

Summary of Mission Trip to Bolivia - (July 16-24, 2018)
Author: Carey Beamesderfer – Rotary Club of West El Paso

I would like to thank Bob Reid and Ximena Murillo, the mission and team leaders, for the opportunity to be part of this outstanding project. Bob Reid, PhD is a member of the Rotary Club of Hobbs, New Mexico, the CEO of a major Foundation, and a well-respected community & international leader. Ximena Murillo is the President of United4Change and the primary driving force behind this incredibly successful project - Empowering Impoverished Women in Mining Communities of Bolivia.

The principle purpose of this trip was philanthropic, but we were also provided an opportunity to see and learn about Bolivia, its people and culture, and to explore various tourist attractions within the country. Bolivia is a beautiful, geographically diverse, multiethnic, and democratic country in the heart of South America. It is surrounded by Brazil to the northeast, Peru to the northwest, Chile to the southwest, Argentina and Paraguay to the south. It shares with Peru control of Lake Titicaca, the world's highest navigable lake (elevation 12,485 ft.).



Sometimes referred to as the Tibet of the Americas, Bolivia is one of the most "remote" countries in the western hemisphere; except for the navigable Paraguay River stretching to the distant Atlantic, Bolivia and Paraguay are the only two landlocked nations in the Americas. It is also the most indigenous country in the Americas, with 60% of its population being of pure Native American ancestry.



United4Change is a non-profit organization that creates opportunities for vulnerable populations, especially women through improved literacy, a better understanding to access and utilize healthcare resources, and economic empowerment. U4C specializes in serving people and communities who have suffered extreme, sustained and multigenerational poverty. The primary focus of their work is in isolated and remote communities which have little or no access to education, healthcare or economic opportunity.

Members of our team, in addition to Bob Reid and Ximena Murillo, included Carey Beamesderfer & Doug Borrett from the Rotary Club of West El Paso; Carey's daughter – Audrey Buglione – an attorney from the Philadelphia School District; David Sadler – a member of the Hobbs Rotary Club and professional sculptor/business owner; Dr. Del Endres – a retired family practice physician from the Taos Milagro Rotary Club; Pete Sheehey – a retired scientist from the Los Alamos National Lab, and his wife, Naishing Key – a licensed mental health counselor and social worker. Each member of the team paid for their own travel expenses, including a visa, flights, room and board, etc. for the eight days of the mission, and volunteered their time to work on the project.

The Bolivia team, located in LaPaz, included Carla Murillo (Ximena's sister) – a consulting economist and one of the founders of U4C; Sonia Murillo (another sister) – U4C's medical director and a member of the Hobbs Rotary Club; Víctor Hugo García M. Carvallo – U4C's Director of Bolivian Programs; Hernan Vera (alias Nacho) – a former Rotary District Governor in Bolivia; and Ivan Murillo – Carla's son.



Our team – David, Carey, Carla, Audrey, Nacho, Bob, Sonia, (the Mayor of Quime in the middle) then Ximena, Pete, Naishing, Doug, Del & Ivan.



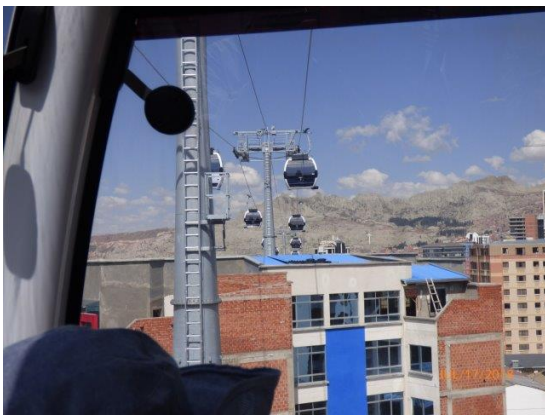
Rotary



PEOPLE of ACTION

The Rotary Global Grant sponsors included the following US based Rotary Clubs from Districts 5520 and 5730. - Hobbs, Lovington, Carlsbad, East Odessa, West El Paso, Albuquerque, Los Alamos, Roswell, Santa Fe, & the Rotary Club of San Jorge – Bolivia. It also included the Southeast New Mexico Cycling Club and five (5) individual donors.

