

NEWSLETTER

FRIENDS OF BATAHOLA

TOMORROW IS A NEW DAWN

WINTER, 2006

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.

WHEELCHAIR DAY

On Tuesday, January 17th, twenty-nine disabled people from various barrios in and around Managua were given their own wheelchairs. This event was the culmination of a six-month project begun last August by two scholarship recipients, Jessenia Cruz and Anahi Chavez. They had undertaken this as part of their "Social Service" requirement. First they



produced a brochure telling of the event and asked all students at the Center to spread the word to relatives, friends and neighbors who might be in need of a wheelchair. Six of the Center's scholarship students then set out to visit each person who had requested a chair, determining whether there was a legitimate need, then obtaining specific information such as; age, weight, height, etc.

On January 17th, the group boarded a bus hired by the Center and travelled to the town of Nandasmo, Masaya where those chosen were to receive

their wheelchairs. Each person was individually fitted by a volunteer to ensure that the chair was the right size and type to best meet their needs. The recipients were extremely grateful to receive the chair and thus a new lease on life. For many, the chair signified a new freedom of movement previously unattainable, either because of a broken wheelchair or no chair at all. The Center is grateful to their friends at the Connecticut Quest for Peace for putting them in contact with the volunteer medical team who had arranged for the wheelchair donations.

ANNUAL CHRISTMAS CONCERT

On Friday, December 23rd, the annual Christmas Concert was held in the main hall of the Center. The hall, with its amazingly beautiful full wall mural, called "New Dawn", serves as a wonderful setting for this type of event. The concert represented the final presentation of 2005 to be given by the Angel Torrellas Choir and the Margarita Navarro Youth Orchestra. Among the musical presentations were a number of traditional Christmas favorites as well as a few selections from Handel's "Messiah". An interesting dynamic of this year's concert was that nearly 70% of the choir was composed of recent additions to the choir from the 2005 "Introductory Music" class. The class represents the highest number of students ever to join the choir following their first year of basic music instruction. The concert also included a performance by the new Children's Choir, which began only this fall.

There was an excellent turnout by family, friends and neighbors as well as national and international guests. The concert was offered in appreciation to Professor Francisco Jarquin, former Director of the choir and Professor Edmundo Gonzales, of the orchestra. At a recent ceremony, commemorating the fourth anniversary of the death of Padre Angel, certificates of appreciation were passed to these professors who had given such wonderful service in their respective musical entities. The baton that day was officially passed to Juan Guido, new Director of the chorus, and to Mayra Velasquez, as Director of the orchestra. It should be noted that both Juan and Mayra are products of the musical programs of the Center, having studied with Padre Angel for many years and then with the subsequent directors.

A VERY WELCOME VOLUNTEER

In September, 2005, John Neiswander arrived to volunteer a year at the Center and his service has been indispensable! John is originally from Ohio and graduated from the Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia last May. There he had majored in Business Administration with a minor in Spanish and Accounting.

He appears to have become an integral part of many works of the Center: particularly assisting Francisco with the Artistic programs, e.g.: helping with the choir and orchestra; assisting with administration and inputting music scores into the computer sheet music program; working on preparing profiles for the newly begun "Project Education Sponsorship Program" and being a major player in the "Wheelchair Project". John will be at the Center until July, 2006.

MEET MORE OF THE STAFF

In each of our newsletters, we have introduced one or two staff members who are so vital to the functioning of the Center. Here we present a husband and wife team who have been involved in a variety of ways for many years, Daisy and Antonio:

DAISY ALVAREZ TORREZ: Sewing Teacher
ANTONIO TORREZ: Driver and General Assistant

Daisy first came to the Center twenty years ago when she signed up for a course in sewing. As she explains it....she had the joy of meeting Sister Margarita



and Father Angel and, thanks to them, felt a desire to share her knowledge with others. And so she began as a volunteer



teacher of literacy and continued in that position from 1986 to 1994. In 1991, after receiving appropriate training, she began to teach dressmaking and tailoring as a full faculty member. Daisy is married to Antonio who also works at the Center. He is responsible for driving staff to various appointments and activities outside of the Center. He also maintains the two pick-up trucks, runs errands (purchases, bill payments, bank transactions) and provides transportation for the international visitors. Daisy and Antonio have three grown children and one grandchild, Amy...already a part of the Center as a member of the childrens' folkloric dance class.



Antonio and Rigoberto Calero (scholarship student and library worker) delivering the books which the Center donated to the Ciudad Sandino Community Library....see story on page 3, Library news.

