

DOS PUEBLOS

New York–Tipitapa
Sister City Project

A Partnership for Human Rights

www.tipitapa.org

155 West 72nd Street, Suite 402, New York, New York 10023

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The Spirit of Volunteerism

By Dena Fisher

Our Dos Pueblos delegation to Tipitapa in February 2009, consisting of Eliza Bates, Sarah Birch, Cathey Falvo, Dena Fisher, Ann Garvin, Donna Katzin, and Lupe Ramsey, was invited to a Managua Conference of Wisconsin-Nicaragua Partners of the Americas, an organization built on volunteerism that grew out of John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress. The conference was designed to disseminate ideas and models of successful volunteerism. Innovative for Partners of the Americas was to invite representatives from other State-Country partnerships to share their experiences and learn from each other. We felt honored to be among them all. We visited three Partner communities, including a learning center in Tipitapa.

The conference began with a presentation by Ellen A. Maurer, a long-standing member of Wisconsin Partners. Her message is: "start something and get out of the way – the key is never pay people – their pay is self-esteem and recognition in the community" This is a very hard concept when we see so much poverty, but since we are not a charity we must work towards enabling self-sufficiency through people-to-people relationships and solidarity. *(Continued on page 2).*



Dorita from the Tipitapa Children's Community Library

Adelante Compañera!

By the Dos Pueblos Board of Directors

We do not have enough words to express our fond and grateful appreciation to our outgoing Chair, Donna Katzin for over 22 years of extraordinary service and leadership. In 1987, Donna could not sit back and watch the U.S. political intervention in Nicaragua - instead she turned turmoil into solidarity with the Nicaraguan people. Along with a group of other West Side members of the Committee for Non-Intervention in Central America, Donna began the tireless task of getting to know Tipitapa and organizing our neighbors in New York to accompany them. Over two decades, as governments shifted, her sophisticated analysis and generous, caring spirit have had a tremendous positive impact in renewing *(Continued on page 2)*



Learning how to wire a lamp in a workshop at the learning center

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(Continued from The Spirit of Volunteerism)

Their Tipitapa project, for example, started as a lending library in a small private home and is now a learning center for book repairing, sewing, computers, and more. It is a self-described center for change. We learned that:

- Good intentions are not enough;
- There is a skill involved in responsible volunteerism from a distance;
- Ordinary charity can have very negative consequences, and
- It is not enough to understand the idea of giving people the fishing pole, rather than the fish, or in many of these projects the sewing machine rather than the clothes.

Training and education in skills, marketing, teaching, collaboration, and much more are important elements. The project I would most like to work on is expanding our delegations so that we are hands-on. In this picture (below) from our visit, Lupe is learning how to knit with mothers in Los Cedros (and she tells us she learned how to wire a lamp!). Many of the projects involve generating income for families and the community.

Special thanks to Amy Wiza, leader of Wisconsin Partners, and Steven Vetter, Matt Clausen and Barbara Bloch in the Washington office, who made our participation so welcoming and meaningful.



Donna and Angela Ramirez from Comedor Sandra Shepherd

(Continued from Adelante Compañera!)

and reshaping our work. Donna's vision of Nicaraguans and New Yorkers working together to defend Nicaraguans' right to determine their own future and uphold their basic social and economic rights contributed to the formation of the Upper West Side – Tipitapa Sister City Project. The organization, now Dos Pueblos, has produced many successes - five children's feeding centers, preschools, sister schools, women's health, support for free trade zone workers, hurricane relief, a revolving bank, street gang outreach, a computer school, potable water projects, a popular pharmacy and a vast network of preventive health *brigadistas*. Despite the changing times, her dedication to Tipitapa has been unwavering. Donna has been instrumental in keeping the people of New York and beyond aware of Nicaraguans' dignity and creativity in the face of poverty and social injustice, a powerful voice reminding all of us how much we can learn from our partners, and how much work there is still to be done.

We thank Donna for her years of hard work, dedication, wisdom and collegiality. She has contributed in untold ways to building a long-term, North-South community-based partnership for social change. We heartily wish her the best in all of her endeavors and will always be inspired by her words encouraging us onward, *Adelante Compañera!*

Please continue to support our success. Send your tax-deductible gift to Dos Pueblos today!

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