



Durham - San Ramón Sister Communities

# Hermanamiento News

Durham, North Carolina - San Ramón, Nicaragua

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## *Finca Esperanza Verde wins*

# BEST ECO-LODGE 2004

**F**inca Esperanza Verde (Green Hope Farm) was recently named Best Eco-lodge in Nicaragua by the Ministry of Tourism. The award is the culmination of a first-ever certification process to identify sustainable ecotourism sites in Nicaragua, a program to be continued in the other Central American countries as part of the Central America Green Initiative.

Our lodge excelled in all areas, including involvement with the local community, employing sustainable resources such as our solar electrification system and composting, quality of accommodations

coordinators or participated in one of our ecotours as well as to those who sold Café San Ramón over the past ten years, for this is principally how we raised money to build the farm and pay staff salaries.

We expect San Ramón's tourist business to grow in 2005 and encourage you to make plans now to join an ecotour. The entire cost, \$750, stays in the local economy. Visit our web page [www.durham-sanramon.org](http://www.durham-sanramon.org) in the coming months for trip announcements. We also hope to hear from those who want to coordinate an ecotour. Our weeklong ecotours include four days of exciting activities and relaxation at the lodge and three days living with guest house families in the small town of San Ramón. You will visit a school and community-built water project funded with income from previous ecotours as well as visit other projects funded by Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities. Once a trip coordinator gets a group of 6-22 people together, plane tickets are purchased. Months later when the group arrives in Managua, our staff takes over all the details of making your trip one you will remember for years to come. Trip coordinators who bring 10 others will have their trip fee waived and will receive \$600 for airfare.



The staff of Finca Esperanza Verde enjoy meeting tourists and teaching them about their culture, flora, and fauna.

and meals, and accessibility to natural areas.

The award brought us a lot of publicity in Nicaragua and an influx of tourists including diplomats from embassies in Managua.

After six years developing Finca Esperanza Verde lodge and coffee farm, we have a model sustainable tourism lodge and nature reserve to be proud of. We are thankful to all those who have been trip

### **A wonderful experience awaits you in San Ramón**

Our ecotours are designed to match the special interests of each group. You may wish to spend more time on any one of the following types of activities.

**Day 1** – Arrive Managua airport where you are

*(continued on page 2)*

## BEST ECO-LODGE 2004 *(from page 1)*

met by our staff. Express bus ride to Matagalpa. Truck ride to Finca Esperanza Verde. Dinner at sunset with view across the mountains.

**Day 2** - Nature hike with naturalist guides. Visit La Chispa School built with income from tourism (10 percent of tourism income funds a similar project each year). Excursion to Wabule River for a picnic/bird-watching/swimming/relaxing. Watch a campesino baseball game. Lecture about organic coffee farming.

**Day 3** - Nature hike to see birds, howler monkeys, waterfall, medicinal plants, orchids, and butterflies. Horseback ride. Lecture about the life cycle of butterflies in our butterfly conservatory. Local folk musicians perform around the campfire. Neighboring children roast marshmallows.

**Day 4** - Make compost for the coffee plants. Talk - "Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities' Impact on the Local Economy." Pick coffee (December through February). De-pulp day's pick of coffee. Talk - "Renewable energy -- a sustainable resource." Star watch.

**Day 5** - Visit a rural school and distribute school supplies. Arrive in town of San Ramón and meet your guest-house family. Visit town of San Ramón (schools, health clinic, herbal medicine farm and pharmacy, library, baseball stadium...) with Tourist Guide Club.

**Day 6** - History lecture by member of the community. "Teach" English in the high school. Jewelry making workshop. View movie in Spanish at the municipal library. Learn to make a special dish in Doña Adalila's cooking class. Communal dinner with families.

**Day 7** - Hike to Coffee Cooperative. Visit water project built with income from ecotours. Bird-watch. Oxcart demonstration. Cool off in swimming pool. Visit craft market. Municipal Band performance and good-bye send off.

