



NIÑOS NEWS
Winter 08- Spring 09

DEDICATED BOARD MEMBER RETIRES

Having served Friends of Niños Adelante for many years as Treasurer, Board Member, and Sponsor, Ann Gebo is retiring from the Board. Her organizing and business skills have proven invaluable in creating the procedures and reporting necessary to manage the accounting side of our organization as we have grown and moved toward the organization we strive to be. Her contributions have been enormous and we are all better off because of her. Ann has accomplished all this volunteer effort while working and raising two children who are now in high school and college.

Thanks Ann for all that you have done for us. You have touched the lives of many niños with your dedication to the program and the gift of your time and talents. In addition your student, who graduates this year, will have a better life because of your support. We will miss you as a board member. You have made a difference in the lives of the students and all of us. We wish you, your husband, and children all the best. Good luck as you begin a new chapter of your life. We hope to welcome you back as an active participant in the future.

PAST PRESIDENT'S COLUMN-WINTER 2009

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Friends of Niños Adelante and especially the niños, thank you for your continuing support of this great organization. I would like to give you a brief update on your organization.

Currently, we have 220 students in the program being supported by a like number of sponsors. There are 49 in our college program and 171 in junior high and high school. Our first college students are nearing their school completion and approximately 10 of them will graduate this year. These will be our first college graduates and we are very proud of them and their accomplishments.

We completed the Zihua breakfast reunions for the year 2009. Both were very successful. I was personally able to attend both the January and February meetings this year. It was great meeting new sponsors and students for the first time. If you have never attended one of the breakfast meetings, I would strongly encourage you to do so. It is very rewarding to get to know your student and his or her family. This type of meeting lets the student (and family) know how much you care about them and their education. It encourages the student to work hard at school and it is a very gratifying experience.

Our fundraiser in Minneapolis was a huge success. We were able to raise close to \$20,000 this year, our biggest one ever! This money is used to run our organization so that 100% of your student support dollars can go directly to your student. This is one thing that I am very proud of about this organization. Many organizations use part of the donor dollars for “over head”. We do not. A huge thanks to all that supported the fundraiser with donations, attending, helping out and organizing.

We are concerned about the recent devaluation of the peso. The world financial crisis is hitting Mexico very hard. Costs and unemployment are going up while incomes are going down. We will try and keep you posted on what effect this is having on our students and their families. Another article in this newsletter gives additional information on peso devaluation.

If you have any questions or concerns, you may contact us through the Friends of Niños Adelante website at www.friendsofninosadelante.org. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

For those of you that have communicated via email with your student, thank you. Please be patient with translations, which are sometimes difficult. If you want to communicate with your student or ask questions about your student, you can contact the Zihuatanejo office directly at ninosadelante@prodigy.net.mx. Make sure you provide your name and the name of your student.

This will be my last column as President of this fine organization. Jan Moe has taken over this position at our annual meeting in February 2009. It has been an honor to serve in this capacity for the last several years and I will be staying on the Board as past president. Please congratulate Jan on her new position and give her the same great support you gave me.

On behalf of your Board of Directors,

Steve Leighton

NIÑOS ADELANTE INCREASES CHRISTMAS GIFT TO STUDENTS TO DISTRIBUTE SURPLUS CREATED BY PESO DEVALUATION.

The beca payments to the students as established in July of 2008 were based on the prevailing 10 pesos to one dollar exchange rate. Payments began in September with an inscription beca plus a monthly beca. The high school and junior high school students received the inscription beca of 520, nine monthly becas of 220, a Christmas/Birthday gift in December of 500 for a total of 3000 pesos for the school year, which equals the sponsor donation of \$300. The college students receive two beca payments of 2,500 pesos for a total of 5,000 equaling the sponsor donation of \$500.

In July and September when the exchange rate was still 10:1 a total of two thirds of the 08/09 school year's funds were sent by Friends of Niños Adelante to Niños Adelante's bank account in Zihuatanejo. This followed past patterns of Niños Adelante's needs.

In October there was a sharp devaluation of the peso. Friends of Niños Adelante seized the advantage by sending to the Niños Adelante bank the remaining third of the annual beca funds. The surplus pesos thus created will be paid out to the students. In December, Niños Adelante

increased the Birthday/Christmas gift payments to each of the students by 200 pesos and plans to provide additional increases for the student because as the year progresses, all aimed at using up the surplus.

The devaluation has translated to increased cost for most items our students and their families buy so it seems only fair to try to keep them even with where they were prior to the changes.

NEW PRESIDENT'S GREETINGS

Greetings to all the friends of Niños Adelante. As the incoming president of Niños, I was asked to write a short bio to introduce myself.

I became involved with Niños through Bob and Barb Neal. The Neals had been coming to Zihua for years and introduced me to the Niños program. What held my attention was the approach of self-improvement through schooling. As a retired teacher I really appreciated the absolute value of education. Here were children wanting to learn but missing one key ingredient--money. Many of us, wanting them to learn, are urging them on with the one missing piece of the puzzle--the money. This helps them with their books, uniforms, shoes, transportation etc. and thus the chance to continue their education. It has been a wonderful example of working together for a common cause.

