

Summary of Mission Trip to San Jose Villaneuva, El Salvador
November 14-30, 2010

First and foremost I would like to thank Doug Champ and Bob French (the project leaders) for the opportunity to join this team. Both Doug and Bob are members of the Rotary Club of North Renfrew (Ontario, Canada) and are the principal drivers behind the ongoing success of this project. To quote Bob: "I marvel at how well 10 individuals became an effective team in achieving our goal of 2 completed homes. Each person brought a different perspective to the work and together the successful outcome was a TEAM effort. In addition, the fellowship we shared, the partnership with Epilogos, the warmth of the people of SJV and the tears of joy and hugs of the families receiving the homes will be cherished for a life-time."

Donna & I learned a lot about El Salvador, SJV, Rotary projects, and Canadians. We particularly enjoyed the fellowship with the team. It was a fantastic experience for us and we look forward to doing it again in the future.

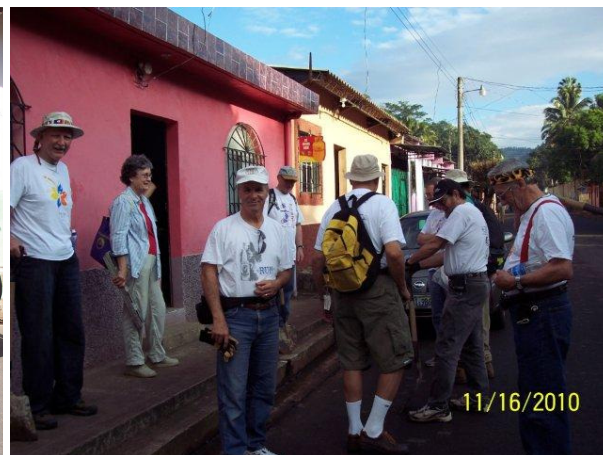
Members of the team included: Doug Champ, Bob French, Charlene Brennan, Greg Csullog, & Paul Tremblay from the Rotary Club of North Renfrew (District 7040); John Escott from the Rotary Club of Pembroke (District 7040); Bob & Nan Bruce from the Rotary Club of Waterdown (District 7090) and Carey & Donna Beamesderfer from the Rotary Club of West El Paso (District 5520). Each member of the team donated \$500. for the mission and the Waterdown and North Renfrew Clubs each donated \$1000 for the house construction. The average age of the team members was about 68.

The Project:

The project was located in the village of San Jose Villanueva which is approximately 50 miles south west of the airport in San Salvador. Our flight to San Salvador was uneventful and we landed safely at approximately 2:30pm. We met Doug Champ, who had flown here a week earlier to do some advance preparation for the team visit. After the Canadian group arrived on a different flight, we all loaded our luggage onto a large van and proceeded to drive to the SJV village. (Note: Each team member had previously collected about 100 lbs of clothing, medical supplies and other items for the SJV community to be donated. As such there was a total of 18 large suitcases/duffle bags as well as small carry-on bags and 10 passengers to load into one van.) We arrived at our "home away from home" late that afternoon.



Our Van



Our new home - The Pink House

Upon arrival we were introduced to Mike & Susie Jenkins, the on-site mission hosts who represent the Epilogos organization (www.Epilogos.org). They are former Peace Corp volunteers who were originally stationed and trained in SJV in the 1960's. Since 2002, Susie and Mike have lived in San Jose Villanueva. Together, through Epilogos Charities, they have guided hundreds of other volunteers in providing the people of San Jose Villanueva the health care, education, housing, and work skills that are making a true difference in their lives. Susie left for a visit to her family in New Hampshire shortly after we arrived, so Mike served as our host for the next two weeks. We had excellent food, served by our cook, Anna, as well as daily laundry service. All meals were served at Mike's home which was a short distance up the street from the volunteer house. The food was primarily traditional El Salvadoran dishes with lots of beans, rice and tortillas with splashes of American/Canadian cuisine.