**Day 8** - Return to Managua for departure or for

a side trip on your own to another part of Nicaragua.

Please email us at [info@durham-sanramon.org](mailto:info@durham-sanramon.org) or call 919 489-1656 to talk with us about planning an ecotour to San Ramón for your school, congregation, club, friends and family.

### Those returning from San Ramón have this to say:

"I have made three ecotour trips to San Ramón, and each time I am powerfully affected and changed for the better by the experience."

— Ken Knight

"My trip to San Ramón was most rewarding. It was amazing to experience the results of the hard work of the good people of the Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities. A new school, clean water distribution system, baseball stadium, a full time librarian, and an award winning Eco lodge made quite an impressive list. But the most satisfying part was witnessing the pride of the San Ramón community. I had a terrific time, too, enjoying the natural beauty, tasting different fruit (granadilla is awesome) and making new friends."

— Mike Sheffer

"We had a great trip to San Ramón and Nicaragua.

"The Nicas were most hospitable as always...they outdid themselves — giving us gifts! Our group enjoyed the folk music, the nacatamales and all. We saw a number of great birds including a new species for Nicaragua seen at the Finca, Streaked Xenops, as well as a great bird called a Pheasant Cuckoo that Ernesto found near the Cascada.

"We located Red-eyed Tree Frogs, and found both species of Sloth, two-toed and three-toed, at the Finca -- very unusual! Finca staff, and homestay visits were terrific.

"Yelba continues to do a great job. We want to talk about future trips."

— John Connors, naturalist

## Basketball Fever

By Fernando Escorcía, age 16

In the past, baseball was the favorite sport in Nicaragua. All the young people played. There were leagues here in San Ramón and in Matagalpa (regional capital). But popularity for baseball has been affected by soccer which has little by little been taking away fame from

baseball. And now the sport increasing in popularity is basketball which is now the most popular sport here in San Ramón. There is now a little basketball league organized by the players. Our enthusiasm for basketball has been influenced by the marvelous NBA. Each one of us who plays at the "cancha" (basketball courts in the center of town) has his favorite star and says that he is this player during our games. We young people have organized our league ourselves and teams play almost every night.

# Forming Ties of Peace and Friendship

People visiting San Ramón form strong ties of peace and friendship with people there. Here's how a micro-enterprise project got started when María Teresa Cruz Cortedano, Tourist Guide Club member, met Sylvia O'Connor of Sacred Heart Cathedral in Raleigh.

## María Teresa (Teresita) writes:

"Hello friends,

"Today I would like to share with you one of the beautiful experiences I have had as a tourist guide. During my most recent opportunity as a guide I met Sylvia O'Conner who is a beautiful person and with whom we discovered sharing a common passion: crocheting. During our short time together I learned new and beautiful things to crochet and this excites me to learn more, to improve and to share these little bits of knowledge."

## Sylvia writes:

"In January 2003 I was part of the delegation from Sacred Heart Cathedral in Raleigh led by Sally Poland to San Ramón. I have crocheted for years and usually travel with a project. For some unknown reason I decided to take extra hooks and materials. Teresita, one of the guides in San Ramón, took an interest. One day on the bus to Matagalpa I taught her the basics and how to make a simple granny square dishcloth. She told me that Nubia crochets also.

"I sent more materials to them with later ecotours.

"In September when the delegation from San Ramón came for the 10th anniversary celebration, Teresita sent

me a handbag. She had gone far beyond what I taught her. It was lined with a zipper. I began talking to Nubia and Lonna about going back to teach others.

"I stayed in touch with Teresita via email. On February 19 I returned to San Ramón. For the month before, Nubia and Teresita had been teaching the basics so everyone was ready for projects when I arrived. There are now about 16 women and girls making small drawstring bags, string market bags, shawls, belts, and Teresita's bags. Much of the material can be purchased in Nicaragua. A woman in San Ramón puts the zippers and lining in Teresita's bags.

