

## **SPRING UPDATE AND APPEAL**

### **The First Nicaragua-to-Vermont Brigade - a Great Success**

The Nicaragua-to-Vermont brigade was an amazing experience for all of us. One of the wonderful things about Planting Hope experiences is that we connect with each other as individuals with similarities and differences regardless of nationality. I made new friends in New Hampshire, Morrisville, and Massachusetts. In Boston, I met a teacher from Colombia, South America where I had been a Peace Corps volunteer and discovered that he and his family regularly come to Vermont for camping in Groton State Park. Planting Hope's work enriches our connections between and within local, national and international communities.

### **PH Nicaragua Volunteers and Scholarship Students**

Two new Planting Hope volunteers from Burlington, Vermont, Eric Hart, Pam Laser, and their children, are in San Ramon for a sabbatical year of Service Learning. Pam is working with our host mothers in San Ramon as they become an organized group of host families who can market their services to other individuals and organizations visiting Nicaragua.

With financing from Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, our two Nicaraguan ESL teachers and native English speakers, Eric Hart and Caitlin Keitel, are bringing us closer to establishing the La Chispa library as a learning center for Teachers of English in the Matagalpa area. Eric has begun to teach an advanced English class at the library and he has had preliminary contact with English teachers in San Ramon, La Chispa and the city of Matagalpa. Former Scholarship recipient, Nereyda Urbina, has returned from Costa Rica to serve as the Special Programs Assistant at the library. Nereyda and Caitlin are working together to provide English classes and other programming for the children in La Chispa.

Eric has also been upgrading the Norwich University-donated laptops and Digna Cadoza is using several to teach computer classes in El Chile. Digna has moved from receiving a PH scholarship for teaching and helping in the La Chispa library to become a part-time PH employee working in business development with the weaver's collective, ARTISEAS, and computer literacy with students and ARTISEAS workers at the mini-library in El Chile.

The workshop is a busy community center as well as the ARTISEAS place of business. With support from our Planting Hope members, the library provides support and encouragement for High School students in this very rural town where students walk 1.5 or 2 hours to get to school for classes once a week on Saturday or Sunday. The rest of the week they support their families, through farm work or other manual labor.

### **Solar Power in La Chispa and El Chile**

In much of Matagalpa electricity is off in the evening, making it doubly hard to keep up with school work. A Green Mountain Coffee Roasters grant will help us install solar panels at the weavers' workshop, which will become an uninterrupted working, teaching and learning center for the weavers and students of El Chile.

Last year the Green Mountain Coffee Roasters grant brought reliable electricity to the La Chispa library by installing a battery back-up system to cover for the regular evening black-outs. This year the back-up system will soon be solar-powered. It is wonderful to be able to install solar power and support the renewable energy industry in Nicaragua.

### **The San Ramon Host Family Community**

In San Ramon, Mercedes has continued to provide host families with a forum to pursue their individual agendas for household and community improvements and Pam Laser has begun to teach an English class for host mothers.

In April the People's Academy and South Burlington High School students reconnected with their friends in Matagalpa. (A group of People's Academy students first visited Nicaragua in 2007). And in mid-May the Norwich University NUVisions Abroad brigade will begin their three-week service learning trip.

### **From the Board of Directors in Vermont**

Our Board of Directors Finance Committee, ably led by Rick West, has been keeping a careful eye on our financial situation. Thanks to your generous donations last year, strong support from Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, careful planning, hard work by the Nicaragua-to-Vermont group, the Buffalo Mountain Hardwick Dinner, People's Academy contributors, and PH's Board members and dedicated staff, we have made a solid beginning in support of our programs this year.

In order to respond effectively to the ever-growing need for educational opportunities and expanding grassroots development, we are renewing our annual spring request for your support. People in the communities where Planting Hope is most active have noticed our scholarship students, programs, employees and the successes they are experiencing. Twenty-nine young people applied for the Nicaragua-to-Vermont Brigade. We currently have eight scholarship students and regularly receive requests from promising young men and women. During these uncertain times, Planting Hope depends on our membership to help those whose need is greater than ours. After being in existence for eight years, it is striking that 42% of our revenues come from individual donors, small community businesses and participation in local events.

**Please take time to make a donation using the enclosed pledge card and help us continue this good work!**

Sincerely,  
Darryl Bloom, Chair  
for The Planting Hope Board of Directors.



*Digna, Darryl and Sonia in Hubbard Park.*