

# Planting Hope (*Sembrando Esperanzas*)



**La Chispa Library's new second**

Dear Planting Hope Supporters,

We write to you with great enthusiasm to tell you about Planting Hope's busy and productive past several months, and to ask for your continued support for our programs in northern Nicaragua. As you may recall, the second story of the La Chispa Library was completed in late 2006, in time for the new school year which began in January. Students and local residents are immensely proud of the expanded library, from the spacious new classroom to the upstairs balcony with its sweeping view of the hills of Matagalpa. The expanded space, including the completed courtyard, enables multiple classes to be held simultaneously and fosters a safe, enriching and inviting atmosphere for the many students who visit the library all day long and into the evening.

Planting Hope continues to support educational opportunities in Pueblo Viejo, a remote village where Planting Hope built a community preschool in 2004. This year we provided two more work-study scholarships for high school students in Pueblo Viejo and Adult Basic Education classes are now being offered in the preschool during the afternoons.

Planting Hope has hosted two service-learning delegations this year, including its first high school service-learning trip with twelve Spanish students from People's Academy in Morrisville, Vermont and a multi-generational group of 14 mostly Central Vermonters, aged 6-68. As they testify in a video made to commemorate their trip, this experience changed their lives. It enabled them not simply to witness another culture and practice a foreign language, but to make deep connections with those they met and to realize how much they had in common with their new friends, in spite of the obvious differences in language, culture and economic opportunities.

The trip also included an arts exchange component modeled after the Vermont Palettes Project, which culminated in the creation of a mural along the inner wall of the library's courtyard (to complement the vibrant exterior mural created last year). The new mural juxtaposes and weaves together Vermont and Nicaraguan scenes. The palettes created by Nicaraguan and Vermont students to design the mural will be shown in various rotating arts exhibits around the state (check our website at [www.plantinghope.org](http://www.plantinghope.org) soon for a schedule of exhibits).

A major theme sounded at the Board's retreat last August was the need to rely on local, grassroots participation in both the day-to-day operations of the library as well as discussions about future needs and how best to meet them. When Sarah Allen wrapped up her 18-month term as Library Director last December, it seemed the perfect opportunity to make the transition to a Nicaraguan director. Given Planting Hope's expanding reach in northern Nicaragua as well as the growing number of delegations being hosted, we actually now boast a co-directorship: Sonia Castro received a promotion to Library Director, and Mercedes Guerrero was hired



**Students make good use of the new large second floor class-**



**People's Academy and La Chispa students work on the library's mural.**

as Director of Special Projects. In addition, a former La Chispa resident, Ariel Escorcía, and Ingrid Ballesteros now share the job of teaching and tutoring English classes. The new team is functioning superbly by all accounts, and



**The Vermont delegation teaches the "hokey pokey" to English class on the**

freed Beth Merrill, Founder and Executive Director, to focus more on building broader support and new projects for PH through networking in Nicaragua and Vermont. Our eventual goal is to establish a Nicaraguan advisory board which would help set priorities and direct fundraising efforts in Vermont.



**Molly Thoms and Laila Copperansky teach a dance at the li-**

year, we counted solely on support from individual donors such as yourself. While you remain our key supporters (we received donations from over 200 individuals last year), we are also proud to announce the receipt of two major grants in the last few months. The first, a \$10,400 grant from Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, is devoted to providing a living wage for our executive director, significantly supplementing the stipend initially proposed in the budget. The Board is challenged, in turn, to come up with ways to sustain this critical position in future years, through various fundraising strategies, including *your support!* We also received an \$11,700 grant from the Arizona Global Giving Circle and the Clarence Foundation to build a workshop for an indigenous group of weavers in El Chile whom PH has supported for the past several years.

Clearly, donor agencies see what *you* have seen: a dynamic, grassroots organization that responds to the needs of local communities by utilizing local talent and work-study scholarships and fostering

As Planting Hope has grown, so too has its budget, and with it, our fundraising efforts. Until this



**La Chispa Library's staff, scholarship students and friends.**

**3rd annual GIANT yard sale at Union Elementary School on School St. in Montpelier to benefit PH!**

- Drop-off used items in good condition: Fri. 6/1 between 4:30 and 6:30
- SALE Sat 6/2 from 8:30 – 4:00 and Sunday 11:00 - 3:00

**A slide show of the April**

**The 2<sup>nd</sup> annual "Planting Hope Plant Sale" is being held at the Buffalo Mountain Coop in Hardwick, Vermont,**

**Planting Hope's next Annual Meeting Celebration and Nicaraguan Dinner will be held Saturday, August 25: Mark your calendars! More info to follow as it**

**Planting Hope will host a week-long delegation to Nicaragua in October, 2007, with a focus on the El Chile Indigenous Weaving Collective and other educational projects. Email for more details: planting\_hope**

Enclosed is an addressed envelope. Please consider making a donation today. On behalf of our students and staff, thank you so much for your support!