I look forward to serving with an excellent board dedicated to this program and its continued success. It will be a pleasure to work with our past president, Steve Leighton, who has been tireless in his work for and with the "niños".

Thank you for your efforts. If there is any concern or question you may have, the door is always open.

Jan Moe
President

DEAR FRIENDS AND SPONSORS OF NIÑOS ADELANTE

The annual Friends of Niños Adelante dinner/auction is in September 2009. As much as we would like all of you to be in attendance, we know that's not possible. We would like to propose in the alternative for those not able to attend, a cash contribution of any amount, which we would add to donated auction items to enhance their value. As an example, a trip for a weekend retreat in the Colorado ski country might be paired with airfare derived from cash contributions. By making the auction items more attractive in this manner, the revenues raised for Niños should be higher.

Another possibility is a donation of a service or item. We are looking for items in the \$100 range or we can group things together for more value. If you have a vacation home, boat for an outing or other significant donations we would like to hear from you. Keep in mind this is our biggest fundraiser of the year and we need your support to make it a success. We are counting on you to

make it our best ever. This would be a wonderful way to be part of the auction in spirit, if not in person. Those contributing will be recognized in the auction brochure.

Your tax deductible cash contribution.

Send to
Friends of Niños Adelante
Niños Adelante
PO Box 1624
Sonoma, Ca 95476

Your donations of service or Items.

Send to
Stefanie Rose
4032 Oakland Ct.
St. Bonifacius, Mn 55375

Regarding auction donations- Stefanie Rose at Stefanie.rose@michsi.com
Or 612 386 3864

Questions or comments –please contact Steve Leighton at Leightonconsult@earthlink.net
Or at 952-443-3910

ENGLISH TEACHERS

Many thanks to the five dedicated teachers who gave their time to instruct some of the ninos in English Classes. Shelagh Yarnell and Ross Yarnell meet with two different groups of students three days a week for approximately six weeks. They teach in the morning for two hours and then return for a new class from 4-6 in the afternoon. Anlee Schaye, Len Draving, and Leif Lindblom all volunteer for afternoon classes during the time they are visiting in Zihuatanejo. In addition to teaching these fine people dispense a lot of TLC to their students. Many happy memories are the result of their dedication.

SPECIAL THANKS

We would like to thank Bob Albright and Steve Leighton for current information regarding our Niños Adelante organization. Thanks also to Elizabeth Williams –US Consular Agent- for keeping us informed with up to date information on Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo safety and security. Also many thanks to Shelagh Yarnell for her human interest stories.

SHARING INTERESTING EXPERIENCES

We are always looking for stories of interest from those who would like to share an experience with other sponsors. Please contact Leif or Lois Lindblom at Leif@lindblomfamily.com or at P.O. Box 677, Oscoda Mi 48750

IMPORTANT DATES-2010

The dates for the Niños Breakfast reunions of students and sponsors are on January 17 and February 14, 2010. We hope many of you will be able to attend this important function in the lives of your niños and their families.

WHAT IS SUCCESS ?

Success can be measured in many ways.

Success is the sparkle in the eyes of a child who knows he is special to someone. He is loved. Sponsors in Niños Adelante have been providing that sparkle.

Success can be defined by the child who enters the Niños Adelante program as a shy, timid youngster and leaves the program confident, with head held high, bolstered by the love and support of his padrinos.

Success is the youngster who, sponsored through Niños Adelante, continues on through university or technical college until he or she graduates and begins his/her career of choice. There are many such stories of success in Zihuatanejo.

Success trickles down through families. When the parent of a Niños Adelante student sees the child blossom, through sponsorship and education, they say, "yes, my other little ones must be educated too." That is success!

The teen-agers who attend Niños Adelante English Classes are successful in that they learn a little English. More importantly, they develop an enthusiasm for the language, a desire to keep on with it. "Hey," they say, "this is fun. I like it. I can do it." The English Class students bond with their teachers, some kids returning two and three years in succession to the same teacher. Success can be measured by the positive attitude the kids develop towards the English language, and by their growth in both ability and desire. Their hugs demonstrate the strength of relationships between teachers and students.

Successful are we, as padrinos, when we broaden our student's world, when we let them know that we care about them, that they are precious to us. Success is a relationship where love flows over the miles between niño and padrino.

A wonderful story is that of Adrienne Baldwin. She and her husband Jack have sponsored many students over the years, through "Niños". Now she has two little "Mexican granddaughters", each named Adriana. Yes, two of Adrienne's ex-students have each named a child in her honor. Isn't that the ultimate tribute of respect and love in a Niños Adelante relationship? Now that's success!!

Submitted by Shelagh Yarnell

GABRIELA

My life has been enriched by people I have met during my travels, especially by the people of Zihuatanejo.

Zihuatanejo is a fishing village on the West Coast of Guerrero state in southern Mexico. For the past twenty years, my husband and I have spent time there each year. For many years we have participated in a program called "Niños Adelante", a program through which we help support a child---a very poor but very intelligent child---through school. Being "padrinos"(sponsors) to our various students has brought us much joy and many opportunities. It has opened doors into the community and into the homes and hearts of our students and their families.