END OF SEMESTER EVENTS

343 STUDENTS RECEIVE CERTIFICATES

On Saturday, December 3rd, friends, family and neighbors came to the Center for the "End of Semester Cultural Celebration"....a morning filled with music, dance, theatre, painting, food and handicrafts. This event gives students an opportunity to show off all that they have learned in the past months; from traditional folkloric dances to Mozart; from combined orchestra-choir performances to beautiful artistic works with views of mountains and lakes painted by the talented student artists.

Following the presentations of the performing arts classes, presenters and guests alike were invited to sample some of the creations of the the cooking and cake decorating classes, while viewing the displays offered by students in the sewing and handicrafts sections. The following number of students received certificates. All certificates are recognized by INATEC (National Technical Institute) with which the Center has a contract.

Sewing: 14 women

Beauty class: 34 women

Cake Decorating: 6 women

Cooking: 15 women, 1 man

Basic Adult Education

Introductory level: 4 women, 4 men

Level I: 4 women, 3 men

Level II: 4 women, 2 men

Level III: 14 women, 4 men

Computer Operator: 20 women, 11 men

Cashiering: 16 women, 4 men

Natural Medicine: 14 women, 1 man

Typing: 8 women, 3 men

Handicrafts: 5 women

Painting: 25 girls/women, 24 boys/men

Folkloric Dance 40 girls, 2 boys

Theatre: 18 girls, 6 boys

Music: 12 girls/women, 12 boys/men

Total graduates for 2005 were 343 with 75% being women/girls.

AND A NEW SEMESTER BEGINS.....

Enrollment so far for 2006 is already 570, higher than last year at this time. Some classes actually have waiting lists: others have up to 40 students. A very professional appearing ad was placed in the local newspapers, and both Jennifer Marshall, Center Coordinator, and Sonia Olivarez, in charge of Academic Affairs, were interviewed on the local TV channel. Via both medias, the mission and work of the Center was explained to a wide audience.

NEW COURSES AND GOALS.....

New this semester will be courses in "Advanced Cake Decorating", "Dance for Adults", and "Music II" for choir members. Some further goals for this year are: reopening the Children's Story Time on Saturday mornings and increasing the retention rate to 80% for all students.

GRADUATION: MOVING ON

Several of the scholarship students graduated at the end of the school year in November and will be moving on to new chapters in their lives. Here we highlight just two of them:

LEONOR LOPEZ: STUDIED LAW

Leonor completed her studies in "Civil Law" at the National University and has already done her first thesis defense. The final one will be on February 28th and we shall keep her in our thoughts on that date. Leonor has been searching the classifieds in the daily newspapers for job opportunities, but without success thus far.

But she will hardly sit around waiting. She is interested in studying English, which would be of great benefit when she is able to begin her career in Law.

The Center provided scholarship aid to Leonor during all of her years of study. As her social service commitment to the Center, she worked in the Library helping younger students and doing general library work.



JOSSIE MORALES: CHOOSES MEDICINE

Josie has taken this year to study pre-med with the hope of entering the National University for the study of Medicine. This career will require six years of study followed by two more years of internship and social service. Specialization would take three more years after that time. She has received a scholarship at the Center for the past five years and will continue to receive assistance through her medical studies. She has been an



active choir member for several years and also works on the Center's informational mural.

Jossie writes that she has come to realize the importance of giving of her time to others through volunteering at the Center.

teering at the Center.

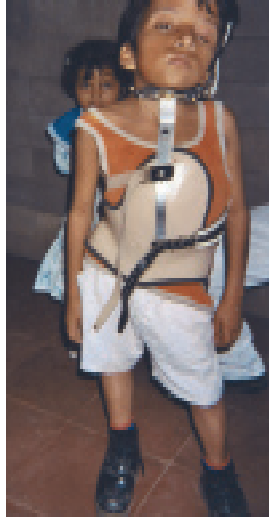
She feels she has grown socially, having learned about other people from her travels with the choir and meeting many internationalists at the Center. She appreciates how these latter visitors have come to Nicaragua to offer their services, giving of their own time and talents in doing so.



GABRIELITO FINALLY GETS HIS SURGERY

In one of the newsletters of a few years ago, a story was told of a little boy who was introduced to us by Sister Margie before her death. A picture of Gabrielito Perez and his family accompanied the story of how Margie had discovered a very poor family of six, living under a small plastic tarp. It seems that Hurricane Mitch had washed their little wooden shack into the lake. Margie built them a small house of cinderblock in an area outside the city called "Nueva Vida" (New Life). Sister had also begun the search to find a hospital in the United States where Gabrielito might undergo surgery for a very severe form of "curvature of the spine." He had already had two prior procedures in Managua at age four, but infection set in both times necessitating that the metal rods, used to straighten the spine, be removed. He then wore a cumbersome heavy plastic and metal body brace for about six years...definitely a difficult task in the tropical heat of Nicaragua.

