

NEWSLETTER

FRIENDS OF BATAHOLA

TOMORROW IS A NEW DAWN

Spring, 2007

Anniversary Celebration

The twenty fourth anniversary of the arrival in Batahola of Sister Margarita and Father Angel was celebrated on Saturday, March 3rd. The auditorium was filled with people from Batahola and the surrounding towns, paying tribute, not only to the founders, but to so many others who have made and continue to make the Center the life-giving institution it has become. There were several testimonials from teachers who had been students themselves and each spoke about what the Center had meant to them. At one point the stage began to fill as one by one each member of the Center's staff came forward to loud applause.



Daisy and Ileana place flowers

Even Don Magdeleno rose to receive acknowledgement of his many, many years of tenderly keeping the gardens. It was a day to celebrate each one.

The choir sang everyone's favorites, while the marimbas, flutes, and strings blended in. "Las Mananitas" (a Spanish birthday song) was sung as flowers were carried by some of the women, ... folks who had accompanied Margie and Angel during those early years... and placed at the memorial fountain in the garden. The folkloric



Dance instructor, Patricia Ruiz, poses with the youth who performed the beautiful folkloric Gueguence dance

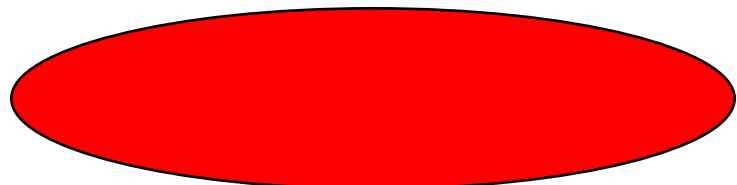
dancers in new costumes were exquisite this day and demonstrated a professionalism and maturity which left one in awe

Wheelchairs Donated

For the third year in a row, several students, as part of the Social Service required of scholarship recipients, took part in the "Wheelchair Project". They helped to locate, then interview and prepare, future recipients of the donated chairs. Persons receiving these chairs are not only physically challenged but most often are in difficult economic situations. The chairs greatly enhance the independence



of these individuals. Some 44 chairs were given out this year and there are plans for a continuation of this great service. The Center is pleased to be able to play a vital part in this important venture.



Who Are The Friends of Batahola?

Actually, any person who by prayer, donations or other means supports the Cultural Center is a “Friend of Batahola”. The fact that you receive this newsletter makes you an important part of this project. You have a distinct role in making the wonderful events, about which you read in these pages, happen at the Center.

The idea of forming “Friends of Batahola” was the brainchild of Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ. Before Sister Margie died, she had asked Helen to stay involved in her Center and to see that it continued. Helen then called together several of Margie’s friends from various areas of the country and asked that they meet to see how this might be accomplished. The first meeting was held in November, 2001, shortly after Margie’s death, and the groundwork for incorporation, tax exempt status, etc. followed. Currently, work goes on to develop an “endowment fund” by which the financial needs of the Center will be met for years to come. These persons who first assembled became the Board of Directors of the organization. Some members of the original Board remain, others moved on but remain supportive, and new members have been added in recent months. It is important to note that no Board member receives remuneration for travel or work performed. Except for some administrative expenses, your donations, therefore, are earmarked for the Center’s direct needs.



Terri Holman, Board President

Dear Friends,

Some members of Friends of Batahola made the annual trip to Nicaragua in mid March, 2007. During the many meetings with the Administrative Team and Staff members, we found the Center to be doing very well in serving the people of Batahola and beyond. My personal favorite gathering is on Friday to reflect and share the Sunday readings. The sharing of the hearts of the staff and how the Gospel relates in their lives is always inspirational and life giving.

Our time was also spent with two projects that we were supporting. One was a quilting class in the area of sewing and crafts, and the other was medical screenings for the scholarship students and the staff members.

As president of Friends of Batahola I feel it is my job to make sure we are keeping the mission and vision in line with what S. Margie and Fr. Angel, the founders of the Cultural Center of Batahola, intended nearly 25 years ago. As years march on and new people come and go we must continue to live the mission, reaching out even beyond the Cultural Center to tend to the needs of the people of Nicaragua.

Terri Holman

Mission Statement of the Friends of Batahola

Inspired by the vision of Sister Margie Navarro, CSJ and Father Angel Torrellas, OP to empower the Nicaraguan people, and in unity with the people of the Cultural Center of Batahola Norte, the Friends of Batahola strive to answer the Gospel call by affirming and supporting their mission. We share who we are and what we have through friendship, prayer, solidarity and financial support



*Mary Ann Antrabus
Board Treasurer
Retired teacher*



*Jeanne McManus
Board Secretary
Retired Teacher*



*S. Sandra Blanchard
Board Vice President
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*S. Helen Prejean
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*James O'Beirne
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*Pat Berning
Nurse*



*Michael Keefe
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*Susan Keefe
Nurse*



*John McManus
Past President
Retired Engineer*



*Gail Hebert
Retired Nurse
Anesthetist*



*Mary Aileen Dame
Past President
Retired Physician*

Laura Hopps, a senior at Boston College, is working with Friends of Batahola and the Cultural Center to develop a volunteer program that will support the Center's mission and promote cross-cultural understanding between young people in the US and Nicaragua. The idea came out of Laura's visit to Batahola with S. Helen in November 2006. Since that time she and three other BC students have gained support from a wide range of individuals and institutions. More information on this project in the next newsletter.



