



Strengthening human and community development since 1984, through the exchange of people and ideas between Minnesota and León, Nicaragua.

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SAN CARLOS YOUTH

REC FIELD PURCHASE: A DONE DEAL!



PML supporters and guests will celebrate this achievement at the October 26 fiesta. Girls soccer team co-captain Helen Ovando will give an account of the hurdles and triumphs faced by the youth as they successfully completed stage one of this project. A celebration will likely be held at the field at the end of the school year in late

November.

The San Carlos youth have been meeting since 2015. After a winning campaign to reduce student bus fare, they decided to tackle an ambitious dream“ to acquire a safe, accessible place for recreation.

Now that the land purchase is a reality, the 24 youth group members need to care for and administer the field and infrastructure.

Over the course of three meetings they formed a Rec Area Operations Committee that also includes teens from the hamlets of Los Mangos and El



Pilar. The committee has seven members and will be supported by girls+soccer coach Yader Obando. The committee will create field and building policies, manage equipment use, and oversee property maintenance.

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The Rec Area Operations Committee will meet with the San Carlos women’s coordinating committee (OMEGAs), as well as representatives from informal adult teams, such as a women’s kickball team and men’s baseball team, to talk about scheduling field use and organizing a cleanup of the site.À

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Youth Programs Continue

- Saturday girls+soccer practice continues, although shoes donated in January 2018 have worn out. The team will invite La Gallina girls to join. Coach Yader Obando hopes to have 18 consistent players at practices to form a strong team.À
- A dozen youth are participating in an entrepreneurial program sponsored by Community Solutions (Soluciones Comunitarios“ SolCom) to form a pizza making/delivery business. Rosa usually accompanies the group’s activities and notes that seven participants who were part of the youth cultural exchange in 2018 are playing a strong leadership role.À
- PML partner SuNica, the non-profit that gave valuable technical support for the clean-water installation, is conducting a mentoring program for 24 youth aged 13 to 18. The program focuses on leadership issues, religion, and a recreational exchange with young people from the other communities where SuNica has involvement.À
- Fifteen teens continue to participate in a drug education and risk prevention program led by San Carlos parents trained in the Dále Sea Real (Keepin+it Real) curriculum.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

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PML Fiesta Fundraiser

Saturday, October 26

6:15 to 9:00 p.m.

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Church of St. Albert the Great
2836 33rd Ave. S., Minneapolis



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Special Guests

Helen Obando, San Carlos Youth Group leader,
will share stories about the recreation area project.

Project Coordinator Rosa Lira

will give updates on

community development efforts
and the situation in Nicaragua.

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Social hour with mojitos, wine, beer

Tamale dinner

Silent and live auctions

Click [here](#) to order tickets.

PML FINANCES

A DREAM FULFILLED

BY DEBORAH ALLAN



PML started 2019 in good financial shape, thanks to many generous donations at the July 2018 event featuring Rosa Ulloa and Julia Torres and to the year-end appeal. Costs have been reduced in Minnesota, so less than 15 percent of our funds are being used here, and more than 85 percent

are going to direct support in León.

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When an opportunity arose late this summer to help purchase land for a recreational field and community center in the village of San Carlos, our board responded. This land had been assessed, along with other parcels, and determined to be the most suitable land for the field that San Carlos youth have

been working toward purchasing for several years. Because of the ill health of the seller, we had to act quickly to cover the cost or risk losing the site.

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About \$6000 had already been raised for the rec field at flestas in 2016 and 2017. We were delighted and grateful to receive a total of \$6000 in two grants (in 2018 and 2019) from the Lake Minnetonka-Excelsior Rotary Club for this project. The PML board agreed to pay the additional several thousand dollars needed.



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At this point, PML is down about \$8000 from where we were last year at this time. We hope our generous donors will chip in to help reimburse PML for this purchase. This project will have a big impact in San Carlos by allowing people of all ages to have a safe place to play sports and to gather. The community's dream is to build a small structure that will provide shade and shelter for community meetings and perhaps someday to create an internet café.

FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

What's PML Up To?

BY RALPH BAUMGARTNER



Many readers of the PML newsletter attended our flesta last fall. At that event, we worked through a process called a World Café conversation. This comprehensive process provided an interactive way for supporters and donors to share ideas and give their input about the organization and future hopes for PML.

The PML board had a meeting in July to complete our analysis of the World Café responses we collected last fall. In analyzing these, we came up with six strategic plans for moving forward.

