

The Women's Sewing Cooperative (i.e. The Fair Trade Zone) has gotten money from DFID (a British government development agency) to finish its infrastructure for free trade zone status. The



\$17,000 will enable them to build an office within their complex, outfit it with new office equipment, and finish their canteen. This will get them out of the cramped space in our office.

Although they had been approved for free trade zone status for months, customs had not given them permission to operate until recently. Hopefully, the container of clothing they are sending the week of the 12th will go duty free. By the way, a container holds approximately 28,000 of pieces of clothing!

Other good news is that the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) has approved a loan/partial grant for \$765,000 to start a spinning plant. The spinning plant will be another business of the Fair Trade Zone (the Women's Cooperative). It will be

designed to spin locally grown organic cotton into yarn, to be knit into organic cotton cloth in Costa Rica. We are also exploring organically certifying cotton growers here in Nicaragua and some indigenous groups in Guatemala. The spinning plant will bring the possibility of having a truly fair trade garment one step closer.

The Fair Trade Zone's website has been updated thanks to Becca and Kelly Doering. Check out the new site and all our main buyers' sites! Addresses are in the box below.

Always with the good comes the bad... as of this writing 05-05-05 (had to add that date!)... the IADB's legal department has not approved the go-ahead for releasing the funds because the JHC/CDCA cannot risk all its other programs as collateral. We are hoping insurance will take care of the problem.

Other not-so-good news is that the cooperative is really having problems managing themselves profitably. The above-mentioned container will actually run them in the red, *but* will that mean they will see the need for drastic managerial changes? ¡Ojalá! (So we hope.)



The coffee growers at El Porvenir have sold all of their 2004

harvest! They have money to invest in planting new coffee bushes. Although we are always scared to predict something positive in crops... so as not to jinx it ☺... it looks like this year will be a good harvest. The plants have survived some early rains.

Last growing season we shipped four containers of sesame. We hope to ship more in the 2005/06 growing season. With some of the funds generated we were able to pay more on the debt still owed to Once Again Nut Butter from the Hurricane Mitch disaster ...truly good people there.

For clothing information & suppliers:

- www.fairtradezone.jhc-cdca.org
- www.maggiesorganics.com
- [NACCP for organic t-shirts](http://NACCP.org)
- www.ethicalgoods.com
- www.pcusa.org/enough

For coffee & organic food suppliers:

- www.buildingnewhope.com
- www.their-buckscoffee.com
- www.onceagainnutbutter.com



The Water Filter Business (Filtrón) is doing well and has a physicist working with them testing their filters.

Brett, one of our volunteers, works with them daily. The filters are also being tested by the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta. The business' only problem is lack of water... a problem becoming more and more critical to all of us in this area. Water is also a problem for the **Concrete Construction Material Cooperative** as well... with no water it is impossible to mix concrete. **The Security Cooperative** helps us all by filling barrels of water in the middle of the night when the water does come on.

The Health Center continues to see patients and provide as good quality health care as we're able.

We continue to struggle with the problems of rising health costs in medicines and lab tests along with the reductions of services provided by the Ministry of Health. We work on how to make the clinic sustainable in the midst of all these rising costs and still offer services to the poor. We are looking forward to the Bucknell class (see below) helping us survey and get a good idea of the percentage of malnourished children living in Nueva Vida. Together with health promoters they will go house-to-house and weigh children.

Volunteers continue to add a new dimension to the work of the Center.

They have fresh insights and high energy, especially the ones we have now. Besides Brett, who is mentioned above, we have Dean. Dean is so good about jumping in and fixing things as well as helping in any way. Abby came right as Rob, our volunteer coordinator, got lanced by Cupid's bow and left for love. She is Canadian, and continues to uphold Canada's record of producing superb volunteers... she has great ideas and is sent from above to help with all the delegations and volunteers scheduled to come this summer.



Since our February newsletter we have had four excellent delegations: the Spanish Club of Lopez Island High School (WA); a Bucknell University Brigade (Lewisburg, PA); a small pre-delegation from Mt. Pleasant Presbyterian Church (SC); and a group of garment industry personnel sponsored by Maggie's to experience the realities of poverty and the hope of fair trade. May and June will bring a delegation from Presbyterian Campus Ministries (NC); a 3-week class from Bucknell University; and a group from St. John's Methodist Church (SC). In addition to these groups we have approximately a dozen individual volunteers coming this summer... see why Abby is heaven-sent for us old grumps!