The Trip: Team members arrived by air to El Alto International airport in LaPaz on various days and at various times of the day or night. At an altitude of 13,325 ft it is the highest international airport and the fifth highest commercial airport in the world. Doug & I arrived on Tuesday morning, July 17 at 3:30am. Our luggage didn't catch up to us until the next day. We were met and greeted with smiles and passion by several members of the Bolivian team and escorted, by van, to the Castellon hotel in downtown LaPaz. We spent most of Tuesday acclimating to the climate and high altitude. At lunch time we had our first opportunity to ride the **LaPaz Teleferico** (*an aerial cable car urban transit system serving the La Paz–El Alto metropolitan area in Bolivia. As of July 2018, the system consists of 22 stations along seven lines: Red, Yellow, Green, Blue, Orange, White, and Sky Blue. Another four lines are in planning for construction: Purple, Brown, Silver, and Gold*) to a local restaurant where we spent some time to get to know each other while enjoying our meal.



Riding the Teleferico to lunch



Lunch in a local restaurant in LaPaz

We spent the afternoon walking around the area near the hotel as we continued to acclimate to the altitude. That evening we were taken to Roxi's restaurant, a favorite café/night spot for the locals, where we were introduced to the project scope and completed our orientation .

Day 2 – Wednesday, July 18 – After breakfast we boarded the van (2 vans) and began our trip to Quime - a small town in the LaPaz Department at the Khatu river. It is in a deep forested valley surrounded by high peaks of the Andes. The region is one of the steepest in the Bolivian Andes and the center of biodiversity of both Andean Bolivia and South America. The population is about 10,000, with 3,000 living in the town and the rest in 31 indigenous Aimara communities scattered over a small area. The drive included a stop in El Alto, a municipality at 13,615 ft. and the second largest city in Bolivia where we met a group of women who make Alpaca products. The leaders of this microenterprise have graduated from U4C's training programs. We spent about 1-1/2 hours at this site, meeting the women, learning about their business, and enjoying a traditional Bolivia lunchtime meal with them. *See photos on the next page.*



Map of the LaPaz – Quime area



Women’s Microenterprise in El Alto

After lunch we were on our way to Quime, a four hour drive from El Alto, over the Andes mountains. Our drivers made time for a photo stop near the top of the mountain. It was a beautiful, sunny day, perfect for taking pictures.



Carey – Audrey – Doug in the Andes Mountains



We drove past a herd of llamas along the way

Our arrival in Quime was nothing less than spectacular. The people of the town greeted us with smiles, hugs and flowered necklaces, then powdered us with confetti on our heads, neck, shoulders; physically removing our caps and dosing our hair with an abundance of the multi-colored confetti. After things settled down we were escorted into a room in a building near the plaza and center of town to more formally meet the mayor and residents of the town. Many people on both sides of the table gave speeches and shared poems and stories about the project. Cameras were everywhere, and our team was enjoying every minute of it. It was one of the most amazing and delightful greeting experience I’ve ever been part of. *See next page.*



Entering the town of Quime



Meeting the town's people for the first time



All smiles after the initial warm greeting



Our team as we prepare to formally meet



Audrey with one of the family members



Doug & Carey in front of the town's banner

After the ceremony we walked to our hotel (The Rosa Alvina) to rest for the night.

Day 3 – Thursday, July 19 – After breakfast we all walked (downhill) to the “Training & Production Center” building for the inauguration and presentation by the graduates of U4C’s Education & Health Program. The mayor spoke, as did several others, including one of the graduates who recently learned to read. She stood up and boldly read to the entire assembly at

the meeting, providing one of many success stories surrounding this U4C project. Several members of our team also spoke to introduce themselves and why they were in Quime. After the formal meeting, we were each assigned a Workgroup and promptly went about our tasks. Doug & I prepared about 150 sandwiches and later had an opportunity to meet the community by handing out lunch to each of them individually. Audrey & Naishing were assigned to work with the kids, while David, Pete, Nacho, Ivan, Victor, & others began work on the mural. Eventually Doug & I joined the group on the mural painting and helped put paint on the hands of the women and children. (It was fun.) Del joined us after lunch and began working with Sonia on the medical challenges facing the community.



Walking downhill to the Center



Audrey having fun with the kids



Doug making sandwiches for lunch



Doug handing out lunch



The mural team starting work



Naishing with the kids



Pete & David making preparations



Doug & Carey painting hands



Hey – This is FUN !