Our mealtime headquarters



Anna - Our cook

The volunteer house was a communal living experience with very basic accommodations. Team members sleep on bunk beds and share two cold showers and flush toilets. We had to dispose of toilet paper in trash cans rather than flush it down the toilet. Sheets and towels were provided to us. Local water is not potable, however bottled water was provided by Epilogos. The entire area is very noisy filled with the sounds of roosters, trucks, cows, and chickens. To top it off we were there during their festival season so we were subjected to parades at 4:30 am and fireworks 24 hours /day for most of the two week period. After a while the noise became part of the experience and we were all typically so exhausted at the end of each work day that we slept without too much trouble.



One of the rooms with bunk beds



Basin to wash face & brush teeth.

The US dollar is the local currency, and the population of the village was approximately 14,000. Spanish is the native language but very few people speak English. The temperature was a fairly constant 80 degrees with 85% humidity. The roads and basic infrastructure is poor. Dogs, cows, chickens, cars, trucks, carts, buses and locals all share the same pathways. The local cemetery is very colorful with most graves highly decorated and above ground.



Showers/Toilets - Green and Pink doors



Local farmers on the road



Woman carrying load on her head



Cemetery

The goal of the project was to construct two cement slab homes in the two week period. The first home was for Roxana Rodriguez/Rene Cordero and the second for Blanco Enrique. Both homes were completed on time and within budget. A local tradesman (Chepe) provided on-site leadership for the construction and local students assisted at various times as part of their school community service requirement. We got to know two of them well - Karla and Alex who spent many work hours with us. The recipients of the houses worked to prepare the sites prior to our arrival and also assisted the team during the construction phase. One of our team members - Paul Trambly was an experienced mason and provided technical expertise throughout the fabrication process. He even designed and donated a tri-pod to lift the 42 lb blocks into place. All cement mixing was done by hand as was all the block "pointing" and lifting of all the posts and blocks within the site as construction progressed. Each member of the team walked about 3/4 mile to the job site every morning, then back again at lunch time and the end of the work day. We each carried work gloves, water and our cameras to the job site. Basic tools, such as shovels and wheelbarrows were provided by Epilogos. Construction materials were delivered to the job site by local vendors and roof installation was done by local trades people. The next two pages show construction activity as it progressed for both houses.



Roxana Rodriguez/Rene Cordero Family - House #1



Blanca Enrique Family - House #2

On several occasions we had an opportunity to visit other parts of the village. We went to the medical/dental clinic to donate the medical supplies that several members of the team brought with them. We met Dr. Fernando Gochez who gave us a tour of the facility. There were about 75 patients waiting for treatment at the time we were there. Many are treated for diarrhea and related water borne illnesses. Others are there for child birth, immunizations, minor accidents and dentistry. There is a small pharmacy, the clinic is functional, and Dr. Gochez is very proud of the progress he is making; however there is a need for furniture, computers and donated medical/dental supplies to continue the work.



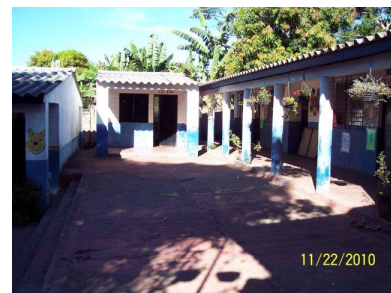
We also had an opportunity to visit the Kinder school for children (up to age 6). The most urgent need is to repair/replace a large retaining wall on the one side of the facility. During the rainy season some of the classrooms get flooded with water and mud. They also need a roof over the open courtyard so there is a place for the kids to play when it rains.



School Classroom Entrance



Damaged Retaining Wall



Courtyard needing a roof

There is a very successful local Market Gardener who grows about 15 different types of vegetables and a half dozen fruits. His name is Israel. On a previous visit, Doug Champ and others worked with Israel to start the garden and Doug worked with him the week prior to our team's arrival, to install a drip irrigation system.



Israel proudly shows off his vegetables



Black tubes on the ground are Drip Irrigation



Maze (Corn)



Bananas

Israel has a very strong work ethic and has tripled the size of his garden in one year. Business is good. He and his family were one of the first to receive a home built in conjunction with the Epilogos charity. They also have a composting toilet and both the home and outhouse are well maintained.