Gabriela was one of our students. Her story—our story—is a story of love and friendship.

We met Gabriella when she was just eight years old, working in her Grandma's store. It was a shack, really, which hung over the cliff above Zihuatanejo Bay on the road to La Ropa beach. Each day as I passed the little shack on my way to a local school where I taught English, I stopped for a cold drink.

“Con popote, Senora?” Asked the bright-eyed little girl with the dimpled smile.
“With a straw, Senora?”

I was charmed by this child, and bit by bit, came to know a little of her life and of her circumstances. She worked in the store from seven in the morning until one o'clock every day. Then she hurried off to school. At seven p.m. she left school and climbed, in the dark, up and up and up to the top of the hill in Dario Galeana, a community of squatter's shacks. There she lived in a one room, dirt floored, wooden house with her Grandmother, Ramona. Her mother was very young and irresponsible when Gabriella was born, and so Ramona has raised her as her own child. She is “Mamma” to Gabriela. Gabi has never known her father.

Each successive year as we passed the little store, we looked for Gabriella and visited with her. We came to know her grandmother, Ramona, as well. We became very fond of them both.

When Gabi was twelve years old, she became our student in “Niños Adelante.” We began to spend more time with her and with Ramona. We enjoyed being together and a deep friendship formed.

We met Gabriela's still-young mother and her four other children, Gabi's half-brothers and sisters. We met aunts, uncles, and cousins by the score. All live up the hill in Dario Galeana. All embraced us as part of their family.

When Gabriela was approaching fifteen, we wanted her to be princess for a day, to celebrate her “Quinceaneros”, her fifteenth birthday, as every young Mexican girl wishes to do. And so we set off, my husband Ross, Gabriela and myself, in search of the perfect gown. After much trying on, many sighs and “oohs” and “ah's”, we found a pale lilac piece of perfection! Gabriela placed the matching coronet over her dark curls. She looked beautiful. She looked like a princess. She wept tears of joy and excitement. Since my husband and I would not be at her Quinceaneros in May, he asked her if he could have the first dance. To the delight of all, he twirled her about the shop, a vision of lilac loveliness in his arms.

We were leaving for Canada the next day, and so after the purchase of the gown, we returned to our little casita on the beach. There Ramona and Gabriela set to in the kitchen, preparing chiles rellenos for our supper. Afterwards the four of us---Gabriela, Ramona, my spouse and I ---- walked out into the darkness onto the sand in front of our casita. We stood quietly in a circle, hands joined, gazing at the beautiful star-lit sky. We were filled with sadness and emotion at the prospect of saying good-bye for another year.

“Look at the moon,” suggested my husband. “We all see the same moon. Let's make a pact that we will all look at the moon at seven o'clock on Sunday, and know that we are thinking of each other.”

Tight hugs, tears, one last glance at the moon, and we two Canadians were alone. The four of us repeat our “looking at the moon” ritual each year and it somehow helps to diminish the distance between us.

We love Gabriela. We love Ramona. We love their many family members who have opened their homes and their hearts to us. We will be forever grateful to “Niños Adelante” for bringing Gabriela and her family closely into our lives. We have been so enriched.

But this is not an entirely happy tale. Gabriela did not succeed in school. She will never become the architect that she had hoped to be.

Towards the end of Gabi’s fifteenth year, Ramona became ill and could no longer manage the store. Gabriela had to leave school and find a job in order to support herself and Ramona. When she was sixteen, Gabriela herself was ill for many months. During that time, a much-loved aunt, who was more like a sister to Gabriela, died of leukemia at age twenty-seven. She left behind her husband (whom Gabriela called “papa” in the absence of a real father) and two young children. “Papa” went illegally to the states in hope that he would be better able to provide for his little ones. Gabriela and Ramona became the caregivers to the children.

Gabriela worked selling ceramics at a shop in town. She missed her friends at school. She missed her beloved Aunt Chana and her “Papa” Rafael. She worried about Ramona’s failing health. She was concerned for the two little ones. Her own future looked bleak. She was seventeen and the bottom was falling out of her world. She was lonely, scared, and worried.

Then along came a knight in shining armor. Gabriela was seventeen, he almost three times her age –forty-nine! She was won over by his promises, his attention, and the prospect that, with him, life would be better for herself, for Ramona, and for the children. Gabriela made a tragic mistake when, at age eighteen, she married her older suitor. She is now terribly unhappy living far from Zihuatanejo in Toluca, with a father figure she does not love. She is being ill-treated by Eduardo and his grown children, some of whom are older than Gabi. Gabriela is struggling with the concept of separation and divorce. In her culture, she would return to her family and her village “tainted” and shamed. She is between a rock and a hard place.

What will become of our Gabriela? We don’t know. What we do know is that we love her and we will support her forever in our hearts. Not every story has a happy ending, but we still hope that in the future, Gabriela’s story will. For us, she is one of the special treasures of Zihuatanejo.

Submitted by Shelagh Yarnell