



2024 SPRING NEWSLETTER

President's Column

By Tom Lindblom

The Ixtapa / Zihuatanejo economic outlook has improved. High spending international visitors are down significantly from pre-COVID, however this has been partially offset by a substantial increase in Mexican visitors. While the overall number of visitors are now close to pre-COVID numbers, local restaurants and tourism related businesses have seen reduced traffic as many of the Mexican tourists visit on package deals.

We had a fantastic turnout for the breakfasts, with just over two hundred and seventy-five students, sponsors and families attending the breakfasts. A sincere "Thank You" to those sponsors that were able to make the trip. Historically our best performing students have been those that have the highest levels of engagement with their sponsors, and the in-person events, social media, and email communications have all helped our sponsors to actively engage with their students. During the February Student/Sponsor Breakfast the attendees were able to hear from two of our scholarship recipients, with Elizabeth Molina and Francisco Martin both sharing inspiring messages.

For international visitors Mexico has become a much more expensive destination, with high inflation combined with an unfavorable exchange rate. As I write this, the Dollar to Peso rate is now \$1.00 USD to 16.77 MXN and what used to cost \$100.00 (US) in January 2022 now costs \$122.18 (US). This is a 22.2% increase in just two years.

Mexico Annual Inflation Trend			\$1 (US) to Peso (MXN) Rate (Year-End)		
\$ 100.00	\$ 107.90	\$ 113.88	20.49	16.93	16.77
	7.90%	5.54%	2021	2023	Today
Start	2022	2023			

With unfavorable exchange rates, last year the Board voted to use available funds to subsidize the 2023/2024 Becas, to avoid a reduction in the number of pesos awarded to the students. Soon the Board will have to make a difficult decision about increasing the 2024/2025 sponsor Beca contribution. With our students coming from the low end of the economic ladder, inflation is a significant impact. Most families spend a large portion of their money on food and transportation, categories that have experienced higher rates of inflation.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Tom Culligan who has retired from the Board. He served as a Board member and Treasurer for many years. Tom remains active in the organization and continues to lend his expertise and assistance. We had the good fortune to have current Board member Paul Sheahan assume the additional role of Treasurer. Paul is extremely qualified for this role, having spent many years as a partner at a global accounting firm.

Thanks again for your ongoing support and I hope to see many of you in person in Mexico next winter.

Save the Dates

- January Sponsor-Student Breakfast – Sunday, January 12, 2025
- February Sponsor-Student Breakfast – Sunday, February 9, 2025
- 2025 Benefit Dinner – Wednesday, February 12, 2025

The January and February Niños Adelante Student / Sponsor Breakfasts

The combined total of these two events amounted to slightly over 275 Sponsors, students, and family members.

February's event followed past practices, with tables for Sponsors and their students/families assembled in the Fontan Conference Center. Showcased at the event was the Friends of Niños Special Scholarship program. The eight class of 2023 high school graduates who were awarded scholarships were called to the stage and recognized for their accomplishment. It was an impressive list:

	Sponsors
Donaji Rauda Blanco	Tim and Dorothy Ellis
Edwin Geovani Nolasco de Jesus	Brian and Jan Grier
Elizabeth Molina Contreras	Jim and Molly Conahan
Emmanuel Osvaldo Bustos Sandoval	Gabriela and Russel Coolidge
Francisco Martin Rivera Salgado	Peter and Susanne Keller
Ivanna Pelaez Peñalosa	Paul Franklin and Sandy Japely
Luna Karley Vargas Benito	Barrie Smith Eddy
Ylianet Campos Llamas	Jay and Dorris Schroeder

Elizabeth Molina and Francisco Martin two of the awardees, spoke to the audience about their experience in Niños.

The following are excerpts from Francisco's message:

Good morning everyone. My name is Francisco Martín Rivera Salgado and I am currently a mechatronics student at the "Tecnológico de Monterrey". I want to express my sincerest gratitude for giving me the opportunity to be here today and share a little about my experience with "Niños Adelante".

First of all, I would like to extend my gratitude to my sponsors, Peter and Suzanne Keller, for changing my life. I also deeply appreciate "Don José" for making this opportunity possible. I am sure that all the godchildren present here are deeply grateful to all the sponsors who have contributed to making this dream a reality. Thank you very much from the bottom of our hearts!

My story with the foundation began about 7 years ago, when I least expected it. I have always been a person very focused on my studies; however, I had never considered going beyond continuing my education without a defined direction. However, upon meeting my sponsors and seeing the opportunities they offered me, everything changed. Talking to them and feeling their genuine desire to help me broaden my horizons, I glimpsed a future I had never considered. I committed myself to giving my best to excel in school and acquire all the knowledge possible.

In my last year of high school, I was presented with the opportunity to apply for a 100% scholarship covering all tuition at the "Tecnológico de Monterrey, Campus Querétaro". Thanks to my academic record and my participation in a math club in high school, I managed to obtain that scholarship. Also If it hadn't been for the foundation, I wouldn't have been able to receive the Friends of Niños Special scholarship to help with housing and food expenses while at school in another state. Now I am excited about everything I can learn and achieve. Again, I want to thank Peter and Suzanne for making this dream possible.