"It is a privilege to work with these women and to be a part of this new venture. Even the youngest taught me a great deal. They were patient and helpful with my Spanish and so enthusiastic about this opportunity. I am already planning new projects for next year.

"It is a joy to be associated with Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities on this venture."



Sylvia O'Connor teaches crocheting to a group of women and girls. Their goal is to sell their creations to earn money for their families

## Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities

### Board of Directors

Chair: Lonna Harkrader  
Vice Chair: Candace Carraway  
Secretary: Pablo Torres  
Treasurer: Richard Harkrader  
Board members: John Chase, Sally Poland, Debbie Durham, Marsha Torres, and Sylvia O'Connor

### Committees:

Education: John Chase and Sally Poland  
Webmaster: Pablo Torres  
Newsletter editor: Jim Jensen

Coffee baggers: Sylvia and Rod O'Connor, Gail Curry, Sally and Al Poland, and Lonna Harkrader  
Coffee sales: John Chase, Bill O'Connor, Arnie Katz, Janneke Ratcliffe, Lewis Carson, Amy Tornquist, John and Nancy Paar, and Dwayne Dixon  
Honey sales: John Chase and Sally Poland  
Finca Esperanza Verde: Richard and Lonna Harkrader  
Tourism: Candace Carraway, Debbie Durham, Richard and Lonna Harkrader  
Database manager: Doug Henderson-James  
Translation: Adriana Oller and Juan Carlos Oller  
Grant Writing: Marsha Torres, Candace Carraway  
Crafts: Sylvia O'Connor and Sally Poland

# Our 10th Anniversary Celebration Lives On

Our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary delegation from San Ramón in September was a great opportunity for those in Durham who haven't yet been to San Ramón to meet members of our partner organization. And to give our counterparts in San Ramón the undreamed of possibility to visit Durham. There were 240 supporters present at our fiesta in September, an overwhelming show of support and spectacular welcome for our visitors. Remarks from members of the San Ramón delegation to Durham:

**"My experience** during my trip to Durham and Raleigh, North Carolina, was very wonderful: to learn about your culture which is very different from ours, to learn about your beautiful trees and flowers, to be taken care of by friends who blessed us with care and attention, to be invited to stay in homes by people who made us feel like well-loved members of the family. I think our sister community partnership between Durham, a very prosperous county, and San Ramón, a very poor one, is a miracle from God that has made it possible for people with hearts full of love to be united in love and friendship. I ask God for abundant blessings for all. Thank you to our friends in Durham and Raleigh."

— Doña Marina Escorcía (community organizer and former mayor of San Ramón)

**"My trip** to the United States was grand and educational for me. I observed ways of life that I could never imagine. I remember wanting to wash the dishes of the family where I stayed only to find to my surprise that there was a machine to do it all. The United States is very different from my country, Nicaragua. I didn't see any poverty like I see everyday at home. Everything is orderly and there are a lot of rules. There is everything, nothing is missing. I learned that my community needs my help and that of every person who lives here. I heartily thank you for the opportunity. Thank you also for taking me to so many interesting places and for dedicating so much time to be with us. Thank you for visits to see a play and puppet show, art museums, schools, and everything that you shared with us. I returned home very happy. Thank you for this opportunity."

— Johayda Escorcía (art school student, art teacher, and tourist guide club president)



Delegation from San Ramón (left to right): Nubia Rojas, Marina Escorcía, Margarita Sanchez, Johayda Escorcía, Yelba Valenzuela.

**"As a librarian,** the visit to the (Durham County) library was very helpful. And the librarian who spoke Spanish explained patiently the system by which parents and children in the community are allowed to develop skills needed before entering school. The visits we made to schools was very helpful because we saw how advanced technologically schools are in the U.S. We also talked with students who want to come to San Ramón as well as with those who had already come and who shared what their experience was like. (More school visits) will allow students in small rural schools to meet visiting students for an exchange of friendship and awareness."

