



Durham - San Ramón Sister Communities

Hermanamiento News

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San Ramón Celebrates Centennial

by Lauren Harkrader and Lonna Harkrader

San Ramón, first settled around 1802, was established as a "municipality" August 28, 1904. Amid much pomp and circumstance, San Ramón celebrated its Centennial for 11 days this past August.

Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities' supporters Lauren Harkrader, Anna Chapman and Frankye Riley traveled to San Ramón to represent our organization at the celebrations. They arrived in San Ramón the afternoon of August 19 to witness the fervor of preparations. The streets were cleaned, curbs painted, and decorative streamers were hung to line the streets.

The festivities began the next day at 4 a.m. with a dawn parade featuring The Municipal Band of San Ramón that traveled throughout the municipality awakening the entire community with music and fireworks.

The entire 11 days were filled with exciting and diverse activities. There were Indigenous celebrations, the selection of the Queen of the Centennial, a large parade of floats, an awards ceremony, sports competitions, a horse show, bull riding contests, and several live music concerts. The Sister Communities project sponsored a musical performance where Lauren, a.k.a. DJ Chela, performed her skills as a deejay at a dance party for the whole town in the central park. Three hundred townspeople of all ages danced all evening to mostly Latin beats being spun by DJ Chela alongside DJ Batman and DJ Fabby of the Matagalpa-based national radio station "Radio Yes." *La Prensa*, a national newspaper, ran a story about the event titled "DJ Chela captivated San Ramón." The story is archived online at <http://www.laprensa.com.ni/archivo/2004/septiembre/02/revista/revista-20040902-03.html>.

Lauren, Anna, and Frankye teamed up with a group of San Ramón-based artists to erect a mural at the Finca Esperanza Verde. The mural is painted in the Nicaraguan style of "primitivism" and depicts the flora and fauna of the farm while also including the houses, streets, and landscape of San Ramón.

To top off the Centennial celebrations, Cardenal Obando y Bravo, the highest ranking official of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua, and the entire Nicaraguan National Assembly came to San Ramón Sunday, August 29, to declare San Ramón a "ciudad" (city). All of its 4,500 residents feel a surge of pride and are learning what the new status as a city connotes. Lauren reflects that "The elevation of San Ramón to the status of a city was an amazing culmination to the entire celebration. The citizens of San Ramón were very proud of the appearance of their city and all the activities taking place. Although problems persist, the Centennial celebrations offered a

time to come together and celebrate the rich cultural heritage of the area and the accomplishments of its citizens. Thank you, Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities for all your work and for the opportunity to represent you on this trip."

We thank Frankye Riley for taking beautiful magazine-quality photographs, Lauren for presenting a major event of the Centennial, and Anna for showing her enthusiasm for the culture of this out-of-the-way, mostly rural, mostly struggling mountain community. Thank you for sharing with our sister community the love and good will we sent with you from North Carolina.



Lauren Harkrader, also known as DJ Chela, performs in San Ramón.

November 21 Holiday Bazaar...

Crochet project takes off

By Sylvia O'Connor

Perhaps because I am not athletic I tend to think of challenges in physical terms. Thus, when in my forties I decided to go to graduate school while working full time and caring for a family, I compared it to climbing Mount Everest. Now, developing a women's crochet group in San Ramón has begun to feel like a hurdles course, not only for me but for all the participants.

By far the biggest hurdle has been language. On my first trip to San Ramón in January of 2003 I knew a few tourist phrases in Spanish. The teenage guides loved practicing their English and there were several in our group fluent in Spanish. Since then, however, I have been taking classes through Wake Tech and studying with a friend. I keep in touch with Maria Teresa, my first crochet student, via e-mail. She writes in Spanish and I respond in English.

In February of 2004 I returned to San Ramón with the intention of teaching others the craft I love and which I understand has some history in Nicaragua. By the time I left, sixteen women and girls were making three kinds of bags, belts, and shawls, and I had im-

proved my Spanish.