I understand that for many, the future can be terrifying, and I confess that it scares me too. However, I am sure that, regardless of the challenges we face, it is always worth striving and fighting for what we want. I am just starting my university journey and I know that there is still much for me to experience. But like me, all of you have people who support you, and I believe that the Niños Adelante foundation embodies that idea.

The road to success is full of obstacles, but each challenge overcome makes us stronger and brings us one step closer to our goals. May we never lack the determination to pursue our dreams and the gratitude to recognize those who help us along the way. Thank you again to everyone for your attention and have a beautiful day.

Here is Elizabeth's message:

Good morning dear students and sponsors,

First of all, I want to thank you for taking the time to be here and also, I want to thank the sponsors who provide the scholarships for university students.

This second support is a huge help for all the extra expenses we have at school but, also the support is a motivation to keep doing our best day by day. As students we commit to making the most of this opportunity, putting effort, dedication, and hard work.

In my case I am studying architecture at the Instituto Tecnológico located on the road from Zihuatanejo to Ixtapa. In my opinion this is a beautiful and creative career for which it is necessary to constantly purchase various materials. For example, in architecture we use special computers designed to run programs needed in our studies. I imagine in the same way students of dentistry, medicine and computer science also have specific tools depending on their careers. There are also those students who are studying at universities in cities away from Zihuatanejo where they have the expense of establishing living accommodations.

So, I can tell you it has been a better road for me thanks to the scholarship from Jocelyn Servick and Gary Steinhafel and the support of my sponsors Jim and Molly Conahan.

Finally in the name of all the students with special scholarships, I can mention how grateful we all are.

Here also are excerpts from the letter Elizabeth submitted last August, with her application for the Scholarship:



My name is Elizabeth Molina Contreras, I was born in Zihuatanejo, Gro. I am seventeen years old and I live with my family in the neighborhood La Joya in Zihuatanejo.

My father Eligio Molina Sánchez works in a department store called *Bodega Aurrera* where he is in charge of storing and organizing the products, and the last year he also started a small Pizza Business with my mom, Adela Contreras Fernández. The pizzas are only for home delivery in the evenings, and we prepare them at home. Some evenings and when I am on vacation, I work helping my mother to prepare them and my brother takes the orders by phone and delivers them to our neighbors. My brother, Jonathan is 5 years older than me, he is studying Architecture at University.

I'm grateful with Mr. José Bustos for giving me the opportunity of being a part of Niños Adelante since 2019. Being in Niños Adelante has changed my life, for four years I have been sponsored by Mr. Jim and Mrs. Molly Conahan, two of the best people I have ever met. Thanks to the foundation and them I have had many opportunities. One of them was

taking English lessons. The last year I got a Cambridge Certification of B1 Level in English and this year I applied for and took the B2 English Certification, which I passed. In the English classes I learnt new things that make me happy now being able to communicate better in English and manage it for reading, speaking, listening, and writing because it will help me a lot at school or in the future within a workplace.

In the foundation I also could join with my sponsors and see how they help a lot of people with the Cataract Operation Missions. I have been able to participate few times supporting them in whatever I can. They also help the children of an Orphanage in Morelia; they change people's lives and I have been one of them. They have supported me and my family a lot, and when I see them, they motivate me to keep doing my best at school and as a person.

Currently I have finished High School the last August in the school "Escuela Preparatoria no. 13", achieving an average of 9.74. At school I studied introduction to engineering and Architecture, which attracted my attention. I also could know more about it because my brother is studying it, so I decided to study Architecture at the "Instituto Tecnológico de la Costa Grande de Guerrero", located in Zihuatanejo around 40 minutes apart from my home. I enjoy watching series, listening to music, cooking deserts, drawing, but also to create or design new things and math. Architecture is a career in which I can apply it. My dream is to achieve my degree, and then become one of the bests architects.

Kind regards, Eli

The following are several photos from the February Student/Sponsor Breakfast event



January's Breakfast, which included close to 70 total Students, Family, and Sponsors, was held at a venue more suitable to the number of participants, the Fontan's Hacienda Restaurant. The following are photos of that gathering.





Our 2024 Benefit Dinner

Close to 50 guests enjoyed a wonderful meal, good conversation, and a very pleasant evening next to the pool at the Pacifica Club's Ixtapa Spa facility. All of this to the background sounds of a very mellow saxophone. This event is one of two annual fund raisers that provide funds to help with expenses of the Niños Zihua office. Rent, internet connection, banking, accounting services, admin services, eyeglasses for the students in need and limited dental work.

Here are a few photos from the Benefit Dinner event:





Capping this year's February events was Jose's appreciation party

Once again Jose and his family showcased their culinary skills and amazing home site to treat 40 guests to Jose's annual luncheon. Jose, Ana, their children, and relatives cooked and served a superb salad followed by an entree featuring grilled fresh caught mahi mahi that brought comments of delight from all guests.





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