— Nubia Rojas (librarian and teacher)

**"This experience** was of great importance and very successful because otherwise I would never have known this precious place and especially because I learned the way our sister community in Durham is organized and the way you work to raise money to carry out projects here in Nicaragua. It was very moving to observe at the fiesta that so many

people want to help our people. I want to thank all who welcomed us into their homes. In this you showed your love and most of all friendship for us.

Something very important and special for me was visiting the medicinal herb farm,

where I observed that these people are conserving the culture and use of natural medicine and that they use some of the same plants we do. My ardent wish is that these people will visit our country and see how we work. Before I finish I want to say thank you with all my heart for your patience to take me to so many places I will never forget. And to our sister community Durham for helping the needy in my community. I pray to God that you will stay strong so that you can keep helping the needy. Greetings to all the members of our sister community in Durham and Raleigh. A big hug from someone who remembers you."

— Margarita Sanchez (community development worker and herbal medicine promoter)

*PS. Yelba Valenzuela will write about the economic and social benefits of tourism in San Ramón for the fall/winter issue.*

# Los Pipitos Center for Disabled Children

By Ann Rivers

Progress is evident in the Los Pipitos program, in spite of overwhelming need and minimal resources. There is a huge range of disabled children involved, including Down's Syndrome, hydrocephalus, psychomotor retardation, and many other disabilities. A twenty-six-year-old man, who is very severely delayed, non-verbal and self-injurious, is homebound. He receives home visits from the volunteer coordinator.

A major component of progress is in physical therapy. Used equipment was procured from UNICEF. A physical therapist has been coming to Los Pipitos twice a week. She works individually and in groups with children and mothers, showing mothers therapeutic techniques that can be used at home. Her dynamic and sensitive approach is an excellent role model for mothers and Los Pipitos volunteers.

Examples of progress include a four year old boy with reported severe thyroid and hormone dysfunction. Reported to have been immobile in the recent past, he is now working toward sitting and crawling independently and is very expressive and responsive, obviously delighted with this new learning. A young teenage girl was seen to have progressed from extreme spasticity of arms and hands, last year, to becoming able to use crayons and scissors this year through the efforts of volunteers. Physical therapy for her is toward relaxation of her spastic limbs.

The addition of physical therapy to the Los Pipitos program brings skill and hope to mothers and volunteers by teaching them techniques they can use at home and at the Center. The progress of the children is exciting to witness. Skills and attitudes learned can generalize to other families, with a "ripple effect" through the Los Pipitos community.

***Ann Rivers recently returned from her third ecotour to San Ramón.***



Ann Rivers and her friends at Los Pipitos.



**Dra. Carolina Rodriguez does her best to provide dental care to 10-11 patients per day at the San Ramón Health Center. The Center needs a dental chair in good working condition, and anesthesia.**

## We Need Your Help

We have more projects pending than we received donations this year to fund. If you have not yet made a donation in response to our appeal last fall, please consider making one now. Your support will bring electricity to rural health posts (only 2 of the 8 have electricity), water to Los Pipitos Center for Disabled Children, school supplies for the adult literacy program, and a dental chair to replace the broken down one currently in use.

## Thanks

We thank the following people who recently took a suitcase of material aid to San Ramón or brought one home full of honey and crafts. You saved us lots of money in shipping fees! — Janet Hitti, Kate Beasley, Ken Knight, Mike Sheffer, Karen and Ryan McCall, Pat Shurtleff, Ann Rivers, John Connors, and Dave Davenport.



La Pita residents who will build their own water project this year.

## Community-Built Water Project for La Pita Coffee Cooperative

By **Lonna Harkrader**

Construction of the community-built water project for the remote community of Santa Martha reported on in our Fall/Winter 2003 newsletter has been postponed. We planned to fund half the cost of the \$14,000 project with our 10 percent annual allocation of ecotour income and our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary fiesta proceeds. Henniker, NH, another of San Ramón's sister communities, was to pay the other half.