Community Life: Sarah is in the States right now speaking her little heart and voice out. She has spoken/is speaking from Maine to Florida. She is enjoying days here and there with her mother, Jessie...who suffers from Alzheimer's. Every day is precious. She has also gotten to spend time with her children, Jessica in Massachusetts and Tiff in California. With all this

moving about she is missing out on the newest members of the community... four monkeys... yes, monkeys!

We have spider monkeys who love people and trees. Mike is in love with them. He fights his bureaucratic battles for an hour and then goes and has sane time with the monkeys... sometimes he does both at the same time! We still enjoy our three human monkeys – Coury, Daniel, and Joseph. They are looking forward to the end of school (June 24th) and a visit from their friend, Nick Trowell, and his friend, Josh.

The Community and the Center are enjoying the use of a phone that allows us to call the US free...when internet and power are up. Pat, Kathy, and Kathleen are enjoying calling their parents. It is nice to be able to talk about nothing critical... just to check in. This phone is the blessing and gift from Jim Brown, our communications guru.

Other big news for us is that Becca and Paul are expecting their first child! We are all so excited about the prospects of being friends to a little one and watching Becca swell up like a balloon!



News: The last several weeks Managua has been in turmoil due to the high cost of fuel. You think fuel is high up there? Here diesel is the cheapest starting at \$2.75/gal and prices go up to almost \$4.00/gal. With the high cost of diesel, public buses (run by cooperatives) needed to raise their fares to C\$3/ride, which is about 18 cents in US dollars... a raise of 3 cents.



The government has to approve fare raises...so the buses went on strike to get the raise. After about a week the taxis joined them. Violence and vandalism fell upon the scabs. The bus fare raise was approved, but the university students couldn't afford the raise, so they demonstrated. This was weird... because historically the students and drivers demonstrate side-by-side. This time they were against each other.

People got hurt. Some died. Traffic was stopped in many places. Schools closed. Police fired on people. Buses were burned. Rocks and mortars were shot and thrown... it was ugly. Then the two groups once again joined together against the government calling for the government to subsidize the fuel prices. It even got to a point where the demonstrators were calling for the president to step down.

There were political overtones... some said it was the Sandinistas trying to disrupt and cause the fall of the government. Some said it was just the fare hike. Some said that it was the Sandinistas making sure that they, the Sandinistas, would fail in the next election. Some said it was the CIA trying to disrupt stability here to the point that the US would come in and be able to build a "Panama Canal II". Some said it was the CIA trying to get control if CAFTA fails in the US Congress. Some said it was the US hawks in the current Bush administration, who had been in power during the contra war (the 80's) and are still mad that the US was not able to crush the Sandinistas. Some say they now want revenge (people like: Otto Reich, Roger Noriega, Rogelio Pardo-Maurer, Elliot Abrams, John Negroponte, John Bolton, Charles Shapiro, and on and on).

No one WE know has a definite answer, but isn't it sad that the US is a suspect? Isn't it even sadder that the possibility of US intervention is not an unlikely scenario? The fact that US involvement is more likely to be reality than fantasy is saddest of all.

The strike was finally settled when President Bolaños agreed to give C\$20 million to the bus co-ops over the next three months if the mayor of Managua would also give C\$10 million. This will allow the buses to maintain the C\$2.5 fare. What happens at the end of three months? Who knows?

Reflection: Most of you have already celebrated Mother's Day - that Most Honorable Day (I'm a mother!), but Mother's Day is celebrated in Nicaragua on the 30th of May. Mother's Day is sacred here. It is a half-work day so people can go see their mothers and take them cakes.

Mothers are revered here. You can say just about anything to someone but to insult their mother is an invitation to a fight. That is not because mothers are more loving, kind, nurturing, or attentive than elsewhere. In fact many would be considered abusive. In the US there are all these self-help books about how to get beyond dysfunctional families and beyond the mistakes and abuses of parents to lead healthy lives...there exists an almost "Mommy Dearest" syndrome.

Here people revere their mothers knowing good and well that many mothers were not what we would consider "good mothers". Here many men worship their mothers, yet treat the mother of their own children poorly. Here good, loving fathers get schlepped-over on Father's Day, which is not celebrated much at all. Here "Mother" is holy. Why?

Mothers/women are the backbone of this culture. They are the ones who hold the family together. They are the ones who make sure their children survive. They will work their bodies to the breaking point to keep them fed and alive. They are the center of the family. Mary, who is called "Mary-Mother-of-God", is holy. She is the core to so many here. She represents the holding of the family of God together. She is the Mother. While the Father is often away and the Son is often hanging on the cross with His head weighed down not looking, the Mother is looking at the petitioner and hearing the pleas. Mary is the representation of the Holy Mother – the Holy Woman. So with her, we will happily say, "Happy Mother's Day!"

- Kathleen



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