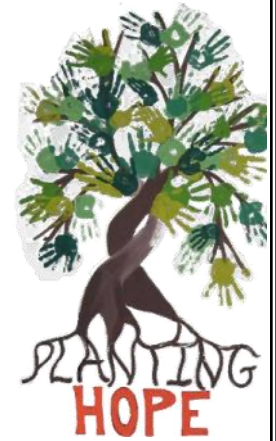


# Planting Hope

## *Sembrando Esperanzas*

**Vision:** *Planting Hope envisions global equity, sustainable growth and mutual understanding through the exchange of social, cultural and material riches of Nicaragua and the U.S.*



Summer 2010  
Newsletter

## Hope Grows: New Ventures

**Mercedes Guerrero Arista,  
Director, Planting Hope- Nicaragua**

Today I want to share with you the work of Planting Hope in Nicaragua, and to reach your hearts with the sincerity and deep appreciation that we, the people of Nicaragua, have for the organization.

I have been working for Planting Hope for five years. Early this year, I was promoted from being Special Projects Director to be the Director of the Planting Hope in Nicaragua. While this is an important change, I want to tell you, friends, that I'm still the same Mercedes – young, optimistic, trustworthy, and always eager to share my culture with you. Although I've received a new job title, the reality is that I continue the work I've always done, eradicating poverty through education and community organizing. Working on these issues within this progressive organization has been the most wonderful opportunity of my life. I feel so useful and alive, doing very simple, practical deeds which contribute to the development of our communities in Nicaragua.

During the past few months, we have achieved many goals. Among them is the grand opening of a second-hand shop and a new Planting Hope office and classroom in San Ramon. The shop is special because we sell clothes, household goods, computer equipment, and cell phones from Vermont and other states, which have been donated by families who want to share what they have or simply want to recycle them for reuse. Here Planting Hope carries the benefit to many people, particularly to those living in rural communities where we



*Planting Hope's growing staff stands in front of the new office, classroom and second-hand store in San Ramon. (L-R Laura Davies Rubio, Store Manager, Santana Garcia Aguilar, Caretaker, Beth Merrill, Exec. Director, Maykelis Escorcía Zeledon, Economics Student Intern, Mercedes Guerrero Arista, Director, and Marilen Aguilera Maradiaga, Office Assistant. The new space offers a place for delegations to meet, for free computer classes, meetings with members of PH's rural projects and favorably priced used shoes, clothes, household goods, cell phones and computers.*

*The new Planting Hope banner and logo was painted by Stowe High School's art teacher and students, with help from the San Ramon host family community.*

sell the products at a favorable cost. The proceeds we generate are reinvested in social and educational projects in these communities, like the new Laguna Seca Pre-School building (see page 3). In addition to recycling and sharing resources, this new small-business venture is one step toward becoming a more self-sustaining organization.

Within this new project, we have employed three high school graduates who are eager to move forward in life, continuing their studies. They see this as a way to fulfill their dreams and continue studying, while earning a salary to help their families. In truth, they have played a large part in turning the store into a self-sustaining project. We are very happy with the store's success in the short time since it opened.

During the first four months of 2010, we were fortunate to have visits from five different groups, four from Vermont and one from the University of New Hampshire. The exchanges have been learning experiences for both sides and we trust that these visits help participants understand our lives here and to learn with and from Nicaraguans. Please see the photos in this newsletter to learn more about these and upcoming trips.

Although we are a small organization with limited financial resources, we listen carefully to the people we work with to understand their needs and ensure that your contributions respond to those needs in a just and sustainable way. Thank you for your part in making this work possible.

# Early Education: Planting Hope's

Planting Hope has expanded our educational mission to include some of the youngest members of the Nicaraguan communities where we work: the preschoolers. Recognizing the role of preschools in providing children with a head start in schooling, socialization, offering a free nutritious lunch, we joined the World Food Program and other organizations to strengthen local preschools.



*The El Chile Weaving Center has dedicated a corner of their workshop to serve as a preschool for the community's youngest members, including the weavers' children.*

Nicaragua's preschools face many challenges. In some cases, public schools have enough space to offer a classroom for the preschool, but in many cases, teachers teach at their homes or in makeshift structures in the school yard. Many of these rural preschools are distant and disconnected from resources available in urban centers.

