

The Burlington/ Puerto Cabezas Sister City Program

15 Beech Street, Burlington, VT 05404

www.uvm.edu/sistercity

2013 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE CITY OF BURLINGTON

Board Members: Tina Escaja, Dan Higgins, David Hutchinson, Richard Kemp, Jane Kramer, Marisha Kazeniak, Sarah Luneau, Sam Mitchell, Charlie Delaney

MISSION

The Burlington/ Puerto Cabezas Sister City Program continues to promote interaction between residents of Burlington and residents of Puerto Cabezas, a municipality on the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua. 2013 marks the twenty-ninth anniversary of the program. While strategies have changed over the years, our focus continues to be the creation of partnerships between like-minded groups and individuals in Vermont and Nicaragua.

OUTREACH

During the past year we promoted the sister city program using video, public displays, and our web site, which gets many inquiries for information about Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast. In October 2012 Burlington's Old North End Studios featured an exhibition of Dan Higgins' Puerto Cabezas photographs. Also during October we participated in a Vermont International Film Festival event showcasing an evening of films representing each of Burlington's sister cities of Puerto Cabezas, Yaroslavl, and Bethlehem/Arad. Margarita Antonio, a radio and TV producer from Bilwi, visited Burlington during the event and we discussed ways we might further use media and the Internet to connect our two communities.

DELEGATION 2013

In February, board members Dan Higgins and Jane Kramer traveled to Puerto Cabezas. They brought congratulations from Mayor Weinberger to the new municipal administration and had a productive meeting with vice alcaldesa Sra. Anicia Matamoros. They also met with a new group organized by Dixie Lee as a Nicaraguan partner in advancing the sister city relationship. Dixie's group includes several residents who have visited Burlington over the years and been active in sister city exchanges.

Dan and Dixie, following up on the cultural inventory project started last year, delivered prints to members of the Creole population whom Dan had photographed. Images included a healer, a long time music teacher, a baker, a barber, a furniture maker, a midwife, and a woman who has been selling vigoran on the street for many years. We produced a book of the portraits to be left at the new Creole Center and had copies printed for exhibiting in Burlington. As in past years, Dan and Jane sought a video project to be involved with, and this year worked with young people at CEDEHCA to produce a TV spot about the making of a mural in downtown Bilwi. At the Irma Cajina School, where a Burlington sister city delegation had refurbished the playground three years earlier, they discovered that chains on the swings were wearing through and engaged a local welder to reinforce them with new iron.

OLD & NEW RELATIONSHIPS:

UVM student Sam Mitchell, who traveled to Bilwi with the sister city delegation in 2012, spent the winter writing his honors research thesis on Miskito Poetry: "Unheard Voices: Miskito Poetry and the Nicaraguan Poetic Tradition". A link to the thesis, written in Spanish, will be posted on the sister city web site.

Marijn, a private organization started by Jet Os of the Netherlands, has been doing excellent work with young people in Bilwi, helping with reading and math lessons while exploring social issues with the kids and building their self-esteem. We have seen the organization's accomplishments and the sister city board this fall voted to fund a new Marijn proposal that will encourage the kids to create art, plays and dances about social problems that affect them. Issues will include violence, drug abuse, unemployment, teenage mothers, etc. Board member David Hutchinson is looking to connect Marijn with a parallel youth organization in Vermont.

Julio Bordas, one of the participants in the first video workshop we gave in year 2000, is now working with PLAN Nicaragua training young people to use video cameras to document a day in their lives. These 7-8 minute videos offer a marvelous way to learn about kids in another culture. In previous years, Spanish teachers in Vermont have reciprocated by having their students make videos in Spanish about life in their communities here and we are always looking for teachers who might encourage their students to produce short videos or photographs for showing in Puerto Cabezas.

In March 2013 a new community cable TV channel was launched by Myrna Cunningham. Myrna has worked with the sister city program since its inception, and the goals of the channel reflect very closely the ideals of public access channels here in Vermont. During the past decade Myrna produced a monthly show called Agenda Costeña that explored social and political issues in the region. The new channel offers a significant tool for citizen participation in building civil society and the sister city board has voted to support the channel with training, equipment, and video exchanges. CCTV will air their video programs on Burlington's channel 17, and the personnel of Burlington's other public access channels have volunteered to help train the group using Skype. We are encouraging someone from Channel 17 to join the Burlington delegation to "Port" next spring.

An 18-minute can be viewed on line, opening with a greeting by Myrna Cunningham announcing the new channel, followed by assorted clips made over the years introducing Puerto Cabezas and sister city history: <http://blip.tv/winooskivision-cafe/report-from-puerto-cabezas-6578125>

DELEGATION 2014

The sister city program will be planning a trip to Puerto Cabezas sometime in February/March and we invite any residents of Burlington who'd like to go to contact us. Charlie Delaney, collaborating with the Alliance for Global Justice, will be orchestrating meetings with indigenous groups, visiting the mine regions and focusing on issues of indigenous concern. Whatever someone's interests might be- arts, music, education, women's issues, media, health, etc.- we can set up meetings with appropriate counterparts.

IN SUMMARY

While the sister city board is represented by a small core of enthusiastic members, we function best as an umbrella organization, networking with other groups and institutions. We have collaborated with URACCAN, CEDEHCA, Johnson College, Champlain Valley Union High School, VT Council on World Affairs, the Center for Media and Democracy, UVM Latin Studies, CCTV, and the CORE program at Champlain College.

We appreciate the continued official support of the city of Burlington and invite participation by any Burlington resident who'd like to learn more about the program. The Burlington/ Puerto Cabezas history offers a unique opportunity for exploring global issues through the perspectives of a long-term sister city relationship. Our meetings take place at board member Jane Kramer's house, 15 Beech Street, in Burlington, and we can be contacted through our web site.

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