

NEWSLETTER FRIENDS OF BATAHOLA

Tomorrow is a New Dawn

Summer, 2007

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.

New Initiatives in Child and Youth Leadership Development

A 2007 grant from the Global Fund for Children has enabled the Center to launch two new initiatives to improve the work with children and youth.

First Project: This seeks to create a space for children to identify and address problems in their community, using the Child-to-Child methodology. Approximately 12 children participated in a workshop, alongside Center teachers and older scholarship students, to learn about this methodology and begin analyzing community needs, as well as learn new problem-solving techniques and



cooperative games. The group will meet weekly to work on the biggest problem they identified: violence in their homes and community spaces.

Second Project: brings together young people (ages 16-30) from the Center's various programs: internal and external scholarship students, library volunteers, as well as members of the chorus and orchestra. In early June, these participants spent two and a half days in a retreat to share their dreams of the future and explore different models of participation and leadership. The group will also continue to work to create space in the Center for youth to come together and organize new projects for their peers.

Boston College Graduates To Spend Two Years at the Center



*Laura Hopps and Christina Ruppert
Read about their creative new
Volunteer Program on Page 2*

Plans for the Center's 25th Anniversary

As planning moves forward for the 25th anniversary activities in March, 2008, we want to put out a call to all Friends of Batahola who would like to share photos and personal stories for a bilingual book about the Center. If you have personal testimony or historic photos, please contact Jennifer at: jennifer@centrobatahola.org, or send mail to Mary Aileen Dame at: damsels2@aol.com. Mary Aileen will be the U.S. liaison for the celebrations.

Update on Quilting Collective

Following a week-long quilting workshop led by Mary Jo Martin and Elizabeth Zweiner in March, a group of 10 women has gathered to continue honing their new skills and have set up a "Collective" for



producing quilted goods. The group meets three days a week at the Center to learn new techniques and to produce sample materials. They also spend one day learning about business planning, organizing their collective and discussing future projects. They recently sent a suitcase-full of quilted projects—table runners, purses, pillows, hot mitts, placemats—for review by the quilting teachers who came down from the US in March. The women are very excited about the prospects for expanding this new business.

Creative New Program "Batahola Volunteers"

(See Photos on Page 1)

Christina Ruppert writes: "Friends of Batahola has a extension! We're called 'Batahola Volunteers' and are very excited to be joining the family of the Centro Cultural Batahola Norte! Batahola Volunteers will support the Center with long-term volunteers from the United States. We will be working to develop a sustainable volunteer program, starting an English class, and collaborating on new initiatives with the Center's staff and students. The two of us will be moving to Nicaragua in September in order to start things off, and we couldn't be more excited. We graduated from Boston College in May, 2007. Working on Batahola Volunteers presents a unique opportunity for us in that we are able to couple our passions for the Spanish language and Latino culture, with our desire to work in community organizing in a way that fulfills the needs and interests of the Center. We will work with the staff and students at the Center on new programs, taking classes ourselves at the Center and spending time getting to know the community. I'm looking forward to becoming part of the Batahola community, and hopefully meeting some of you on any trips you make to the Center!"

Laura Hopps adds: "I had the privilege of visiting the Center in November, 2006 with Sister Helen Prejean, and was amazed at the incredible programs, and by the dedication of the teachers and administrative staff there. I am excited to join the community, to learn from the Center, and to collaborate on new initiatives and ways to support the Center. Christine and I had the opportunity to study abroad in our junior year of college in El Salvador, where we accompanied various communities in their work. We have also worked with organizations in the U.S. that deal with the rights of immigrants and undocumented workers from Latin America. We look forward to learning more about the reality of Nicaragua, and how the Center confronts poverty and injustice with education and the promotion of human rights. We will be launching a weblog to update you on all our experiences. For more information on ways to support the program, contact us at: bataholavolunteers@gmail.com. We look forward to hearing from you!

Annual Trip to the Center by Cincinnati Parishioners

This June, as in several years past, Sue Keefe, RN, member of the Board of Directors of the Friends of Batahola, led a group from Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Cincinnati to Nicaragua where they experienced first hand the work of the Center as it strives to improve the lives of those who participate in its many life-giving programs. Sue commends highly the work of Jennifer and the Team for the wonderful job they do. See Page 4: a dramatic summary of this venture in the words Sue Keefe.



Cincinnati Volunteer

Katie Schlecter, a student active at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, joined the Center for one month of volunteer work in June. Katie had visited the Center twice before with Sue Keefe. An avid photographer, Katie chose to plan a series of classes in which she shared her skills with both youth and adults. She has helped 30 students learn the basics of photography and explore their environment using a new lens.



