

Coastal Cleanup Helps Change Litterbug Culture

By Sam Jacoby

Nica Times Staff

On a hot Saturday morning earlier this month, nearly a thousand public school students from Granada descended upon the beaches of Lake Nicaragua. And they weren't there to sunbathe.

Instead of swimsuits and towels, they wielded rakes and trash bags, spending the day picking up the waterlogged waste that pollutes the city's otherwise stunning waterfront.

The lake cleanup, the second in as many months, was organized by the Granada Rotary Club. It was conducted Aug. 18, along with a simultaneous beach cleaning effort in San Juan del Sur, as part of international coastal cleanup day organized by environmental group Ocean Conservancy.

"The first time was a bit of a dry run," says Evenor Saenz, the club president. "This time we have five schools participating."

The schools, mostly clustered around the lake's edge, mustered an impressive turnout, some bringing several hundred students.

Wilbur Urbina, 12, of the nearby Dezanberg School, just a few blocks from the cleanup site, takes a break from cleaning to lean on the pointed stick he's been using to pluck up bottles and soaked plastic bags from the sand.

"Look at the water," he says, pointing across the lake. "It's all black and yellow!"

He and his friends giggle, but it's no joke. The small waves lapping against the beach have an ominously unhealthy color.

Martha Quesada, a teacher at the school,



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prods them back to work.

"We brought about 120 students today," she says. "It's important for them to learn the value of this kind of service."

Education, more so even than trash-picking, is the order of the day.

"One hundred, 200, 500 sacks of trash. How much we collect is not important," Saenz says. "We are trying to plant a seed of

change in these kids, and through them, change the mindset of adults."

Most of the students are wearing makeshift gloves; small plastic bags wrapped around their hands. Upon finishing work, more often than not, they toss the bright yellow bags back onto the beach – an ironic indication of how difficult it is to change a culture of littering.

**Bag It:
Elementary
school students
from Granada
help to clean
the beach fac-
ing Lake
Nicaragua.**

Rubén Ogden, a member of the Rotary Club and native of the U.S. state of Washington, acknowledges there is a lot of work to be done.

"This is the beginning of a change," he said. "Little events like this are part of a larger movement of environmental awareness. It's just beginning here."

He noted the exceptional support the effort has received from the municipality, as well as from local businesses.

"We were aiming to raise 15,000 córdobas (\$830)," he said. "We ended up with more than 23,000 córdobas (\$1,250)."

Aura Lila Pérez, director of the Elsa School, acknowledged the importance of the environmental principles being taught.

"We are trying to motivate the students to solve this problem, to show them that they are a part of the solution," she said. "Hopefully they'll bring that home to their communities."

Gladys Laras, a student at the Oriente Nombra School, agrees.

"We have to take responsibility for cleaning the lake," she said, sounding only half-coached. "If we help, if we try to make a difference, it will be easier to keep the water clean in the future."

As the morning wears on, exhausted students begin collapsing in the shade of the bluffs above the beach. Clustered on the nearly spotless sand are heaps of stuffed trash bags awaiting a truck to haul them away.

Saenz surveys the scene with satisfaction, and hopes the key message has gotten through.

"Far more important than picking up trash is not leaving it in the first place," he says. ■

Community Members Pitch in to Repair, Beautify Primary School

By Melissa Maclean

Special to The Nica Times

MANAGUA – Community members from Barrio Hilario Sánchez, located near Kilometer 12 of the Carretera Sur, along with friends from Managua's foreign community, held a workday Aug. 25 at the Hilario Sánchez Primary School.

When the Hilario Sánchez School opened its doors as a public school a year and a half ago, the grounds and buildings – originally built by a private foundation and local parents – were in a terrible state. There were no working latrines, not enough desks, the perimeter fence was broken, the classroom walls were disintegrating, and – since the

barrio lacks municipal garbage service – the school's property was full of garbage and other waste.

Since then, teachers and parents have made an enormous effort to get support for their school. In January, with funds from the French Embassy, the Ministry of Education completed construction of new classrooms. Desks also arrived from various sources.

Meanwhile, four foreign friends, three of whom live nearby, started thinking about how they could help out.

The women – two from the United States, one from England and one from Canada – formed a support committee and, together with the teachers and parents, determined that building latrines was a top priority.

Fortunately, they were able to obtain a grant from the J. Kirby Simon Foreign Service Trust, a small private foundation named in memory of a U.S. Foreign Service official who died while working overseas in 1995. The trust receives funding from members of J. Kirby Simon's family as well as his friends and colleagues, and offers financial support to projects around the world presented by individuals linked to the U.S. Foreign Service.

Thanks to the support of the J. Kirby Simon Foreign Service Trust, two double latrines and a hand-washing station have been built at the Hilario Sánchez School.

On Aug. 25, as part of the project, community members, parents, students, and volunteers from Managua's foreign community, including people linked to the U.S. Embassy, held a workday at the school. They painted classrooms, fixed the roof and walls, and



Courtesy of Melissa Maclean

Pitching In: School kids and local volunteers from Managua's Barrio Hilario Sánchez conducted a weekend workday Aug. 25 to help improve their school.

completed the latrine project, among other chores.

The event was the third workday organized by the support committee. During the two previous ones, parents and students, along with their foreign friends, planted flowers, trees and other plants to minimize soil erosion and make the school grounds more attractive. This additional work has been

made possible by donations from many friends.

But there is still a lot to be done.

Among other projects that the support committee has planned is the installation of a swing set and other recreational equipment at the school.

For more info or to help donate, e-mail Kimberly Clarke at kclarke@ibw.com.ni. ■

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