

i Que Sepan!



(That you all know, find out!) Volume 18 Number 2 –December 2010

Newsletter of the Santa Elena Project of Accompaniment (SEPA)

The following report describes plans for SEPA's annual January delegation to the returned refugee villages of Santa Elena and Copal AA and to the village of Pachaj, the site of the Chico Mendes reforestation project. The author John Gates is the director of the delegation of Oberlin College students. His comments are informed by many trips to the villages, including the August 2010 trip that he and Bill Fuchsman made.

Preparing for the January 2011 Oberlin College Delegation to Guatemala

I am constantly learning new things about Guatemala. I just learned that the northern part of Guatemala known as the Petén, together with the southern part of Mexico and the country of Belize, forms the largest area of rainforest north of the Amazon. A more disconcerting piece of information that I recently learned concerns deforestation in Guatemala. In 1960 77% of land in Guatemala had some forest cover. To-



Preparing to plant thousands of tree seedlings. The person in the picture is Armando Lopez.

day that figure is between 27% and 42%. If deforestation continues at this rate (600 square miles per year), all of the forest cover will be gone in twenty-five years. With the loss of the forest cover, erosion and leaching of the soil will accelerate, thereby decreasing agricultural productivity and endangering the sources of potable water. Thus it is with certain

NEWS FROM GUATEMALA

HUNDREDS DEMONSTRATE TO ELIMINATE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Women often face unique challenges and forms of violence with the implementation of large-scale development projects like the Marlin mine. In spite of the difficulties, women are resisting by advocating for access to water, participating in community referendums to demand respect for the rights of indigenous peoples, and seeking new forms of healing in the face of trauma. On November 25, hundreds gathered in Guatemala City for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women to publicly demand an end to all forms of violence against women. Some groups emphasized the rising femicides, others the particular forms of violence faced by indigenous women. All, however, demanded an end to all forms of violence against women: psychological, physical, economic, cultural, political, ideological, sexual and biological.

"They didn't kill me for being a narco. They killed me for being a woman."

Taken from the NISGUA Website

www.nisgua.blogspot.com/

(Continued from page 1)

feelings of hope, excitement, and energy that I realize that SEPA has been working with the Chico Mendes reforestation project in Pachaj, Quetzaltenango for three years.

The Chico Mendes reforestation project.

The director of this project, Armando Lopez, has a goal of planting 100,000 trees in the next five years. These trees are slow growing pine and cedar trees whose purpose is to stabilize the soil, endangered pinobete trees, and the relatively fast growing alder whose purpose is to improve the soil and then to provide firewood for the people. For the past three years the SEPA-sponsored Oberlin College Winter Term project has traveled to Pachaj to help with the reforestation work. For one week ten students will plant 3 inch tree seedlings in plastic bags of rich forest soil and remove weeds from bags of tree seedlings that have been planted prior to our arrival. When the seedlings have reached a height of about 30 inches and the rainy season has begun (usually at the beginning of May) the seedlings



An Oberlin group dressed in Mayan dress as part of a graduation ceremony to celebrate the completion of Spanish classes.

will be transplanted to the surrounding mountains by other volunteer groups. The mountains where the seedlings are to be planted are communal lands owned by the village of Pachaj, a community of 3,000 people, and the larger governing unit of Cantel, a municipality encompassing many communities. The mountains are the source of potable water for this area. Armando Lopez knows that deforestation of the mountains

would bring soil erosion, leaching, and water pollution, and also a strong possibility that the national government would expropriate the communal lands and privatize the production and selling of water to the residents of the community. We in SEPA hope that by working with the Chico Mendes project, we can help prevent such an occurrence.

In Oberlin we raise funds for the reforestation project by selling T-shirts with a design honoring the Chico Mendes project.

Copal AA La Esperanza. Copal AA will be the second indigenous community that the Oberlin College delegation will visit in January of 2011. Copal AA, a community of about 800 people, is comprised of three linguistic/cultural Mayan groups: Mam, Q'anjob'al, and Q'eqchi'. From Copal AA's weaving cooperative of forty families SEPA buys the hand-woven bags, table runners, and scarves that we sell in Oberlin. The proceeds of these items are currently converted into salaries for teachers in the Copal AA middle school, which serves both Copal AA and the surrounding community and which is entirely funded with private money. The community had requested that the government fund a middle school in this area but the government so far has refused. In 2010 SEPA paid the salaries for two of three middle school teachers for five months. Other U. S. groups provided the remainder of the salaries for the two teachers, and the American Jewish World Service



An Oberlin College group teaching English to the students in Santa Elena.

funded the full salary for the third teacher.