After communication, transportation is the next hurdle. Thanks to the flow of ecotourists from this area during the dry season, we have managed to exchange materials and some finished work.

In addition, Laurie Vander of ImpressMePro has given us our first big chance at the marketing hurdle. The group will make small white drawstring bags to be sold with Laurie's line of First Communion products. This is a wonderful opportunity not only to publicize the group's work, but also to earn some capital.

I plan to return to San Ramón in January 2005. Together the group and I will continue to run these and other hurdles like the availability of materials in Nicaragua, quality control, and increased production.

There is untapped potential for craft development in San Ramón. We invite other crafters willing to share their skills to contact me at: 919-782-0536, rocosoco@mindspring.com or Debbie Durham at One World Market in Durham 286-2457, shuk-san@mindspring.com. Debbie is hoping to lead an ecotour for artisans.



The crocheted items will be for sale November 21, from 10 am-2 pm at Eno River UU Fellowship, 4907 Garrett Road, Durham. The craft sale will feature crafts and coffee from San Ramón as well as a wide variety of fair trade gift items from One World Market. Please come and support our most recent micro-enterprise project in San Ramón and One World Market.

Our mega-sale of Café San Ramón is December 10-12. We are taking orders now for the giant bean "Maragojipe" presented in a see-through bag and tied with a lovely red ribbon @ \$13.50/lb, breakfast, and French roast Café San Ramón (ground or whole bean) @ \$10/lb, and decaffeinated (whole bean only) @\$10/12 oz. Purchase of coffee pays for development of Finca Esperanza Verde. For an order form and a description of our coffee, visit www.durham-sanramon.org. Come to Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 4907 Garrett Road, Durham, Sunday, December 12, 10 am to 1 pm, or call 919 489-1656.

Habitat to build in San Ramón

There's a desperate need for adequate housing in Nicaragua. Seventy percent of the population lives in substandard conditions, in houses built from stick and mud, shelters made from bits of corrugated sheet metal, plastic, cardboard, and scrap lumber. To address some of these needs in the municipality of San Ramón, Habitat for Humanity in Matagalpa, Nicaragua has teamed with the Habitat International office in Apex, NC. Ten houses will be constructed in a Blitz Build during Easter Week next year, March 21-27, 2005.

Jose Luis Villasenor, Global Church Partnership developer for Habitat, was aware of Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities' long-term relationship with San Ramón. He contacted DSRSC for assistance in recruiting a coordinator to generate the volunteer and financial support needed to make this project a reality. Al Poland, recently retired from Progress Energy and husband of DSRSC Board member, Sally Poland, accepted the challenge. Assisting him is Rod O'Connor, husband of Board member, Sylvia O'Connor. Both Al and Rod have visited San Ramón and are eager to further relationships with the community through this effort.

Funding of \$4,000 per house will be raised through church partnerships. One house will be funded collectively by the churches in San Ramón. The other nine houses will be funded by congregations in the Triangle area. Al and Rod are contacting as many churches as possible to obtain support. Ideally, each participating congregation will sponsor construction of one house, but partnerships among several churches are also encouraged. Each partnering church will be invited to send members to San Ramón to participate in the Blitz Build. Delegates will come face to face with the needs and hopes of people in San Ramón.

