

# Newton / San Juan del Sur Sister City Project

## Sister Cities Since 1988

## Two New Models of BioSand Water Filters

The Sister City Project's experiments with two new models of BioSand Filters (BSFs) may revolutionize the technology of home-based water purification systems for rural communities around the world. Test results indicate that the new PVC filters we built function as well as (or better than) the classic concrete models.

First a group assembled, delivered and installed a small-model BSF designed by Lehigh University grad student Julie Napotnik in collaboration with Tufts grad student Anna Murray. What we dubbed the "Filtrito" is based on a standard 5-gallon bucket, and a team placed 30 in homes in San Jeronimo and La Rejega Sur, about an hour south of SJDS. Anna and Julie returned in March to test the water quality and yield of the Filtritos.

Also during this period, an unofficial team of independent researchers from Simmons College, led by Prof. Elizabeth Scott, researched the possibility that abandoned BioSand Filters can be "restarted" simply by adding well water for two weeks, without needing to replace all of the sand and gravel inside.

After the mini-filters came Phase II for the filter designed by Dennis St. John of Rockport and Green Valley, AZ, made from light-weight 10" PVC tubes instead of concrete. Last year we built and installed 12 as a pilot project, and this year the number jumped to 60. The target communities of El Pochote and San Antonio de Ostional, near the Costa Rican border received these filters. The crew included Antonia Mendoza, Ruth Lopez, Yesli



**Antonia and Dennis work on a PVC water filter together**

Roman, and Kevin Woods.

See more photos of the [PVC filters](#) and the [5-gallon bucket filters](#) on our website.

## Historic Commencement at Technical School

In January the Technical High School held its first commencement, graduating 60 students in three career tracks: Accounting, Tourism, and Civil Construction. Almost three-fourths of the graduates were women. Many of the students are the first in their families to receive high school diplomas. The Technical High School

attracts students from distant communities, drawn by excellent teaching and mentoring, and free tuition. To fulfill the demanding curriculum, the Technical School meets 50 weeks a year, starting every Saturday at 7:30 A.M. Families make sacrifices to pay for bus fare and lunch for their students.

On graduation day, students in robes walked through town, each with a mentor (a family member, or spouse) on their arm. Margaret Gullette, who co-founded the FHS and heads up fundraising, was honored to lead the procession toward the Civic Center for the first annual ceremony.

(see photos [online](#))

## Newsletter Spring 2013

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### Announcements:

- Support us by shopping at: [www.cafepress.com/shopforgood](http://www.cafepress.com/shopforgood) for SJDS merchandise and gifts
- Check out our Facebook page for updates, breaking news, and conversations about our Sister City
- Contact David Gullette at [david.gullette@simmons.edu](mailto:david.gullette@simmons.edu) about volunteering in SJDS
- Welcome to our newest Board member, Carlos Solis, journalist for *El Nuevo Diario*!

## More "Green" Building Projects

Our use of environmentally friendly building materials- using compressed earth instead of cement blocks, and bamboo instead of iron rebar- continued in 2012. We completed our second Green Preschool in the village of San Antonio de Baston, and followed with a Green Comedor (Lunch Pavilion), co-financed and constructed by the Union Church of Waban and Lasell College's "Shoulder to Shoulder" project. Union Church also renovated the playground and rebuilt the well used by the school and immediate neighbors.

Lasell's group put the finishing touches on the Preschool, created a mural based on

the children's drawings, and got the comedor nearly to completion. Local supervisor Fidel Pavon led the work crews and also enlisted student volunteers to construct EcoStoves at the Newton Workshop on Appropriate Technology.

Our model of transforming small villages one by one continues. SCP representatives find community leaders, introduce water filters, provide opportunities to receive EcoStoves, and assist with other needs as the relationship solidifies.

**(right) SCP volunteers with SJDS partners in San Antonio de Baston**



## Congratulations, Dr. Rosa Elena Bello, Mayor of San Juan del Sur!

Dr. Rosa Elena Bello was elected Mayor of San Juan del Sur in November, with 63% of the vote. A week after her election she met with the police, judicial authorities, and other civil society actors, to discuss commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking. For the first time, the authorities recognize the existence of exploitation and the need to present a plan to attack the problem. Rosa Elena writes, "We convinced them that this is a social problem that requires social responses... in order to make San

Juan del Sur a place that... respects human rights." They presented a plan later in the month. Inauguration took place in January.

Dr. Bello co-founded the Free High School for Adults in 2002. Many volunteers have worked side by side with her or heard her speak about her years of community activism. In her inaugural speech, Rosa Elena thanked all the Sister Cities for the long-term relationships, especially Newton and Sauda (Norway). We are thrilled to have our long-time partner in the Mayor's seat.



**Rosa Elena marches toward victory**  
[see more photos online](#)

## Solidarity House Continues Rescue and Therapy Efforts

The work of the domestic violence network grew enormously in 2012. Efforts of large-scale public awareness have increased. Activities at the shelter include rescuing and treating victims of violence and other serious psychological problems.

Of the 49 clients in 2011-12, some have lived in the Shelter, and most are outpatients. There is no place else to turn in the SJDS region for therapeutic help.

As of May, Solidarity House had six guests: four adolescent girls and the children of two of them. They enjoyed birthday parties and outings, received tutoring, and earned their sixth-grade diplomas. They were taught manual skills (knitting and jewelry-making). As of November, the four girls who lived there in 2011-12 had been settled with families, and receive regular visits and monitoring.