The Nicaraguan government provides a stipend of \$25 per month for preschool teachers, far below the salaries of other teachers. At less than \$1 per day, teaching preschool is more a labor of love than formal employment. Planting Hope has sponsored preschools with additional funding and materials, in order to pay the teacher a livable wage, provide school supplies for the children and supplement the meal program with more variety of foods. Planting Hope Preschool projects include:



*El Chile Pre-School Teacher Heydy Cruz Herrera watches as her student Mayelkin presents the sun at the environmental fair. Heydy also demonstrated how she turns recycled materials into classroom decorations.*

- *The Pueblo Viejo's La Esperanza Preschool*, built with PH support in 2004, continues to serve children with limited resources in this rural, agricultural area. Children who attend school are entitled to receive a free lunch as part of the World Food Program.
- *The El Chile Weaving cooperative*, whose new workshop was built in 2007 with support from the Arizona Global Giving Circle and Planting Hope, has sectioned off a corner of the workspace to attend to preschoolers each morning. The school serves all pre-school age children from El Chile's lower zone, including those of the workers who are able to bring their children with them to the weaving center.



*Laguna Seca's preschool teacher, Yasenia Cruz Perez teaches a song to preschool participants at environmental fair in a neighboring school.*

- Planting Hope is currently reconstructing rural *Laguna Seca's* preschool building and supporting their preschool teachers with a supplemental stipend. (See photos on the next page)
- *The La Chispa Library* also continues a project started in 2009 by lending a bag of children's books to the La Chispa preschool. Preschool teachers read the books to their students and then swap the books for others the following week.

We're happy to be collaborating with educators striving to make preschool an exciting place to be. We believe that these preschool experiences are essential building blocks for children, fostering an early and life-long love of learning.

We need your contributions to make these and all of our projects in Nicaragua a reality.

To make a donation to Planting Hope, please visit our website at [www.plantinghope.org](http://www.plantinghope.org) to donate online or send a check to:

On behalf of our young pre-school patrons,  
Thank You for your support!

Planting Hope  
PO Box 56  
Montpelier, VT  
05601

# Focus on Community Pre-Schools

## Photos from Laguna Seca Pre-School as Construction Begins



During a Norwich University delegation in 2009, Planting Hope offered to drop off the World Food Program's basic grain supplements to several schools on our route. One of the Schools was Laguna Seca, near the turn-off to Pueblo Viejo. On that trip, we were first introduced to the conditions of the school, in particular, the community's preschool.

*Laguna Seca's preschool structure, as encountered in 2009. (below) The open air classroom is diffi-*

*cult.* This friend, Alberto Mejias Capote, motivated his community, Rociera de Tarrasa in Barcelona, Spain, and together they hosted a concert and art show to support the preschool construction. To date, they have raised \$4,000 for this cause. With this donation, Planting Hope has agreed to fundraise a matching amount to supervise the new construction and support the school's volunteer teacher.



*Laguna Seca Preschool walls go up, adjacent to the community's elementary school.*

In February of this year, the visiting multi-generational delegation from Vermont was able to visit the existing preschool in Laguna Seca, where they saw firsthand the obstacles to education in Nicaragua. Construction of the new school began in June, 2010 and continues in spite of the current rainy season. Parents and students have been bringing rocks from their homes to use to fill the preschool site's foundation and have continued to help by providing the meals for the workers and helping to haul water, clean fill and bricks to the site. We are pleased to work in partnership with this community to make their dream a reality, but there is still more to do.



*Laguna Seca Elementary School students and community members lend a hand to shovel soil into bags, carry clean fill to the preschool's foundation and unload and stack the bricks which will become their community's new preschool.*

Past delegation participants have already begun to gather materials to donate to the new school during next year's delegation. The February, 2011 multi-age delegation to Nicaragua will paint and decorate the finished school. Cash donations are still needed to complete construction.

### Special Thanks to:

**Alberto Mejias Capote & Friends, Rociera Tarrasa, Spain**

**Mountain View Montessori Sister-Preschool, Broomfield Colorado &**

**Paul Treadwell's Razoo Fund-raising page & followers**

**for supporting this Capital Campaign**

# Volunteering in Nicaragua



*GMCR's Rick Peyser and Lynne Herbert serve a free lunch to el-*

Each year, Vermont's Green Mountain Coffee Roasters sends employees from different departments to visit the lands of their coffee's origin. During the 2010 coffee harvesting season, 12 employees participated in a trip to Nicaragua's coffee-growing region, where some opted to spend an extra night with Planting Hope's host families in San Ramon. The group volunteered during their two days in the area, playing with children at the La Chispa Library, serving a hot lunch and food shelf bags to a San Ramon elders group, baking with the women at the town's pregnancy shelter, Casa Mater-na, constructing shelves with local carpenters and helping Planting Hope move to our new office in San Ramon. The group also was able to see La Chispa Library's solar energy system established in 2008 with GMCR grant support.