1. Organizing trips to Nicaragua as soon as possible.

We are trying to organize a trip this winter (Jan/Feb 2020) with people who have been supporters and traveled with us in the past. In addition to seeing firsthand how recent political unrest has impacted the people of León, this trip will help us assess the feasibility of future trips as we see how things have changed in the past 18 months of conflict. We are also working to ensure a safe and productive trip for the Youth Cultural Exchange group from First Universalist Church in July 2020.



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2. **Support existing relationships through communication.**

We will coordinate efforts to send cards and messages from our PML supporters to their contacts in Leon and are hosting a holiday card-writing table at this year's flesta.

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3. **Expand sources of income.**

We are working to get more monthly sustainers, learning more about estate planning, expanding our efforts with Rotary Clubs, and organizing a fundraiser at a pub that offers free space to nonprofits, an approach we hope will appeal to younger adults.

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4. **Increase staff for community development.**

Currently, we have an intern (Lilliam Vargas Mayorga) working with Rosa on community development in La Gallina and La Reforma. We're also looking into helping Rosa create a workshop for training community members and considering ways to restructure Rosa's time, so she can spend more of it on recruiting and training.



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5. **Support Rosa emotionally and developmentally.**

Ralph speaks with Rosa every other week and Elizabeth is also in frequent contact. Rosa also joins us for a portion of each board meeting. We have asked Rosa to look for continuing education opportunities that would help her with her work as well as provide her with a Nicaraguan community of other organizers.

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6. **Assess and evaluate our programs and projects in Nicaragua.**

We are working with Rosa to develop assessment tools for the community projects already completed and those going forward. This will allow us to improve PML's work and document our successes (and failures) going forward.

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Thank you to our editor.

Beth Gaede has been the editor of our newsletter for nearly five years and has regularly maintained and updated our PML website and tiers. Now that she has a new publishing job, she is ready to hand over this volunteer role to someone new. Beth will leave her position as communications coordinator for PML at the end of this year. She will be missed and very hard to replace. Thank you, Beth, for your valuable contribution to the mission of PML!

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Thanks to all of you for your support of our work in León. See you at the Fall Fiesta on Saturday, October 26th!



XUCHIALT ART SCHOOL

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT REBOUNDS

BY ELIZABETH MOREIRA



The Xuchialt Art School wrapped up the first semester with a lovely pub highlighting music, dance, and artwork. Enrollment is back up to 65 students after falling drastically following the socio-political crisis that rocked the country beginning April 2018.

School leaders and students have held painting workshops at city parks and a dance and art presentation at the mall to advertise second semester enrollment.

À facilitated a planning meeting to help organize leadership responsibilities, promoting open communication and equal participation by all staff. The art school board has not been active and they, as well as staff, left every decision to volunteer director Oscar Sanchez.



À After working through a process involving four gatherings led by Rosa, representative small groups made up of teachers, board members, and parents of students will be in charge of each discipline“ fine art, dance, instruments, and the like. All school leaders will work to coordinate efforts, increase income, and grow Xuchialt.



LA GALLINA UPDATE

COMMUNITY ENJOYS SUCCESSESÀ

BY ELIZABETH MOREIRA

PML intern LilliamÀvargas MayorgaÀ has been working alongside the residents in La Gallina and neighboring hamlets to identify needs and carry out projects selected by the community. Efforts range from building a bridge to offering a cooking class to establishing property titles.

À Completing Commercial Cooking Classes



The first victory achieved through La Gallina residents joining forces was to solicit and participate in technical school programs offered by the municipal government. The new students concluded their first qualification course in commercial cooking. Eleven women and three men received a cooking certificate. (Two participants did not receive a certificate because they were minors.) The success of this course was a result of clear communication among residents and organizing to achieve a concrete

goal.

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Winning Support for Bridge Project

In the first of two community-development process cycles this year, La Gallina and La Reforma residents prioritized the construction of a vehicle bridge to ensure access to the community during the rainy season, when the river swells and the current is dangerous. At present, there is only a worn pedestrian swing bridge.



Advocacy groups sought support through repeated visits to the mayor and other city staff, León city council, municipal political secretary, and indigenous community representative.À

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After one important meeting with city leaders, Rosa directed an evaluation process. Residents expressed satisfaction that they had been heard, presented a united front, and received commitments of support from city council members. They also expressed thanks for the support of the San Carlos community. The action group continues to make follow-up visits to government institutions to make sure the project is not ignored.