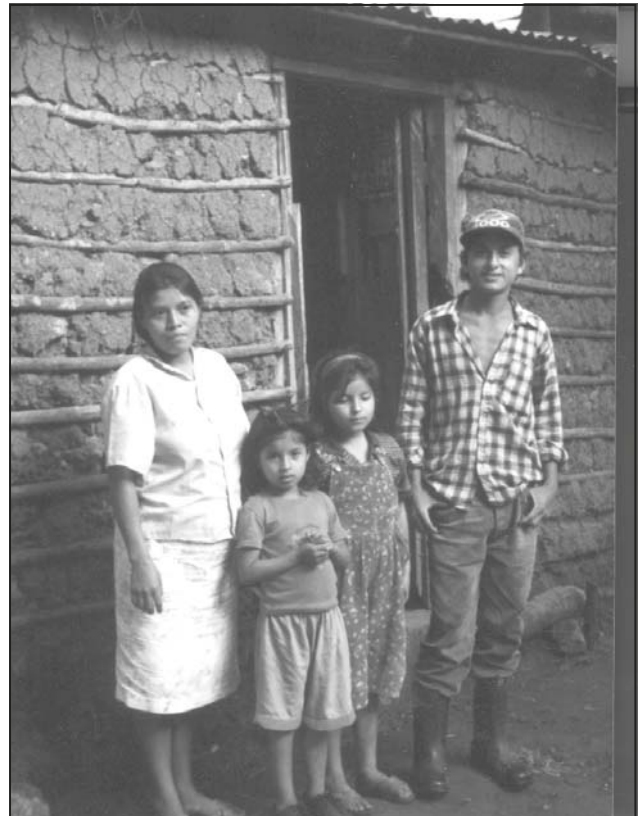
The project will be administered by the Matagalpa office of Habitat. They will provide the onsite supervisors and recruit the approximately 80 local Nicaraguans who will work together with the American delegates and the ten partner families. The 380 sq. ft. houses will be constructed of cinder block walls on a concrete pad, with a zinc roof. Each house features a dining-living area, two bedrooms, kitchen, and either a bathroom or an outdoor latrine. It will accommodate a family of 5-6 members.

Congregations participating in this project will help fulfill a desperate need for a Nicaraguan family. An opportunity to build a house and a relationship! If you know of a Triangle-area congregation that might be interested in learning more about this effort,

please contact Al Poland at 919-828-2607,
sapoland@earthlink.net

or Rod O'Connor at 919-782-0536,
rocosoco@mindspring.com

as soon as possible. Help a family in San Ramón to realize their dream of a safe, decent home.



A stick-and-mud house, typical for San Ramón.

BEST WISHES

**Our administrator, Yelba Valenzuela,
underwent an operation in June
and is now doing very well.**

**She was very pleased that the
health insurance policy we provide
our staff paid for the operation.**

**Yelba may be reached by email at
hermanamiento@ibw.com.ni.**

Finca Esperanza Verde Gains International Recognition for Sustainable Tourism

Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities' ecolodge, nature preserve, and organic coffee farm, Finca Esperanza Verde, was chosen by Smithsonian Magazine and Travelers Conservation Foundation as a finalist for a \$20,000 award for sustainable tourism in the conservation category. All that is needed for this remarkable project to win is for many, many people to vote by visiting web site

<http://www.sustainabletourismawards.com>

and clicking on "conservation award #1." One vote is allowed per email address. The deadline for voting is October 31.

There is a national campaign underway in Nicaragua to encourage everyone to vote on line. Our administrator, Yelba Valenzuela, has been interviewed on national TV and radio and by newspapers. The country has mobilized to win! The following is excerpted from a feature article on Finca Esperanza Verde in the September 20 edition of the national weekly *Blue Pages*.

"Esperanza Verde was chosen from entries in 100 countries worldwide, competing for the Sustainable Tourism award with Ngomongo Village Park in Kenya and Kapawi Ecolodge in Ecuador. It is the first time that Nicaragua has arrived at such a prominent place in a competition that gives a positive image to our country, currently promoting itself as a destination for tourists, especially from Europe and the United States, who usually seek destinations friendly to the environment.

"If we win it will be an excellent opportunity to show off our country, it will help to change the negative image we have, it will attract more tourism, which will create more employment, and will bring immense pride to Nicaragua," says Lucia Salazar, Minister of Tourism.

Help us make Nicaragua proud! And please visit San Ramón and Finca Esperanza Verde in 2005 to see what all the excitement is about!

Call Lonna Harkrader now at 919-489-1656 to find out more about visiting San Ramón in 2005.

...and it's declared a private forest reserve

After two years fulfilling requirements, Finca Esperanza Verde was declared a Private Forest Reserve in June by the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment. Yelba Valenzuela, our administrator, and Christopher Lupoli, our 2004 ecotourism intern, completed the application in April. The application required a list of all the flora and fauna on the farm and many more exhibits.