Cultural Center Opens Shop to Benefit Students

As the Staff is always looking for ways to help students get the most out of their classes, a shop has been opened (using "undesignated funds" from "Project Education") where students can buy the supplies needed for certain classes. Over 100 items are offered which would be needed for the classes in Computation, Cosmetology, Sewing, Handicrafts, Cake Decorating, etc. Rosa Urbina, long time head of Housekeeping and one who herself has taken advantage of courses in Computers and Accounting, is in charge of the shop. Here she has an opportunity to put to use the knowledge gained from her own studies at the Center. In addition to managing purchases and inventory, Rosa coordinates a team of students who fulfill their social service by staffing the store. These scholarship students and all other scholarship recipients receive a credit at the beginning of the semester good for the products they need. Because the shop buys in bulk, savings are passed on to students who also benefit from not having to travel to or pay the prices of goods from the city marketplaces. Both the sewing and handicrafts teachers report fewer dropouts from their classes, thanks to the savings and convenience of this new service.



Rosa Urbina(left) and her customer

**Thanks to Jennifer Marshall, Coordinator of the Center,
for contributing most of the articles in this Newsletter**

July Graduation for Four Classes

Each year, as the first semester comes to an end, the Center hosts a cultural revue that is also graduation for students in half-year courses. This year, as part of the strategy to increase graduation rates, the Cosmetology and Sewing classes have joined Cashiering and Typing courses in offering a 5-month option, in addition to the 10-month course. On July 7, 56 students (45 women and 11 men) received their graduation certificates and shared the stage with 118 arts students. An additional 180 students in Painting, Handicrafts, Cooking, Cake Decorating, Pastry-making and Quilting will exhibit the fruit of their learning following the Cultural show.

Donations of Needed Musical Instruments

The Center has received a donation of new instruments both from our twinning parish in Cincinnati and from the family of Coordinator Jennifer Marshall. The Immaculate Heart of Mary delegation brought a trombone and clarinet in June. Jennifer's parents, Beth and Phil Marshall, brought the

French horn that had belonged to her grandmother, Virginia Irene Carter Grammer (1926-2006), a lifelong lover and promoter of music. Donations made in her memory were used to refurbish the instruments and help support instrument lessons.



Center Staff: Sonia, Jennifer, Ileana, Josefa receive gift from Beth Marshall, Jennifer's Mom (second from right)

New Staff Member

With promotion of Antonio Torres, long-time driver for the Center, to head of Maintenance and General Services, the Center has hired a new Driver, Cándido Canales. Cándido is a father of two who comes to the Center with extensive experience as a driver and also as a gardener. He already has plans for starting a small greenery at the Center and working with Gardener Magdaleno Jarquín to redesign the existing gardens.

Welcome Cándido!

Instruments of Change



Bryan Vargus

Thanks to funds from the Friends of Batahola in Spain, nearly two dozen new students have started instrument lessons. Ten members of the choir have begun marimba lessons, focusing on learning accompaniment to the Misa Campesina Nicaragüense (Nicaraguan Folk Mass). They take turns during weekly Mass to enliven the service with their new musical skills. Three violin students have enrolled in the Conservatory of the Polytechnic University under an exchange agreement with the Center. In addition to their instrument classes, they are also taking classes in theory, history and teaching of music. Finally, many new choir members have signed up for instruction in instruments that have been missing from the orchestra: viola, string bass, French horn, and flute. Orchestra director Mayra Velásquez is confident that these motivated young people will be able to join the ensemble as soon as next semester.

Renovation of Kitchen Workshop Will Accommodate a Long Awaited New Course



Among the larger projects that has been in the planning stages for a few years is a complete overhaul of the kitchen workshop. The Cooking and Pastry classes have long since outgrown the narrow kitchen space, and since 2003 the Center has been stalled in offering a new Restaurant Service (Waitperson) class because of the inadequate space. In May, we received notice that the Mallorca Solidarity Fund will finance the renovation and expansion of the kitchen space, with additional funds from Carl Bailey to complete the project and open the Waitperson class in 2008.



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BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CULTURAL CENTER OF BATAHOLA

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, in a one room prefab structure, a woman volunteered to teach sewing classes while 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 the 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.

Why Would Anyone Go On a Mission Trip to Nicaragua? by Sue Keefe, R.N.

"It is hot and humid when the annual trek to Nicaragua for Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish takes place each June. The parish has been "Twinning" with the Center since 2000 and some 77 individuals have visited the Center during these years. Why would you go? You might enjoy trombones playing, lively marimba music, or colorful native dances. In Batahola, you meet people, 25 women packed in a kitchen only large enough for 10...all learning how to bake a cake. You might join in the weekly Bible study class and hear the women's stories of how their faith has grown. It is seeing several children sharing a lollipop because there was only one left. It is celebrating a man learning to read and write at age 19. It is smelling like "perfume de Bug Spray" from morning to night. It is painting over the graffiti on a wall with color and joy. It is celebrating the Mass all together as the family of God. It is not for everyone, since there is very little hot water, no sleeping over 7 AM, and long bus rides with no air conditioning on these mission trips. Did I say it was humid? Managua gives new meaning to "humid". It is pineapple, watermelon, papaya, rice and beans for breakfast. It is having your heart broken by what you see and then realizing God expects you to do something about the economic situation of Nicaragua. Our annual trips to Batahola empower the women, men and children of Batahola because they know that our parish deeply cares for them. These trips also enrich profoundly those of us who are privileged to travel to Batahola. Why would you go on a mission trip to Nicaragua? Why would you not go?"

For donations to the work of the Center:

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