*Christopher Swenson makes new friends playing Legos at the La Chispa Library.*

## Green Mt. Coffee Employees volunteer with PH in Nicaragua



*Heather carries food staples to PH's office to be sorted into bags.*



*Nicole Hyde delivers a food shelf bag to an elderly resident.*



*Gary Godin and Jason Commo help Remy to plane the boards to make shelves for PH.*



*Gary Godin and Daniel Bolduc transport a heavy pot of hot chicken stew to a group of elders awaiting lunch.*

## Thanks Dylan & Ciara

This Spring, we had the good fortune to have two longer-term, college student volunteers from Cortland, New York. Dylan Treadwell and Ciara Bush spent 3 ½ months living with a host family, teaching English at La Chispa Library, supporting our delegations, and helping with projects at our new office in San Ramon, including the production of beautiful post cards. They also took on the challenge of teaching San Ramon's first-ever swimming lessons. During their weekly class, children had the opportunity to play and learn to swim in a safe and structured setting. Over 30 students learned to swim or improved their abilities during those three months, a skill that will last a lifetime! Thank you Dylan and Ciara! For more information about longer-term volunteer opportunities with Planting Hope, please contact: [Hope@plantinghope.org](mailto:Hope@plantinghope.org) or call (802) 778-0344



Special Thanks to  
**Green Mountain  
Coffee Roasters**

for supporting Planting Hope's efforts to open a new San Ramon office, classroom & second-hand store, offering students and community members from Matagalpa's coffee-growing zone access to education, affordable second-hand goods, work-study scholarships and to become more sustainable.



# with Planting Hope in 2010

## Vermont Multi-Generational and Stowe High School Service Trips



(clock-wise from top) Stowe High School art teacher Marie Hoyniak and student Megan McKay display PH's new sign and logo. Stowe's Anders James paints Planting Hope's new store and office with two San Ramon helpers. Molly Thoms of Montpelier participates in her 4th service trip to Nicaragua. Stowe students Lucy Dixon, Julian Sharat and Megan McKay make play-dough creations with kids at Los Pipitos. Montpelier's Anna Abrams and Planting Hope board member Kris Hammer hang out with patron's on La Chispa Library patio.



For more information on upcoming trips, please turn the page



## Naturally Nicaragua- North Branch Nature Center



Local youth and NBNC's Riley get a close-up look at Nicaragua's abundant wildlife.

In April, Montpelier's North Branch Nature Center teamed up with Planting Hope to offer "Naturally Nicaragua" an exploratory trip, focusing on the country's flora, fauna and natural wonders, as well as the rich culture, homestay experience and exchange of information with Nicaraguan youth. Fourteen teen and adult birders participated

By Sierra Klotz, 17, Hardwick, VT

I will remember the experiences I had in Nicaragua for the rest of my life. While learning a lot about Nicaragua's nature and wildlife, it was extremely special sharing these experiences with the Nicaraguans and the rest of our Vermont group. We had a great group and I'm so glad Larry, Chip, Sandal and Jess could speak so much Spanish. I never expected to see so many birds! The mat-mat was my favorite! We did a good mix of exploring in nature and interacting with young people and their families. Since my family didn't speak English, my Spanish really improved.

Living with a family, I learned a lot about the daily life of a Nicaraguan. One room in our house had a dirt floor and the cooking was done over an outside fire, as I know was the case in many houses. Nonetheless, it wasn't quite as rustic as I had imagined because I mistakenly envisioned there would be no running water and we'd have to use an outhouse to go to the bathroom. My experiences in Nicaragua made me realize how many material goods we have in the U. S. and how little one can have and still live well. It was inspiring to see how happy the people were even though they didn't have very many material goods.



Sierra learns to make traditional Nicaraguan buñuelos from the yucca root

# Los Pipitos Physical Therapy Center

**Beth Merrill, Founder & Executive Director, Planting Hope, Inc.**

For many years, Planting Hope has had a partnership with the Los Pipitos Physical Therapy and Early Stimulation Center in San Ramon. Visiting delegations spend Saturday mornings playing with the kids awaiting physical therapy or doing art projects with the students receiving tutoring. For the past three years, we have sponsored a scholarship student from San Ramon to assist the special education teacher twice a week. The small center is a hub for many parents from the rural zone to bring their children for physical therapy and academic help and to learn from each other.

Having grown up with a sister with special needs myself, the plight of Los Pipitos has always been near to my heart. Knowing firsthand the devotion that parents of special children have for their children, it's been profoundly moving to see that same devotion within Nicaraguan special families.