Before Margie died she had asked others to follow up with this quest and, although Margie never lived to see her wishes realized, she surely managed the whole endeavor from above! We are now pleased to tell all of the Friends of Batahola that a wonderful organization called: Children's Cross Connection International of Atlanta, Georgia found us a hospital and a skilled pediatric orthopedic spine surgeon. The operation took place on November 28th at the Children's Healthcare of Atlanta. Gabrielito then underwent a month of rehabilitation at the hospital and was finally discharged on December 30th. His mother, Josefa, who had accompanied him to the United States, was



allowed to stay in the same room throughout the entire period. The child was amazingly valiant during those first painful post-operative days. We have to admit, however, that he never took to the North American diet and made it known to all that he would eat better if he were given his rice, beans and tortillas. Even Christmas turkey was not deemed a delicacy by this little boy! Gabriel is now back in Nicaragua where he awaits further surgery in six months. At that time, an attempt will be made to straighten even further his very severely deformed spine. In the meantime, we have arranged for some tutoring at home (the nearest schoolhouse is a 40 minute walk over pretty rough terrain) and a healthworker to monitor his growth and weight. We will also make sure that the family has sufficient food to maintain Gabriel in a good nutritional state as he approaches

the next surgery.

Those of us who have had the privilege of being involved in seeing "Margie's mandate" to fruition are most grateful for the prayers, cards/gifts to Gabriel, and for the donations which allowed for the success of this phase of a little boy's struggle to be normal.

NEW PROGRAM IN CINCINNATI PARISH OFF TO A GREAT START

The Parish of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, a "twinning" community with Batahola, has initiated a new program called "Project Education". Its purpose is to help the children and adults of Batahola to break through the cycle of poverty via educational opportunities provided to one student at a time. The project allows interested persons in the US to be a "sponsor" in a variety of ways: financial aid for a child or adult taking courses within the Center; pay the salary of one of the teachers; provide for class supplies, or provide scholarships for youth to attend city schools at primary, secondary or university levels.

This program, as well as a very long-standing and greatly appreciated one from Jubilee Partners in Georgia, was so successful that 132 students were given scholarships this year for attendance at city schools, while dozens more are assisted financially in taking the courses offered at the Center. Each student, in turn for receiving aid, must provide a social service at the Center and must achieve passing grades to continue to be sponsored. To manage all of this, a new "Scholarship Program Coordinator," Gretchen Martinez, has been hired. Gretchen, herself, had received financial aid to help with her studies at the university and finished in Journalism in 2003. She worked for a year with a local television studio and now will assist the many students at the Center who would like also to succeed in a chosen career. Of note: The IHM program received so many requests to sponsor students that they are not taking any more requests until the new school sessions begin.

Information on this program may be obtained by contacting any of the following persons:

Sue Keefe: 513-232-9702

Melissa Auvil: 513-474-7469

Jim Vorwald: 513-528-0676

Bob Sanker: 513-231-6216

Mary Pommert: 513-474-3284

MORE LIBRARY NEWS....NEW STATS AND A READ-A-THON

As has been reported in other *Friends of Batahola Newsletters*, the Library is a major part of the educational programs at the Center. It can never be emphasized enough just how unique this structure is to the disadvantaged youth of the Batahola neighborhoods who use its many services. There are currently 4,792 books available, and during 2005, the Center also donated some 172 books to the Ciudad Sandino Community Library (located about 20 minutes outside the city of Managua in an extremely poor area. See photo on page 2 of books being delivered), and another 175 to the Batahola South school. There were a total of 12,847 student visits made to the library last year: 20% were visits by primary school youngsters, 67% by high schoolers and 4% by university students. The reason given for the low percentage of university visitors is that the library cannot afford the majority of texts these students need to reference. Financial support from any interested Friend for adding to this resource for college students would be greatly appreciated by the staff of the Center.

In August, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the famous Nicaraguan poet Ruben Dario's work, "Songs of Life and Hope", the Library Team organized a "read-a-thon". One hundred people came to read poems from the book and to enjoy the presentations. Among the participants were Center





For donations to the work of the Center:

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For information in the U.S., contact:

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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 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-two 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 benefited are counted among the teachers, homemakers, lawyers and doctors of Nicaragua.