Later that morning Doug, Carey, Victor & Nacho began work on a room partition, with help from one of the local tradesmen. The “wall” was completed in the afternoon and coated with varnish the next day. *(Special thanks goes to Doug for finding tools, paint brushes & varnish.)*



The “wall” - by Doug, Freddie (our van driver), local tradesmen, Carey & Victor – Wow !! - What a team.

The rest of the team continued to work on the mural for the balance of the day we all posed for a group photo before leaving the “Center” for the night.



A “work in progress.” More to come. Thanks to our incredible team.

Day 4 – Friday, July 20 - After breakfast we began our journey to Camillaya – a small mining community where U4C has worked with the residents to construct and furnish a health center. The 30 minute drive on the road to Camillaya can best be described as “scary” or even “OMG”, but we made it, thanks to the expert driving skills of Freddie. Those of us who were riding on the side of the vehicle facing the cliffs took pictures as the adventure continued. Upon our arrival in Camillaya we were greeted by the people of the town, who adorned us with hugs, smiles and beautiful homemade flower leis similar to those you would expect to see in a Hawaiian luau, and, of course, with confetti – lots and lots of confetti.



On the road from Quime to Camillaya



Multiple cliffhangers along the way



Arrival in Camillaya



Meeting the people



Honoring the team



Victor, Ximena, Carla & Sonia



Walking to the Health Center



Health Center Dr. with Mayor

Some of the equipment in the Health Center was provided by Rotary through an earlier grant.



One of the homes on the side of the mountain



Dad & Daughter hangin-out together



Lunch is served



The mayor looks hungry



The cooks – the food was excellent

After lunch (our first lunch that day) we returned to Quime, on the same road – with the same scary curves while trying to pass a very large bus on the one lane dirt road facing a very steep cliff. There was “never a doubt” in my mind that our driver would get us home – and of course, he did. **Thank you Freddie !!**

On the way back to Quime we stopped at the Quime Medical Center for our 2nd lunch. That’s right we had two lunches on this day. Both were excellent. This one was cooked underground in a pit (a common, but unique, cooking process in Bolivia) and it was delicious.



Underground pit barbeque



Ready to be served



A meal fit for royalty

Bolivians have a talent for making you feel at home. The pace may be slower, but the family comes first. People who arrive late for events (they waited for us to arrive) are always forgiven. The person is more important than the work. They work very hard and always make you feel welcomed. This was a wonderful gathering of locals, medical professionals, and our team and we all had a chance to relax and chill for a while.



After lunch we headed back to the Center to continue our work. After varnishing the “wall” we all worked on the mural until late in the afternoon. Everyone participated and good progress was made toward its completion. As daylight began to fade we were all given the opportunity to visit a local family in need of our support. Audrey & I (Carey) accompanied Ximena & Bob to the home of a very poor elderly lady (age 90-100 years) who lives alone at the top of a very steep hill. She was very lonely and welcomed our visit with open arms. She suffered from eye cancer that has scarred on the right side of her face. That didn’t stop us from giving her hugs and comfort while we watched her chew the coca leaves we brought with us. I’ve been to over 90 countries in my travels around the world, but I have never seen this degree of poverty coupled with the strength and courage this woman showed to persist under these conditions. I didn’t feel comfortable taking any pictures of her and her home, but she tended a small group of pigs and chickens, so I took their picture. See below.



Bolivia is one of the poorest countries in Latin America. **Poverty** affects the quality of life of the majority of the population. 60% of Bolivians live below the poverty line. In rural areas like this, the numbers are even more dramatic. Three out of every four people living in these areas suffer from poverty. A disproportionate majority of them are women and the women here have fewer resources to deal with sustained, intergenerational extreme poverty. This project is working to break that cycle.

Day 5 – Saturday, July 21 – The morning began in the pouring rain. Freddie, our van driver, was asking for help to change a flat tire on the van. Several of us helped as the rain hindered the process. Eventually we were able to jack up the van high enough, dig out under the tire, and change the flat with the spare. After that we headed back to the “Center” to finish the mural.



Freddie changing the tire on the van Our mural model – Ximena – modeled as the girl in the red pants

After a scrumptious, well-prepared lunch at our hotel we were packed and ready to travel over the snowy Andes mountains (16,000+ ft.) back to LaPaz. Conditions for driving could not have been much worse, rain, sleet, snow and wet roads, but nothing could stop us from moving forward. Slow, but steady – Freddie came through for us again.