Special children and families in Nicaragua are faced with monumental challenges. With very few handicap-accessible buildings, streets, or buses, mothers often must invent means to mobilize their child, often pushing a wheelchair or carrying their child for miles to take their children to physical therapy. Limited resources make completing daily tasks with their special child in arms much more difficult.

My sister Kim was nearly

three years old when she learned to sit up, four years old when she fed herself and six years old when she learned to walk. Although she achieved these milestones later than other children, they were monumental moments in our home. Individual attention at the public school helped her to achieve these goals. Also essential to her development were seemingly ordinary apparatuses at our home: a high chair, car seat, walker, swing and stroller which helped her develop muscle tone and sensory stimulation, essential to brain development. You don't realize how important these basic things are until you have a child with special needs in a developing country, where there is literally no secure place for the child to sit upright or learn to stand.

In the past, I have collected adaptive mobility and muscle-building apparatuses to donate to the center. While children get a chance to use these devices during one or two sessions each week at Los Pipitos, there is a great need for them to have permanent access to them in their own homes. For my sister, being able to sit upright in a car seat or stand in a toddler walker enabled her to develop the muscle tone and coordination to learn to sit and to eventually walk. This year, our goal is to provide each of the Pipitos physical therapy students with a supportive device to use in their homes, enabling them to continue their therapy when they are not at the Los Pipitos Center and to receive sensory stimulation vital to brain development, when they can't be held. The first vibrating chair was given to a young boy last month allowing him to sit up and observe his world. It has been a godsend for him and his family. Please join me in collecting these items to benefit as many children as possible.



*Physical Therapist Gloria Martinez Cardoza, helps Jobelky from Pueblo Viejo take some of her first steps.*



*A mom helps her son practice being upright in a Johnny jump-up chair at los Pipitos Center.*



*Visiting nursing professor Paula Moore, talks to Fernando as he tries out his new vibrating seat.*

## Planting Hope Upcoming Events

Friday/Saturday, August 27-28: Gigantic Yard Sale

Sunday, October 17 Annual Celebration, Dinner & Dance

Saturday, October 30 Great Haunted Family Pumpkin Hike

To donate a portable stroller, vibrating chair, "Johnny Jump-Up" swing, or "Boppy" pillow to a child at Los Pipitos, please contact [Beth@plantinghope.org](mailto:Beth@plantinghope.org) or call (802) 778-0344. Previously used items are welcome.

# 2011 Delegations to Nicaragua

## Fair Technology Delegation January 2-9, 2011

This trip will lay the foundation for the “Tec-Nica Learning Exchange” - an ongoing mentoring, networking and professional development program for technical students, professionals and practitioners in Nicaragua and the United States.

For more information visit: <http://fairtech2011.wordpress.com/>



## Multi-Generational Delegation

**February 19-  
March 1, 2011**

Families, high school students, adults-young and young at heart will come together to spend 9 full days on an education and recreation service-

learning trip to Nicaragua, living with host families, visiting schools, facilitating extra-curricular activities and English as a Second Language lessons and learning about Nicaragua's rich culture.



**Trip Fee: \$850 (plus airfare) Family Discounts Available**

**For more information or to reserve your spot, please contact**

**Beth Merrill at [beth@plantinghope.org](mailto:beth@plantinghope.org)**

**Or leave a message at (802) 778-0344**

# Planting Hope's Annual Gigantic Yard Sale

Saturday, August 28, 2010 9am-3pm

At The Clothespin Factory



*Planting Hope's newly-rented office, classroom and reuse store space in San Ramon.*

On the corner of Granite St. & Stonecutter's Way, Montpelier

Collecting donations on  
Friday, August 27 from 10am-7pm

With special guest from Nicaragua, Mercedes Guerrero Arista!



*Stowe High School volunteers help out at Planting Hope's 1st community yard sale in Nicaragua.*

Collecting donations for both the yard sale and the San Ramon Reuse Store in Nicaragua. Bring donations of gently-worn children's clothes, baby items, good-quality toys, books, household goods, ATT cell phones. No computers or monitors. Call with questions or to sign up to volunteer: (802) 778-0344

**Volunteer or Donate on Friday, Come & Shop on Saturday!**

**All Proceeds Benefit our projects in Nicaragua!**



**Planting Hope, Inc.**

**PO Box 56**

**Montpelier, VT 05601**

**Help us save resources!**

If you'd like to receive a paperless version of our newsletter or you'd like to opt-out, please visit our website:

[www.plantinghope.org](http://www.plantinghope.org)