Thank you, Yelba and Chris, for giving us our new status as official caretakers of the land in our little corner of paradise high in the Dariense Mountains of central Nicaragua just east of the Continental Divide. We appreciate all the hard work and persistent attention you paid to many details.

To celebrate, we received a zero interest loan to purchase the neighboring farm formerly owned by a coffee grower who polluted the streams with run off from depulping his coffee, contaminated the soil with pesticides, left diseased coffee bushes on the land and worst of all, didn't pay the workers who picked his coffee. Not having paid the coffee pickers during the 2002-2003 harvest, few showed up to pick his coffee during the past harvest. His bank loan was past due and he was about to lose his farm when

Durham-San Ramón SC board member Richard Harkrader, visiting San Ramón in July to help Yelba get back on her feet after a serious operation, became aware of the opportunity to purchase the farm.

Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities has a team of grant writers busy at work looking for funds to pay for this land and possibly to purchase more deforested land worn out from cultivation of corn and beans. We have our sights set on reforesting this and other large tracts of land around Finca Esperanza Verde and creating a more hospitable habitat for howler monkeys, sloth, and tropical birds. John Connors of the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh says that our farm, despite its small size, hosts a remarkably large variety of wild life. He was particularly amazed to find both two-toed and three-toed sloth on our farm during his most recent visit.

In our next issue John will tell you about his recent success establishing an official banding station for migratory birds at our farm by introducing a prominent Nicaraguan bird guide to the farm in March of this year.

Update:

Nicaragua's Water Under Threat

Since our last newsletter, the pressure on Nicaragua by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to privatize the Nicaraguan water service (ENACAL) has led to protests both within and outside the country. As ENACAL announced that it was seeking bids from foreign companies for the concession to modernize the management of the national water company in Nicaragua, the National Consumers Defense Network, comprised of 15 Nicaraguan consumer advocacy groups, staged protests and asked international supporters to write letters protesting turning over water supply to a foreign company.

Within a context of heated disagreement, members of the Nicaraguan Social Movement (Movimiento Comunal-MC) met with ENACAL's president Luis Debayle in September and it was agreed that the MC will be given a small office inside ENACAL's buildings so that they will be able to monitor closely the process which they say will end in privatization and also so that they can redraft ENACAL's process for dealing with water customers who make complaints about service, to guarantee they are treated with respect, and are given a swift reply.

ENACAL's president denied that plans to hand over control of a significant amount of ENACAL's work and responsibility to a foreign company for a period of five years constitutes privatization of the company. He agreed with the Nicaraguan Consumer Defense Network that, in accordance with the republic's constitution, "It would be impossible to privatize ENACAL because it is a public company that is vital for the future of Nicaragua."

For the time being, bidding has been postponed. To stay abreast of this issue, log on to www.nicanet.org

Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities requires that legal title to the land where water projects we fund are built, be in the hands of the local community. We trust that this will avoid water projects being confiscated at any time in the future by private companies.

Senior Citizens



Durham-San Ramón SC is the major funding organization for the program for senior citizens run by the Casa del Niño. The women like to make crafts while they socialize, and the men like to meet for fellowship and reminiscing.

Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities

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and Sally Poland
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and Sally Poland



La Pita community works hard to complete its water project

With a donation of \$16,000, half from ecotour income at Finca Esperanza Verde, half from Henniker, New Hampshire, also a sister community of San Ramón, the coffee growing community of La Pita, located a pleasant 45 minute walk from the town of San Ramón, will soon realize its dream of having clean water, uncontaminated by lead from gold mining operations and animals.

These photos show the community at work. The grant the community received from Henniker and us to pay for materials, transportation and training also included community development/group building exercises designed to help men and women work together in a supportive fashion free of expectations that fulfill outmoded stereotypes.



January 4-11 ecotour for college students and friends. \$750 all-inclusive except air fare.