Israel's Home

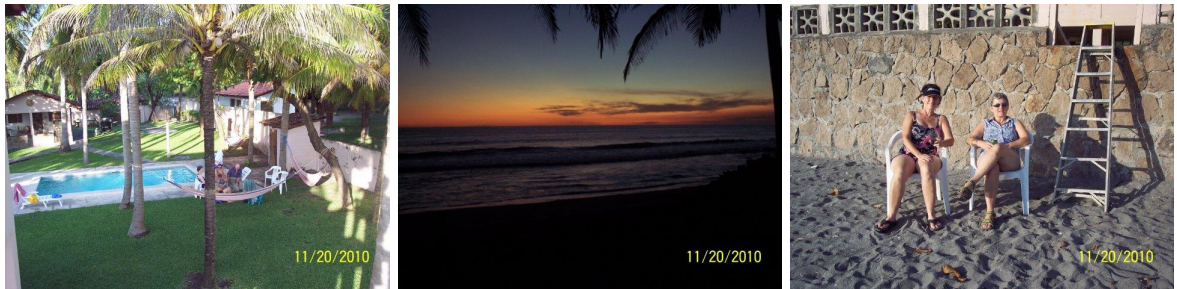


Composting Toilet/Outhouse

In another part of the town there is a need for a water project. The Santa Maria Dos neighborhood needs a water system to supply water to the 93 homes in this area. Doug has outlined a set of specific parameters that must be met for the project to proceed. The water is supplied from a nearby creek which is used by the residents for daily water needs as well as washing their laundry. There is a need for a specialist in water and sanitation engineering to review the site and help develop the plan to make this a reality.



When the weekend finally rolled around we had a chance to visit the beach. We stayed at a resort home of a friend of Epilogos Mike. It was wonderful to have an opportunity to sit and relax, walk on the beach, swim in a pool and lay in a hammock as we watched the sunset over the Pacific ocean.



The following weekend we visited the San Salvador Anthropology Museum, an art gallery and a local shopping market. On Sunday we were taken to the La Libertad fishing pier. This is a fish market like no other. Later that afternoon we ate dinner at a restaurant on the beach.



Museum of Anthropology in San Salvador



The Fish Market (All of the 9 pictures above)



Lunch on the beach near the pier

As I mentioned earlier, we were in SJV during the height of their festival season to honor their patron saint San Jose. This involved shooting fireworks off day and night for about 8 days, as well as parades at 4:30 am and 4:00 pm. for three days straight; and a massive village-wide carnival complete with food vendors, amusement rides, loud music, festival hats/costumes, and a 30 minute, non-stop fireworks display. They even had a ferris wheel that spun so fast it was a wonder it didn't physically eject any of the riders. Our group stuck out like a sore thumb, a bunch of North Americans wondering around among thousands of locals. But it was fun!!



Its Carnival Time

So why go to El Salvador? Most people think about the bloody civil war which claimed the lives of thousands of El Salvadorans; erupting volcanoes which caused millions of dollars in damage; violent street gangs; long lines of refugees, etc; but what they don't talk about is that the civil war ended in 1992; the broad valleys and rolling jungles, the black sand beaches and world class surfing are spectacular; and there are more tourists robbed in Mexico and Costa Rica then here. The warm, friendly, hardworking people are this country's greatest asset. Their literacy rate is above 80% of the population and education is a very important part of their culture. The bean and cheese pupusa's are delicious and a bottle of beer is typically less than a dollar. \$30 pays for a month of bus rides for a student to ride from SJV to the big city of San Salvador and you can sponsor and help educate a primary school student for only \$180/year.

This was an experience of a lifetime, one which every Rotarian who lives by the motto "Service Above Self" should do. Come here and meet the people, listen to their story, learn their language and most of all

enjoy their culture. There is a lot you can do to serve humanity. Step up to the challenge and make it happen. --- Here are a few parting pictures which best describe the fifth part of the Rotary "4-Way Test." --- Was it fun??

