

## **Atlanta Friends Meeting CRC/El Sitio University Loan Fund, 2003-2009**

### **I. Introduction**

The Atlanta Friends Meeting declared Sanctuary for Central American refugees in 1985. Over the next ten years the Cummings, among many others in the Meeting, provided support in Atlanta for refugees from the political repression in El Salvador and Guatemala, and helped establish and maintain a sister-community relation with the small Salvadoran community El Sitio Cenícero beginning in 1991. This community, of about 250 people, was formed by refugees who had fled to UN camps in Honduras after a major massacre in 1983. Upon their collective return from these camps in the late eighties, they settled on land close to the town of Suchitoto, an hour or two north of San Salvador.

Their work with refugees and their visits to Central America led Carol and Frank to retire early to move to Central America and use their talents there as way opened. In 2001 they moved to Suchitoto. After a year they decided to focus most of their efforts on opening opportunities for youth, particularly in education. The people of El Sitio and Suchitoto are poor and the local economy provides almost no job opportunities for youth. For this reason many youth have chosen to take the dangerous journey north to the United States. The Cummings, through their work in the local schools, knew the talent many youth had and their desire to continue their education at the high school and then university level. It was natural, then, to establish scholarship programs to open that possibility.

The Cummings proposed and members of the Meeting and other friends accepted the challenge of funding a university loan program for the youth of El Sitio in 2003. The program was patterned after a similar effort of the Palo Alto Friends Meeting, in a community close to El Sitio. (See the October 2009 issue of Friends Journal for an article on this history.) The idea was to provide an annual no-interest loan of up to \$1000 to be paid off when the graduate obtained a job, through social service in their community or by helping a sibling with their higher education.

One of the tragedies of poverty, particularly in low-income countries, is the waste of human potential through lack of educational opportunity, or as the UNCF slogan puts it, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." Migration to the US causes grave damage to families and the social structure of communities even as it does improve the economic level of those who remain. Few of the youth who emigrate continue their education beyond the 9<sup>th</sup> grade or high school. In contrast, educated youth have a great deal to contribute to their families and their communities, as is evident from the history of the longer operating Palo Alto program.

We report here on the history, accomplishments and funding for the period 2003-2009.

## II. History

A fund drive in the Meeting in the fall of 2003 with pledges over a 3-year period provided some \$30,000. Additional donations were received in memory of Carol upon her death in 2006. The program started slowly with one student and it soon became clear that the demand in El Sitio was less than expected. The community requested that the administration of the program be transferred to CRC, an organization of some 28 communities similar to El Sitio, with the provision to open eligibility to rural youth from all the communities. This was finally arranged in mid-2005 and a group of three scholarship students were selected for the second semester of that year.

There are three levels of higher education in El Salvador: a 2-year technical degree, a 3-year teaching degree and a 5-year bachelors program, which with a thesis and social service requirements actually extends to 6 years. The University year is from late February through mid-December. There is one public university, the National University, a very good technical institute, the ITCA, and more than a dozen private universities in El Salvador. Most of these are located in San Salvador and the two hour bus ride is a significant cost for those students who travel.

The program is now managed by a committee appointed by CRC, and including Frank, which advertises openings at the end of each year, selects and monitors the scholarship students, and provides a monthly stipend for each student with some funds set aside for purchase of texts and computer related costs. Students are asked to write two letters a year to send to the Atlanta Meeting. They meet several times a year with the management committee to review their progress, grades and any problems that have arisen.

A survey of the CRC/AFM group as well as scholarship students in the other programs in Suchitoto in late 2008, shows that the average annual cost for transport, food, rent, books and copies and computer related costs is about \$1800, excluding tuition and fees. The latter are minimal at the National University and between \$450 and \$900 at the private institutions. Thus, the loan provided by the program provides only partial funding of the student's education. Unfortunately, it excludes youth from the poorest families who cannot raise the additional funds and has led to several students in the program withdrawing from the university.

The CRC/AFM program is one of several that have been started in Suchitoto in the last five years. As four of these are headed by Frank and Robert Broz, a Quaker who manages the Palo Alto effort, it has been easy to unite forces in terms of sharing data, promoting the programs, and increasing the possibility for higher education in the five high schools. In the last three years, Frank and Robert have strengthened the program by adding aptitude testing for high school students, and a university fair.

As for the future, Robert and Frank have prepared a proposal to the municipal government in Suchitoto to provide auxiliary services and matching funds, to facilitate having the university students do their social hours, practicums and thesis in Suchitoto

and to look for ways to promote small business development among graduates in Suchitoto, to keep at least part of the trained youth here. The Atlanta Meeting has provided from \$1500 to \$2000 annually for social-economic projects in El Sitio and CRC. In the last few years, these grants have served as seed funds leading to much larger funding from NGOs and other groups. We begin to see signs this can happen for the university loan effort if we can continue the Friends Meeting support for the next five years.

### III. Accomplishments

From 2003 through 2009 the AFM program has supported 20 students, of whom three are from El Sitio and the rest from other rural communities. Two students have graduated: Otilio Martir Ayala Sosa with a BA in International Relations, and Oscar Arnulfo Hernández Hernández as a chemical laboratory technician. Otilio, while looking for a job, is serving as president of the community council in El Sitio and organizing a youth tourism project there. Oscar has just obtained a well paying job in one of the two major flour companies in El Salvador.