Ecotours to San Ramón:

Helping a rural Nicaraguan community one visit at a time

Join our January 4-11, 2005, ecotour to San Ramón for college students and friends and enjoy an exhilarating week getting close to nature and to rural Nicaragua, whose people await you with open arms. Pick coffee, live with a family, practice Spanish, and see exotic birds, plants, and animals at your doorstep.

Install solar electricity and help our local carpenter make furniture for our soon-to-be-established Environmental Education Center at Finca Esperanza Verde. The center will bring hands-on environmental education to local school children as well as provide a laboratory and equipment for groups from abroad wishing to study and carry out experiments on the tropical ecosystem. Deadline for reservations is No-

vember 15. The trip fee of \$750 includes all in-country meals, lodging, and activities.

Contact trip leaders Pablo and Marsha Torres, 919-419-0230, ptorres@yahoo.com, marshatorres@yahoo.com.

Ten percent of each ecotour is donated to communities to build schools and water projects.

Tourism creates economic development in San Ramón, from Doña Adalila's cooking class to musical performances and talks about current events and recent history presented by the citizenry of San Ramón.

Become a trip coordinator! Find 10 people to join your ecotour and earn a free trip (\$750 value) and \$600 for airfare. Contact Lonna Harkrader, harkrader@mindspring.com, 919 489-1656.

We thank the following for donations and support

Foundations:

Robert and Christine Machemer Fund of the Triangle Community Foundation
Unitarian Universalist Fund for Social Responsibility

Congregations:

Watts Street Baptist Church
Duke University Chapel
Durham Friends Meeting
Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
Sacred Heart Cathedral
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Raleigh
Community Church Unitarian Universalist of Chapel Hill

Businesses:

Frankye Riley Photography
Mel Pine, MHP Communications LLC
(www.mhpcommunications.com)
Grass Roots Press for printing our newsletter
Counter Culture Coffee for roasting our coffee
Blast Internet Services for hosting our web site

Ann M.Sink for graphic design
Ken Howard, PA, CPA, for preparing our tax return
Burning Tree Productions for producing our ecotour video

Schools and Clubs:

Executive Service Corps of the Greater Triangle
East Chapel Hill High School
Durham Academy
Southwest Durham Rotary
Rotary International
District Rotary 77-10
Cub Scout Packs 451 and 424

Our talented web master, Pablo Torres, spent many hours creating our second web page, devoted to our ecotourism business. Thank you Pablo! See www.sanramonecolodge.org and www.fincaesperanzaverde.org. And thank you to Mel Pine for providing state-of-the-art technology to maximize search engines finding us so that our web page reaches the most people.

We invite your participation

Include me as a Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities partner. Enclosed is \$_____ to support community and economic development projects in San Ramón. A minimum contribution of \$25 (or whatever you can afford) ensures that you receive the newsletter.

The Durham-San Ramón, Nicaragua, Sister Communities is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Please make tax-deductible donations payable to: Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities
1320 Shepherd Street, Durham, NC 27707

Call to get involved: 919-489-1656;
info@durham-sanramon.org

Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities meets one night each month January-October. In November

we have a one day retreat to evaluate our work and to plan for the next year. In December we have a holiday gathering. We also go on a canoe trip in the spring. Several of us travel to San Ramón each year to meet with our sister community partner organization and with all the groups and institutions that receive our donations. Some of us coordinate ecotours each year, which you are invited to join. We would be delighted to present a program on San Ramón to your organization or congregation.

Our meetings are the 4th Monday of each month, 7:30-9 pm at Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 4907 Garrett Road, Durham. For more information call 919-489-1656. Please visit our gorgeous web pages:

www.durham-sanramon.org
and
www.sanramonecolodge.org



Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities
1320 Shepherd Street, Durham, NC 27707



Vote on line to help us win \$20,000! Smithsonian Magazine selects Finca Esperanza Verde as finalist for Sustainable Tourism Award! Deadline for voting is October 31. Read all about it on page 4.