The snowy road over the mountain back to LaPaz

Some incredible scenery along the way



We stopped at a nice restaurant on the way back to LaPaz



Day 6 – Sunday, July 22 – Our hotel (Castellon) didn't serve breakfast on a Sunday, so Carla & Sonia were kind enough to bring breakfast (empanadas) to us this morning that Bob Reid paid for. An empanada is a type of pasty baked or fried in many countries of the Americas and in Spain. The name comes from the Spanish verb empanar, meaning to wrap or coat in bread. We had a choice of either cheese or chicken. Both were great.



David, Pete & Doug enjoying their breakfast of empanadas

This morning we toured the city of LaPaz on a double-decker Tour Bus, stopping for pictures at the top of the mountain. Located atop a steep hill in the neighborhood of Villa Pabon sits one of La Paz's most impressive viewpoints, Mirador Killi Killi. The mirador, which I understand is named after a small bird of prey that flourished in the area, provides sweeping views over the sprawling city, with a viewing range of almost 360 degrees. From the lookout, visitors can see La Paz's most prominent buildings with the permanently snow-capped Illimani mountain (over 21,000 ft) providing a striking backdrop to the city.



Panoramic photo from the Mirador Killi Killi viewing point. The Mirador also features a monument, a playground and manicured gardens. We were fortunate to have such a beautiful, sunny day to see the city. We also came across a local sculptor who was happy to show us his work, which was very good. Our teammate and professional sculptor, David Sadler, was there to help us choose the best pieces

From there our city tour continued to Moon Valley. Valley de la Luna (Moon Valley), isn't actually a valley at all, but a maze of canyons and giant spires. The formations, composed mainly of clay and sandstone, were created by the persistent erosion of mountains by the area's strong winds and rains. What remains is a serene setting, full of wonder and intrigue. There are two circular walking tracks to choose from at Valle de la Luna each spanning different view-points. Devil's Point (the most spectacular view-point) is located toward the end of the longest track, which takes around 45 minutes to complete. The other track is much shorter, taking just 15 minutes to complete. Clearly marked trails are provided for explorers, however the paths are narrow and tricky to navigate. Because of time constraints we were only able to complete the 15 minute trail. I did the 45 minute track when I visited Bolivia in 2013, and Audrey and Del did the long trail on the first day they arrived in LaPaz.

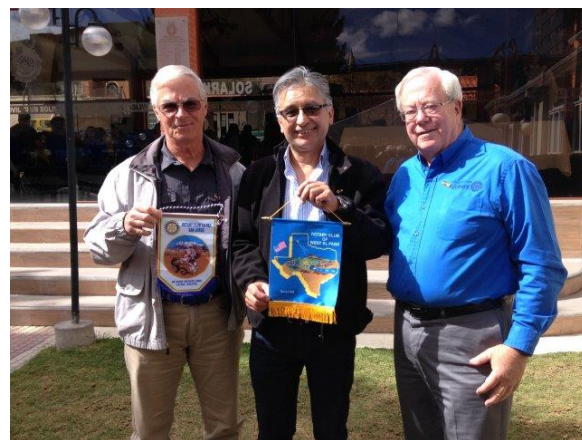


Photos from the 15 minute trail at Valley de la Luna (Moon Valley)

We were invited to lunch by the San Jorge Rotary Club of LaPaz. Bob Reid presented their officers with a plaque to show the teams appreciation for the San Jorge Rotary Clubs sponsorship of this global grant. Afterward Doug & I exchanged Rotary Club banners with the San Jorge Club President.



San Jorge RC Officers with the commemorative plaque



Carey & Doug exchanging RC banners

The San Jorge Rotary Club is part of District 4690

After lunch we went to the Witches Market. La Paz’s Mercado de las Brujas, or the Witches’ Market, is a hot spot for spiritual workers, who read fortunes and facilitate *cha’llas* (“offerings”) to Pachamama. Multiple vendors sell items like colorful sugar tablets, cigarettes, dried starfish, lacquered frogs, coca leaves, and even llama fetuses that can be assembled into custom-made payments. In exchange, locals believe they will be blessed with better health, prosperous business, safe travel, and good luck. For us, it was about 40 minutes of souvenir shopping, and a welcomed pitstop (bano).