One, aged 16, who has a baby, lives with a family that adopted her. One girl lives with her grandmother. Another returned with her baby to her mother after finishing the legal process against her abuser. One 14 year old orphan lives at the shelter while a relative searches for suitable housing. Psychologist Jessica Mayorga-Lugo treats post-traumatic stress, drug dependency, and suicidal intentions at the shelter.



## Art Auction Fundraiser a Huge Success For Free High School

On March 22nd, a reception and silent auction at Lasell College raised over \$4000 for the Free High School for Adults in San Juan del Sur. Margaret Gullette, co-founder of the FHS, said she was "on Cloud 9. We had no idea that a silent auction could be so thrilling, particularly in the last half hour. It was a spectacular evening, with the crowds, the gorgeous galleries, and the happy art-inflected vibe."

She gave credit for the "roaring success" to Lydia Sampson, who has taken students to San Juan several times, Stephen Fischer, a Lasell professor of graphic design who suggested the 12x12 concept and curated the complex show, and the Lasell students

and alumnae who organized the event, volunteered, and publicized it. Almost 50 artists, including Lasell faculty and alumnae, members of the ART/Word Co-operative, and artists from Newton and beyond, donated over 90 works.

Many members of the Sister City Project attended. One buyer said it was a "life-changing" evening for her. Alumnae couple Molly and Drew Gundlach said that spearheading this fundraiser art show was "a dream come true." Also in attendance were representatives of the *Alianza Civica Cultural Centroamericana*, a group uniting Central Americans living in Massachusetts, and Rodney Barker, our SCP President.



Crowds of supporters enjoy bidding on art at Lasell College's Wedeman Gallery

## Gioconda Belli Makes Appearance at FHS Opening

One of Latin America's leading writers and poets, Gioconda Belli, addressed the 2013 opening of the Free High School for Adults. The award-winning author and former Sandinista revolutionary gave a moving speech about the growth of knowledge.

She read a poem entitled *El Ocho del Marzo*, lamenting the difficulties of women's lives. The instructors at the Saturday school taught the poem this semester, in time for

March 8th, International Women's Day.

Perhaps best known for her memoir *The Country Under My Skin*, Belli identifies with the struggles of many Nicaraguans. She said to the crowd, "Todos tenemos cabezas," so that once we can read, we have equal access to the accumulated wisdom of the world; very appropriate words for the school the Vice-Minister of Education called "a model for the nation."



David and Margaret Gullette meet Gioconda Belli

## Record Numbers Again at the "Pride of the Region"

For two years running, enrollments at the FHS have increased dramatically. In 2012, a total of 703 students (up from 532 at the end of 2011) participated in our three programs (rural classrooms, the Saturday School, and the Technical High School.)

In 2013, enrollment rose again, to 757 students. The FHS does outreach by offering classes in rural villages; this year we added two new communities to the roster of 10 and enrollment rose from 175 to 334.

The FHS is now the largest high school in San Juan del Sur and the only one that admits women with children, pregnant women, people who work all week, those over 18, and people from far-flung villages. Three girls from the Battered Women's Shelter also attend. In December, at its eleventh commencement the FHS granted 63 degrees, bringing the total to 482. At Opening Day, the regional administrator of Adult Education programs called the FHS "the pride" of the region.



Watch video about the FHS at: <http://youtu.be/x4urC2Ypg2g>

## Newton/San Juan del Sur Sister City Project, Inc.

c/o Rodney Barker  
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Follow the Sister City Project at:

<http://www.facebook.com/NewtonSanJuanDelSurSisterCity>

**Mission Statement: To work alongside our Nicaraguan friends to improve education and healthcare, and to employ appropriate technology at the village level.**

This is our annual appeal! If you were not able to show your support at the recent art auction fundraiser, it is not too late to donate! Please send your much needed yearly donation to:

Don Ross, Treasurer  
211 Winslow Road  
Waban, MA 02468

Please make checks out to: Newton/SJDS Sister City Project  
(If you wish, you may designate Free High School in the memo line)

Or donate online via:

<http://www.networkforgood.org> (site accepts credit cards.)

- \$45 gives a family clean water for life, for drinking, cooking and washing.
- \$95 covers a student's expenses for an entire year at the Free High School.
- \$1000 pays for the salary of a Free High School teacher for a full year.

## Obituary: Friend and Colleague Fran Seasholes

We mourn the passing of our dear friend and colleague Fran Seasholes, who passed away on November 13, 2012. For many years she served as our tireless Recording Secretary, and a supporter of our work through a series of highly successful yard sales that over the years raised hundreds of dollars for Sister City initiatives in San Juan del Sur.

Her daughter Cathy told the Sister City Project board, "My mother lived a rich and engaged life up until the end and was blessed to be surrounded by dynamic people like yourselves who shared a commitment to social justice."

We dedicate all our 2013 efforts in Public Health and Education in honor of Fran Seasholes.



Frances (Cressley) Seasholes

*"All it takes is just a few people to have such a profound impact on others. I'd like to think your dedication all these years is a prime example of that."*

*Andrew Mayer  
Student Activities Coordinator  
University of New Haven*

*"I really want to give you thank you for help the people from my country!!  
GOD BLESS ALL YOU GUYS!!"*

*Username "molrok84"  
Via YouTube*