

SEPA ANNUAL MEETING
Chairman's Report
March 1, 2012 to February 28, 2013

I am happy to report that SEPA has spent a very busy, productive year. SEPA's Board members this year have demonstrated lots of terrific energy, knowledge, skill, and experience. We have faced a number of challenges and emerged stronger than ever. If you look at the Summary Account page, the difference between the expected income and actual income tells the story. We earned, in response to growing needs, slightly over \$12,500 more than we thought we would. So we have a story to tell.

As many of you know, the Santa Elena Project of Accompaniment (that is, SEPA) is a coalition of individuals, churches, and organizations in Oberlin and northeastern Ohio who support human rights workers in Guatemala and are building committed relationships with two indigenous returned refugee villages in northwestern Guatemala. SEPA's mission is to support human rights workers in Guatemala as well as assist with educational scholarships, teacher salaries, and needs as requested in the villages of Santa Elena Veinte de Octubre and Copal AA La Esperanza. We understand that access to quality education is a vital foundation for achievement of basic human rights.

The final three months of our support for accompanier, Viviana Gentry, extended into this fiscal year. In June, we began to support a very impressive human rights witness, Erik Woodward. Erik was asked to continue to work with NISGUA during the genocide trial of Rios Mont that begins in 3 days on March 19. The danger to witnesses and their need for accompaniment is very high now and Erik's experience is needed. We found the additional funds to continue to support him.

Meanwhile, back in September, the Education Committee at Santa Elena submitted a \$12,000 request for scholarships, almost double the previous year's \$7,500 donation. Santa Elena did experience a baby boom over 10 years ago when the community was new but seemed comfortably settled. Related families are also moving there.

Partly because of the size of this request, we created a new Fund Raising Committee, naming Sue Simonson, Mary Anne Cunningham, Judy Kruger, and Lori Taylor as the first members. In collaboration with our hard working Treasurer, Bill Fuchsman, this group has been very successful. Procedures and record keeping have been tightened up, while our annual fund drive was a great success. Our Web-mistress and newsletter editor, Sue Simonson, has published 5 newsletters and kept the Website wonderfully up-to-date. We have produced a new brochure.

Two opportunities were pursued for the first time. A group met privately with donor John Caveny, who generously donated three \$500 scholarships for students from the Copal AA Middle School to continue in high school. SEPA also received an honorable mention (\$100) from The Catholic Campaign for Human Development for the David F. Fallon Peace and Justice Awards. Oberlin's Sacred Heart Parish School of Religion accepted the Youth Recognition Award for their work to help build a new Catholic church in Santa Elena. Their 250 prize was contributed by the students to the Santa Elena Scholarship Fund.

Altogether, over the year, we held two fund-raising dinners (one in April and the most recent in February). In September, we held our first Appreciation Dinner at Common Ground for SEPA's donors and volunteers. The after-dinner speaker was Viviana Gentry who shared powerful stories about her work as a human rights accompanier. Viviana, a recent graduate of Oberlin College, also gave a talk at Oberlin College. All three dinners and Viviana's talks were smash hits.

Our work to run a booth at the Oberlin Farmers' Market, the new Indoor Eastwood Market, and the Alternative Gift Fair has also provided an important source of income. In December we also participated in a Peace Potluck "Fair Trade Market" at Peace Community Church,

John Gates and Bill Fuchsman organized two delegations to Guatemala. The summer delegation turned out to be small, John and Betsy Bruce, went for two weeks. The big news from Santa Elena was that the community was getting an all-weather road. An Israeli construction company, Solel Boneh, did build the all-weather road from the existing all-weather dirt road at the entrance to Santa Elena into the center of the community, a distance of two miles, and then on to the river Chixoy, a distance of about one mile. The company built this road in exchange for getting access to the thousands of tons of rock on the banks of the river. They will use this rock for a larger road construction project, which will improve the present east-west dirt road into a paved two-lane highway. No money changed hands. The people of Santa Elena are ecstatic about the road!

The summer delegation was also very helpful in preparation for January. John laid big plans for the Winter Term delegation. Instead of starting the month in a Xela-area language school, the 8 Oberlin College students, John, Mary McDaniel, and translators Barbara Sawhill and later Rob Motley, went directly to Santa Elena. The delegation paid for room and board, the teachers who taught Spanish and Kekchi for one week, a community picnic at the national park Laguna Lachua, and the costumes needed to produce a traditional, 500 year old Mayan Dance of the Deer. The community donated other activities such as information about traditional medicine. This brand new effort was successful, benefiting everyone involved. In John's opinion this longer stay in the two communities made it possible for the members of this delegation to better understand the challenges of life in rural Mayan communities and possibly to form a stronger identity with the two communities.

The Winter Term delegation also began work on an oral history project. The first histories will be shared with us after this business meeting.

In addition to supplementing salaries of the two teachers in Santa Elena, SEPA supported teachers in Copal AA for two months. In addition, SEPA also funded some small projects in both communities. For example, when Santa Elena celebrated the 15th anniversary of their founding, the Youth Committee raised \$453 for the fiesta and asked us to contribute \$391, which we did. Copal AA asked us to contribute \$1,134, one half the fee required by the government to certify that students had passed the keyboard typing requirement.

Finally, SEPA agreed to take on "Mi Casita Montessori School" in Xelaju, Guatemala, as a Special Project where we handle contributions to the school. Maggie Paulin, in return, has been helping with SEPA's work here in Oberlin. She has a short report for us this afternoon.

SEPA's Financial Report

	Budget 3/12-2/13	Actual 3/12-2/13	Budget 3/13-2/14
Income	\$28,815	\$41,322	\$31,368
Expense	\$28,700	\$40,454	\$31,200