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Conducting a Cleanup Campaign

In the second community-development process cycle of the year, residents went back to their original list of priorities and selected items that can be accomplished in a shorter time frame. Unable to count on municipal government services, they decided to have a cleanup campaign to rid the community entrance, about two kilometers of secondary road, of brush and debris.À

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The area had not been cleaned for more than 20 years. It was overgrown with weeds, and private trucks were coming from León to dump garbage. The families worried that the area could become a place for thieves to hide or for delinquents to drink or smoke dope. In addition, it posed a health hazard due to broken glass, garbage contamination, and standing water that provided a breeding site for mosquitos.À

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Fifty-six participants helped clean up the area, bringing the community together and demonstrating their ability to organize and accomplish a worthwhile project. An additional benefit was creating community good will: they cut branches that overhung the roadway, chopped them into manageable pieces, and gave the wood to a couple men in the village who sell firewood for income.À

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Researching Property Titles

Another priority that surfaced during group meetings facilitated by Lilliam focused on improving homes, which requires a registered land title. La Gallina and La Reforma were designated as a cooperative called "Che Guevara" during the agrarian reform of the early 1980s. When the cooperative failed and its property was divvied up among members in the 1990s, the paperwork was not completed to give owners legal title to their property. Thankfully, most residents are original receivers of land who have stayed in place over the years.

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Currently they are requesting documents from municipal archives to learn whether their holdings are free and clear of encumbrances and the property lines are valid. Residents are gathering copies of every owner's national identification and will present them along with the legal documents to the government with the hope of including everyone in La Gallina in a package registration.À

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Protecting a River

Area institutions are becoming aware of the improving organization and regular meetings in La Gallina. For example, at a recent action committee meeting, a Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources (MARENA) representative requested time to describe a new initiative to clean up area rivers. (Photo courtesy of La Gente, Radio La Primerisima)



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On behalf of the community the committee agreed to install a "Nica barda" a large net tube filled with recycled plastic bottles. The bottles are capped, so they float, and the tube is stretched across a river to capture debris and recyclable materials. The system needs local maintenance and protection from vandalism. One resident, a man who collects empty bottles to earn a meager income, was given the authority to collect and recycle the captured plastics.

SAN CARLOS CELEBRATES WATER PROJECT



In July, San Carlos residents celebrated the one-year anniversary of their successful clean water installation. The youth committee provided entertainment and led activities for the young children, while adults organized food and made speeches.

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The members of the Water Committee (CAPS) participated in training activities and administrative support monitoring carried out by the Environmental Initiative Center (CIMAC), La Fise Bank, and nonprofit SuNica. As CAPS from other locations shared challenging experiences, the confidence of San Carlos leaders stood out compared to that of leaders from other CAPS (mostly men).

YOUTH CULTURAL EXCHANGE

Nicaraguan Youth Experience Minnesota

BY ELIZABETH MOREIRA



Twelve Nicaraguan teens and two adult chaperones arrived in Minneapolis at the end of June. They represented the León participants of the Youth Cultural Exchange, a program of First Universalist Church, facilitated by PML. Host families eagerly awaited the group, who had had to race through airports to make tight

connections.À

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Minnesota youth had been given the responsibility to research activities and were required to put in many hours fundraising. Their plan included visiting traditional Twin Cities travel destinations such as the Guthrie, outdoor sculpture gardens, the Minnesota History Center, Minnehaha Park, Lake Nokomis beach, and a St. Paul Saints game.À

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The Nicaraguans were also introduced to distinctive Minnesota pastimes of skating, curling, inner tubing, and a lake cabin sleep-over. They celebrated the Fourth of July at a parade followed by a BBQ and fireworks. The youth spent one day performing for residents of Walker Care Center, followed by a social hour to hear residents' stories.

A highlight of the visit was a bilingual church service, where the Nicaraguan youth unveiled a gift to the congregation—a painting they created that represents friendship and sharing cultures.

Afterwards, the Nicaraguan teens put on a show that included folkloric dance, singing, and socio-drama.

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The emphasis of the exchange is to go beyond tourism and focus on goals including building cultural awareness, enhancing deep community, developing leadership, and serving. To this end periodic reflection sessions served as a safe space of open communication to share feelings and incorporate experiences for deeper understanding. The friendships formed lead to a realization that despite cultural differences, the youth have much in common.



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More fundraising and volunteer hours will be necessary as the Minnesotan teens prepare for their visit to León next summer. Their Nicaraguan "siblings" are excited to provide hospitality and complete the exchange.

TIMELINE UPDATES

Learn about Nicaragua's Ongoing Conflict

BY ELIZABETH MOREIRA

Sign up for monthly updates on the political situation in Nicaragua. Elizabeth Moreira will prepare the updates drawing on English and Spanish language, international online newspapers, NGO reports, and other sources.

To subscribe, send an email to minnesotaleon@gmail.com.



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