During 2010 the leaders of the middle

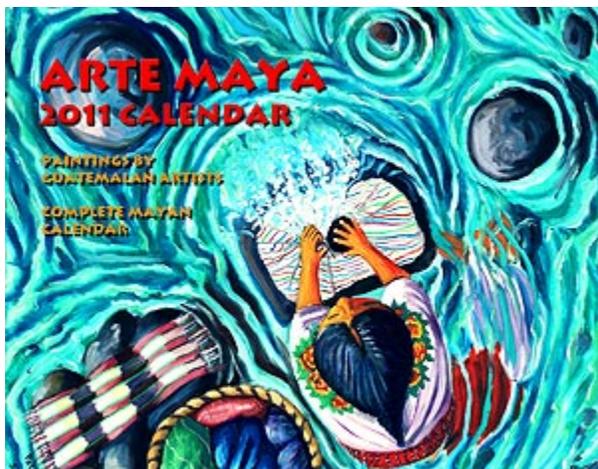
school were successful in attracting a major grant from the European Union that funded a large solar panel now in use to power seven computers, a printer, a scanner, and accessibility to the Worldwide Web. This phenomenon occurs in a community that otherwise does not have electricity, except for a few small solar panels that power low wattage indoor lights. In Copal AA the Oberlin College students will work with middle school students, teaching English and conducting some mini-lessons in chemistry, math, and physics.

Santa Elena Veinte de Octubre.

Santa Elena, with a population of about 300 people, is almost exclusively a Q'eqchi' linguistic/cultural community. SEPA has been working with Santa Elena since 1997. Santa Elena has a government-supported elementary school, whose two teachers have their salaries supplemented by SEPA. (Until 2009 SEPA paid their entire salaries, but since the newly achieved government salaries are less than what SEPA had been paying, SEPA has been providing the differences as supplements.) SEPA has provided on average fifteen scholarships a year since 2000 for Santa Elena students who must leave the village to continue their education beyond grade 6. The average yearly cost for a middle school student is about \$300 and

for a high school student is about \$500. In this community Oberlin College students will teach English to the elementary school students, grades K-6. We will teach basic conversation, the alphabet, numbers, colors, the family, animals, days of the week, and food. Much of our teaching will use songs and music.

A major barrier to successful and sustainable development in Santa Elena continues to be a very inadequate, two-mile road into the community from the nearest all-weather road. Creation of adequate all-weather roads for all communities of returned refugees was one of the many unfulfilled provisions of the 1996 peace accords between the then Guatemalan refugees and the government. Completion of an all-weather road into Santa Elena would require hundreds, perhaps thousands, of tons of rock to provide a solid base, along with the construction of two small bridges and the installation of a drainage system for five low wet places. Neither Santa Elena nor SEPA has the resources to fund such a project, but nevertheless it is sorely needed. Without an all-weather road it is very cumbersome and labor intensive to transport produce and animals from Santa Elena to market and to return with items that cannot be procured in Santa Elena (such as cinder blocks, sand, cement, and lumber).



2011 Guatemala Arte Maya Calendars

Beauty for justice, art for peace!

Our bright and brilliant Arte Maya 2011 calendars allow you to **support social change while enjoying original works of art** by Guatemalan artists from the Lake Atitlan area. **They make great gifts!**

With your calendar purchase, you

support:

- the international human rights work of SEPA and NISGUA.
- the Maya artists who paint the pictures.
- the union workers who print the calendars.

CALENDARS ARE AVAILABLE FROM SEPA.

CONTACT: BARBARA & BILL FUCHSMAN AT 774-1804

Each calendar, printed in both English and Spanish, features:

- 12 paintings in the distinctive, colorful style developed by the indigenous artists near Lake Atitlan.
- Biographies of each contributing artist and an explanation of each painting.
- U.S. and Guatemalan holidays
- Maya logographs signifying each day's place on the Maya calendar.

A brief guide to this intricate system is included at the beginning of the calendar.



SEPA – THE SANTA ELENA PROJECT OF ACCOMPANIMENT

I would like to help continue SEPA's good work by contributing: \$

Donations are always appreciated. There is no amount too large or too small.

If you make a contribution, please return this coupon with your contribution, to help with our record keeping. For your contribution to be tax-deductible, make checks out to the Peace Community Church of Oberlin (our fiscal agent). Be sure to put SEPA on the lower left of the check. Send contributions to SEPA's treasurer William Fuchsman, 192 Forest St., Oberlin, OH 44074.