Exciting New Project Photographic Exchange

To promote the idea of relatedness and awareness of a global community, a group of children from the Center and a group at the Montessori school in Northampton, MA have exchanged photos depicting their "daily lives".



Children From Northampton, MA

The program started with an orientation session for the 12 children participating. They were given basic instruction in camera technique as proper use of light, contrast, color and viewing. There were also practice sessions using the Center's digital camera so that one might see immediate results and critique the work. Each then received a disposable camera and departed very excited about the week ahead when they would take their own pictures. The cameras were then turned in to prepare for the photo exchange with the Northampton students. Finally, booklets were created by each student which showed each of their photos along with written descriptions. The students are all quite excited about where such a project might lead in the future.



Students from Center holding their photo collages

Volunteers

The Center staff has welcomed the assistance of some new volunteers this year; one a short term assistant, another who will stay the full year. The latter is **Sarah Klassen**, a native of Manitoba, from the Mennonite Central Committee. Sarah has been working in several areas: the photography project, tutoring in English, creating musical scores, and interviewing students who participate in "Project Education"...a scholarship program sponsored by the Immaculate Heart Parish of Cincinnati.



Another volunteer is **Lou Desitter** from Seattle who is teaching several musical instruments this month, especially the Oboe. Lou's parents and grandparents



Short Play Educates Youth about HIV and AIDS

A brief but engaging theater program held at the Center opened up dialogue with dozens of youth and parents on the sensitive subject of HIV/AIDS. The 30-minute play, featuring 2 actors and entitled "**There are Tigers in Africa**", creatively focused on common attitudes and misunderstandings about this growing public health threat. During the question and answer period, many in the audience spoke up about the usual fears and false information, as well as what they had learned from the play.

Artist Joins the Center Staff

Luis Varela has joined the Center as an art instructor and will teach both child and adult courses. He is a well known artist with expositions in Nicaragua, Europe, the US and other Latin American countries. The Center is honored to have him on staff. Here we picture Luis (right) along with **Gerado Hernandez** (long time artist staff member) working on an outdoor mural which enumerates the courses offered at the Center.



Reaching Out to Public Schools with Special Projects

Two projects were initiated last year in an effort to help strengthen the quality of teaching in public schools. One project, on "Human Rights," involved five local schools. It trained teachers, by the use of drama in the classroom, the integration of games in study, and in teachings regarding the human rights of children. One teacher explained that in 20 years of teaching she realized, from what she had learned in these workshops, that her students had much to teach her....that it was indeed a two way street. In the next phase of this project, Center staff will take a theatre production to schools to generate a debate between teachers and students on human rights. The work to be introduced was written by **April Garcia**, one of the scholarship students at the Center. The play actually debuted in February at a Managua theatre when more than 100 persons participated.



Board Members Visit the Center

During mid March, several members of the Board made their annual visit to the Center and joined the staff there for meetings, recreation and prayerful reflections. The group was accompanied this year by some talented friends whose varied services were appreciated by all.

Quilting Course: Mary Jo Martin and Elizabeth Zweiner, assisted by Board members, Mary Ann Antrobus and Jeanne McManus, taught a class of some 28 women the delicate art of "Quilt Making". The teachers came well prepared, having collected and pre-cut hundreds of light weight squares, ready for the task of designing and constructing small quilts. The number of interested women was greater than had been anticipated, but room was made for all. Each participant was able to keep the quilts they had worked on during the week. One can see from the photo the pride and



pleasure of each at the end of the course. The work was sponsored by a group of women in Chicago who also arranged for the shipment of some much needed sewing machines and materials.

The Doctor Is In..... Doctor Herb Holman, of Minnesota, joined the Board members on this trip to Batahola and offered his professional services in both Medicine and Acupuncture (he is certified in both). Some 50 children from the scholarship program received basic physical exams, something which would be rarely available to them. Herb was assisted by a



fourth year medical student, Sylvia, who will do follow-up on any pressing medical need discovered. The Doctor was also able to provide acupuncture to several staff members for a variety of maladies: back or hip pain or general energy needs.

Doctor Holman with patients and children waiting their turn for an exam



Brief History of the Cultural Center of Batahola Norte

The Cultural Center of Batahola began in 1983 with the arrival of Sister Margarita Navarro of Cincinnati, Ohio and Father Angel Torrellas of Spain. Originally there was a one room prefab structure with a woman volunteering sewing classes as Father formed the children into a little choir. The Center, through some twenty-four years, has grown into a true oasis in a community which knows great poverty. Thousand of lives have been enhanced though career preparatory courses offered at the Center, as well as through financial assistance given to students to attend primary, secondary, and university classes in the city. Courses offered at the Center are registered with the Ministry of Education so that diplomas have National recognition. Students who have benefitted are counted among the teachers, homemakers, lawyers and doctors of Nicaragua.

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