I met with the representatives of the community and the mayor's office in January during my one-month-long visit to San Ramón and learned that the community was unable to obtain title to the land around the springs. Given the uncertain future of water projects in Nicaragua (see article on water privatization on next page), it is imperative that title to the land for water projects be in the hands of the community or the municipal government. The community was aware of this from the outset but could not prevail upon the land owner to do more than promise them use of the springs.

La Pita, a coffee-growing cooperative of 250 inhabitants, was chosen instead to receive our donation. The community had been trying to get funding for a water project for years because the water they

use is contaminated with lead from gold mining operations in the 1950s. They own the land where the springs are located as a result of Nicaragua's land reform of the 1980s and therefore comply with our requirement concerning land title.

The water project in La Pita will cost \$16,000. We are sharing this cost with Henniker. The community is providing labor, and Programa Agua is providing the plan, training, technical expertise, and delivery of materials. Thirty-four houses will have their own water spigots; four homes located at a high elevation will share a spigot.

"I am very happy that I will have clean water coming right to my house so I can have a nice clean shower right at home," says Francisco Mendoza, a senior citizen of La Pita. The project will be completed this year.

**The municipality of San Ramón will celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> year in August. We will be represented at the week-long festivities where we plan to dedicate our support for La Pita water project in honor of the centennial. Please let us know if you would like to attend the celebration August 20-31.**

# Nicaragua's Water Under Threat

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is pressuring the Nicaraguan National Assembly to not give more money to local governments for public improvements except for allowing very small raises for the extremely low-salaried teachers, police officers, and nurses. In the face of a looming worldwide water shortage, the IMF and World Bank are trying to force Nicaragua and many other debtor nations to privatize their water systems. If they are successful, the cost of clean drinking water will rise. This will lead to an increase in water-borne diseases as people use unclean water from rivers and streams and a reduced quality of life for poor communities. The Nicaraguan National Assembly is courageously resisting pressure from the IMF on water privatization and other important issues.

Please help protect Nicaragua from the unjust demands of the IMF by reading the following web pages:

[http://www.citizen.org/cmep/Water/cmep\\_Water/reports/nicaragua/articles.cfm?ID=7795](http://www.citizen.org/cmep/Water/cmep_Water/reports/nicaragua/articles.cfm?ID=7795)  
[http://nicanet.org/alerts/imf\\_back\\_off.html](http://nicanet.org/alerts/imf_back_off.html)

These web sites will give you the information you need to write to:

**Nancy P. Jacklin**  
**United States Executive Director**  
**International Monetary Fund**  
**700 19th Street, N.W.**  
**Washington, D.C. 20431**  
**Fax: (202) 623-4661**

## We thank the following for donations and support

### **Foundations:**

Robert and Christine Macherer Fund of the Triangle  
Community Foundation  
Unitarian Universalist Fund for Social Responsibility  
William G. Gannon Foundation

### **Congregations:**

Duke University Chapel  
Durham Friends Meeting  
Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship  
Sacred Heart Cathedral  
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Raleigh

### **Businesses:**

Executive Service Corps of the Greater Triangle  
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  
Ecoquest Travel

### **Schools and Clubs:**

East Chapel Hill High School  
Durham Academy  
Raleigh Charter High School  
Southwest Durham Rotary  
Rotary International  
District Rotary 77-10  
Cub Scout Packs 451 and 424

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# 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

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 both meet with our sister community partner organization and with all the groups and institutions which receive our donations. Some of us coordinate eco-tours each year which you are invited to join.

Our meetings are the 4<sup>th</sup> 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. And please visit our gorgeous web page:

Durham-San Ramón Sister Communities meets

[www.durham-sanramon.org](http://www.durham-sanramon.org)



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



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