Table I. provides year-by-year information on the number of new students, withdrawals and graduates. At the end of 2009 there are 14 students, two from El Sitio and 12 through CRC. Of these, three are expected to graduate in 2010. The rest will graduate at a rate of three per year beginning in 2012. The hope is to level out at a total of 15 students supported per year from funding from Atlanta and other sources.

**Table I. Summary data on participants**

Group & year	Total of new students	Graduates	Withdrawals	Continuing
El Sitio	3	1	0	2
CRC-2005	3	0	1	2
CRC-2007	4	1	2	1
CRC-2008	6	0	0	6
CRC-2009	4	0	1	3
Total	20	2	4	14

Note: One of the withdrawals returned with other funding after a year.

Three other students already show remarkable leadership. One of the first CRC students, Patricia Rivera in communications, has led in the development of the youth run radio in Suchitoto. The radio, a youth video group and the Arts Center for Peace (Centro Arte para la Paz) were just awarded a 3-year grant [tell here who gave the grant] of \$250,000 for a media project to capture and promote the historical memory of the struggles in Suchitoto. Patricia played a significant part in laying the base for this grant. Patricia Olmeda is an older student who has done a great deal of work with the major women's group in Suchitoto. Orlando Torres is one of the very few physics students in El Salvador. Several of the students participated in workshops leading to the development of a municipal youth policy, a first in El Salvador.

As discussed in the previous section, the AFM/CRC effort has worked with the other scholarship programs to improve university possibilities and to look forward to developing work opportunities in Suchitoto for graduates.

#### IV. The students

Table II provides detailed information on each the 20 students selected by the program.

Table II. Student information, 2003-2009

Name	Year Start	Amt. Received	University	Field & degree	Status
El Sitio					
Otilio Martir Ayala Sosa	2003	\$3500	UES	Lic. Inter. Relations	Grad. 2008
José Orlando Torres	2005	\$2300	UES	Lic. Physics	To grad in 2011
José Francisco Chacón Lara	2006	\$2800	UES 1 year, U. Pedagógica	Prof. Mathematics	To grad in 2010
CRC					
José Milton Landaverde	2005	\$2500	UES	Lic. Industrial Engineering	Withdrew in 2007
Patricia Yoliveth Rivera Hernández	2005	\$4500	UES	Lic. Communications	To grad. in 2010
Alina del Rosario Carranza Menjivar	2005	\$4500	UES	Lic. Business Administration	To grad. in 2010
Alejandro Antonio Herrera	2007	\$3000	UES	Prof. Mathematics	To grad. in 2010
Ramón Osmaro Reyes Carrabantes	2007	\$500	UES	Lic. Business Administration	Withdrew in 2007
Oscar Arnulfo Hernández Hernández	2007	\$0	Inter. American Technical Institute	Tech Chemical	Grad. In 2009, earned national scholarship
David Gomez Ramirez	2007	\$500	UES	Lic. Communications	Withdrew in 2007
Rafael Enríque Gonzales Olmedo	2008	\$1500	UES	Lic. Public Accounting	To grad. in 2012
Wilson Salomón Hernández Hernández	2008	\$2000	UES	Lic. Chemical Pharmacy	To grad. in 2013
Dilsia Victoria	2008	\$1500	U.	Tech. Tourist	To grad in

Clavel Alvarenga			Tecnológica	Admin.	2010
Jorge Luis Pacheco Quijano	2008	\$2000	UMOAR	Lic. Computation	To grad in 2012
Sonia Michel Galdámez Rivera	2008	\$2000	U. Andres Bello	Lic. Social Work	To grad. In 2012
Kevin Noel Menjivar	2008	\$2000	UMOAR	Lic. Public Accounting	To grad. In 2012
Fátima Lizeth Mejía Miranda	2009	\$1000	UES	Lic. Social Work	To grad in 2013
Elmer Antonio Tobar Montoya	2009	\$500	U. Tecnológica	Eng. Systems Engineering	Withdrew
Oscar Arnulfo Gomez Ramirez	2009	\$1000	U. Tecnológica	Lic. English	To grad. In 2014
Patricia Isabel Olmeda Alas	2009	\$1000	UMOAR	Lic. Law	To grad in 2014

Note: UES=Universidad de El Salvador (National University), UMOAR=Universidad Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, Lic.=Licenciatura (BA degree), Prof.=Profesorado (teaching degree), Tech=Tecnico (technical degree)

## V. Financial Report

The funds received over the period 2003-2009 total about \$40,000. The initial pledges were for a period of three years for a total of \$32,000. Additional funds were received at the time of Carol's sudden death in 2006. Limited funds were used to start a high school scholarship program through CRC in 2004. The program continues with funds from other sources. The Catholic Parish of Saint Catherine in Michigan has provided much of the funding for El Sitio students over the last several years.

## VI. Pictures of the Scholarship Students [in each caption, say something significant about that student]

Otilio Martir Ayala Sosa

José Orlando Torres

José Francisco Chacón Lara

CRC students 2005

CRC current students