We were looking for something exciting to do after dinner. Somehow we (the US volunteer team members) all agreed to go to the Bolivian Wrestling Cholitas show. We were taken on a local bus to the show in El Alto. The Cholitas are part of a group called the Titans of the Ring, which includes both male and female wrestlers; mostly female. The Titans perform each Sunday for an audience of hundreds at El Alto’s Multifunctional Center. The *Cholitas* are unlikely stars of the wacky world of wrestling – competing in full dress spiced with bawdy humor that attracts both locals and a growing numbers of tourists. It was a fun night, with one of the wrestlers landing in Pete’s lap, while being thrown over the railing while attempting to steal Naishing’s hat.



Welcome to the Show

That’s our David !!

Performers in the ring

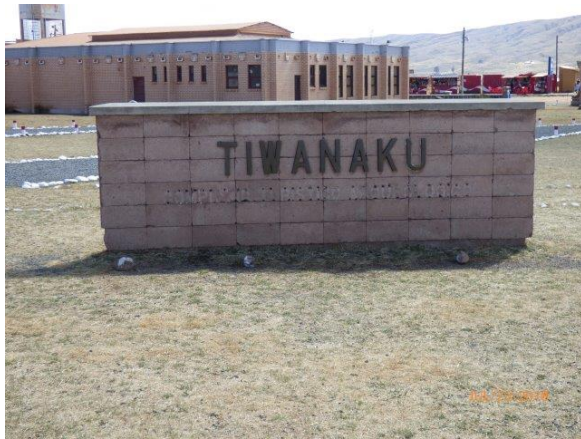
Del with her new hat



Audrey posing as a performer and with the actual wrestlers

Day 7 – Monday, July 23 – Breakfast at the hotel then departure to the ancient archaeological site of Tiwanaku. Massive, stone-faced earthen mounds rise from the plain; nearby are great rectangular platforms and sunken courts with beautiful cut-stone masonry. Located in Bolivia, near Lake Titicaca, the ancient city of Tiwanaku was built almost 13,000 feet above sea level, making it one of the highest urban centers ever constructed. Although its inhabitants didn't develop a writing system, and its ancient name is unknown, archaeological remains indicate that the city's cultural and political influence was felt across the southern Andes stretching into modern-day Peru, Chile and Argentina.

We were given a tour of the museums around the site but spent more of our time at the site. Our guide told us about the history and culture of the area in great detail and allowed us time for pictures and questions. It's a remarkable place. Tiwanaku has been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, administered by the Bolivian government.



Entrance to Tiwanaku



Tiwanaku during its prime ^



Upon our return from Tiwanaku, we were invited to dinner to the family home of the three sisters who lead the U4C organization – Ximena, Sonya and Carla. The table was decorated with Bolivian and American flags creating a very welcoming atmosphere. We were treated to cocktails and snacks before dinner, followed by an outstanding multi-course dinner consisting of chicken, pork and beef. At the end of the meal Ximena played a song or two on the piano for us, followed by a guitar solo by Carla’s youngest son. Afterward we all sang Happy Birthday to him. Wow – what a night. The dinner was the culmination of, and a fitting tribute to a phenomenal mission. Thank you so much to our hosts and their family.

Summary: I offer my thanks and congratulations to our team leaders Bob Reid and Ximena for the outstanding effort they put in, and continue to put into this and similar U4C/Rotary missions. Their dedication to the mission and its impact on the people of Bolivia is truly a reflection of their personal values and commitment. They have inspired me to invest my time and talent to meet the ongoing challenges of this and possibly future missions. I would also like to thank Carla, Victor & Ivan for their unmatched hospitality and for helping to create this opportunity for all of us to prove that Rotary’s motto of Service Above Self are not just words on a paper. Lastly, this is a team effort and being part of this team has been both an honor and a privilege. We’ve all made new friends, learned a lot about Bolivia, and achieved a camaraderie that is rare in today's world. The mission of this team says a lot: There is hope for this world. We are making a positive difference for humanity. Keep up the good work.

Carey Beamesderfer

Past President & Executive Secretary - Rotary Club of West El Paso
President/Board Chair – El Paso Habitat for Humanity

PS: I dedicate this report to my daughter Audrey Buglione - (A team member who made this trip really enjoyable for me, and who I truly believe was a real inspiration to all of us on the team.) Love, Dad

