apoyo. Two buses, 60 students and 30 parents participated in the excursion. We had a lot of fun and it was a good opportunity to interact with the parents and students.



On Nov. 2, we wrapped up our year-long Business Plan workshops. They will have to submit the final copy of their business plans in order to receive their certificate of participation, but the most rewarding part for me was when Marlon informed me in December that he and Lenin were applying the same tools and principles that I had taught them in the Business Planning workshops to their own small t-shirting printing business! Knowledge into practice! That's what I call real capacity-building.

On Nov 30, I held a workshop with the Xuchialt board members to compile and analyze the year's financial statements. They were a little behind on bookkeeping, so we didn't have complete data for the year, but it was encouraging to see the progressive growth of the Taller over the last three years. I surprised the board with a cake to celebrate the completion of the Taller's 3<sup>rd</sup> successful year! (Photo above left) We also discussed our project objectives for 2009, which include continued administrative trainings (in Fundraising), artistic trainings and funding for a media kit. TAX will have its first graduating class at the end of 2009 and one of their goals for this year is try to get certification/recognition from the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Culture for their graduates.

Taking advantage of the fact that the board was on vacation for most of the month of December, we pulled together a week-long intensive graphic design course (photo at right), given by Marvin Hernandez, TAX's current board President. Marvin's day-job is giving computer classes at LaSalle, a Catholic private school in León. So we decided to take advantage of his knowledge and skills and dedicate some time to passing those skills on to his co-board members in TAX. We rented out LaSalle's computer lab and gave 35 hours of PhotoShop instruction to the rest of the board members, as well as three TAX students.



## Santa Rosa

I had a final meeting with the Santa Rosa board (or at least tried to) on December 9. Only two members of the board (Maria and Maribel) and Lilliam showed up. I wanted to have a final meeting to close out our work in the community. I had hoped Doña Gabriella or Doña Bertha would be there, but Doña Gabriella was just elected vice-mayor on the FSLN ticket in Santa Rosa and Doña Bertha now works as a nurse in a Health Post in a nearby municipality, so neither of them was available.

In our meeting, explained to them (again) our reasons for withdrawing from the community and also made it very clear that we hoped to continue a relationship with them in the future, with visits from delegations, etc. They seemed to understand, but then again, I'm never quite sure if what they say in front of me is really what they're thinking.

Turns out, Carol, the Canadian woman that has been supporting CENMIN over the last several years, has told Lilliam she will guarantee Lilliam's stipend for three more months. She will try to find financing to continue paying Lilliam's stipend, but they won't know until for sure until she comes to visit again in March. She's also sent money to finance a covered walkway from the Casa Materna rooms to the kitchen, and I heard something about possibly building additional rooms in 2009.... I've met Carol and she's a very sweet retired schoolteacher. I know she cares a lot for the women in Santa Rosa and she has very good intentions. Unfortunately I feel like she's replacing PGL's past role as a charity-driven organization and she's giving CENMIN everything they ask for, without necessarily thinking through the ramifications or seeing it in a development framework.

## El Porvenir

The water project is coming along... slowly, but surely. Bob Mathews, a Canadian living in Managua, has been contracted by everyone to work on several of the technical issues here with us. We purchased a KIA 10hp diesel motor for the new CAT water pump in November and Bob has been working with the crew at Jubilee House to assemble the motor with the new pump on a base (see photo at right).



The trench will have to be re-trenched, as it has become quite overgrown and the rainy season washed a good deal of dirt into the trenches. Installation of the pipeline is (supposed) to start in January and Bob, Rogelio (from JHC) and I will go up to oversee the beginning of the installation. Bob will also be there to install the motor-pump assembly and to train some of the community members in the maintenance of the system. It has finally been decided (after several months of discussion) that installation of the pipeline will begin from the top of the community so that the pipeline can be tested by backfilling with water and using gravity to provide a certain amount of pressure.

In the meantime, the community has been busy with the coffee harvest season. They started harvesting the first week of December and this year's harvest will be smaller than last year's, due to excessive rains and damaged trees as a result of Tropical Storm Alma, which knocked down hundreds of trees on their coffee farm. They are estimating a total of 29,000 pounds of green coffee this year, compared with almost 40,000 last year.

## Delegations

Ofelia spent much of November and December getting ready for the GC January Delegation. We have identified another group of new host families, this time in the neighborhood of Calvario. The January Delegation will be focusing on health issues and fair-trade, with an overarching theme of sustainable development. Along with the thirteen students and leader, a writer from the Gettysburg College alumni magazine will be coming down to do a feature article on PGL for their next issue.

In November, Ofelia and I had a meeting with the three active (or semi-active) sister schools in León. We also went to visit the principal of the secondary school INO, a potential new sister-school in León for Gettysburg High School. The school year ended here in Nicaragua at the end of November, so not much activity will happen until the school year starts up again at the beginning of February. But it was a good first meeting to reactivate the sister-school program and Ofelia hopes to continue meeting with them on a regular basis next year.

## All-Project Assembly



We had our annual end-of-the-year assembly meeting on December 14 to close out the year. Representatives from most of our projects were present to share their challenges and successes of 2008, as well as their goals for 2009. I was a little disappointed that only Maribel and Lilliam attended from Santa Rosa, and El Porvenir also cancelled on me at the last minute, due to an upcoming farm inspection. But eight members of TAX, Doña Angela and Don Horacio from Talolinga and one of the Sister Schools representatives attended and although it was a smaller group than last year, we managed to have a good time of experience and knowledge sharing. Afterwards, we had our traditional *Sopa de Gallina* lunch together and we sent everyone off with well wishes for the New Year.

*Submitted by:  
Felice Chay, Project Coordinator  
Project Gettysburg/Leon  
January 14, 2009*