

NOTE; PHOTOS HAVE BEEN LOST IN TRANSFER

President's Message

What a privilege it is to be the new President of Amistad Canada. Almost every day the Board of Directors receives word of more fantastic work being done by the projects in San Miguel de Allende and other parts of Mexico. I share these with you through this newsletter and our website (with links to each partner project).

Newsletter readers will know that Canadians who support Amistad Canada projects receive three important benefits:

1. **Amistad rigorously monitors its projects; thus you are assured that your donation is supporting worthwhile and well-managed community services;**
2. **You receive a Canadian income tax receipt;**
3. **You are saying a philanthropic thank-you to the Mexican people for their warmth and generous hospitality.**

A word about our volunteers: We are an all-volunteer organization. Many members offer their time, energy and skills to our Mexican partners. If you are not already a member (reminder: there's no fee nor obligation) we and our partners would love your assistance. The "Contact" page of the Amistad Canada website is the best way to reach us.

Volunteer Opportunity. The October 28, 2015 meeting of the Amistad Board of Directors approved a motion to establish an Audit Committee. Have you the experience to help? Let us know – this volunteer job involves one annual meeting, approximately three hours.

Amistad Canada is building strong connections between the Canadian and Mexican people. We'd love to have you join us.

Charles Novogrodsky

President

Amistad Canada

Amistad's biggest fundraiser – Bi-CICLO – a big success

Diary of a Bi-Cyclist

It was a crisp mid-September morning when then 69-year-old John Murtaugh began pedaling down Toronto's Church Street in the general direction of San Miguel de Allende.

His goal was to raise \$25,000 for the three CASA projects Amistad supports in SMA: children's literacy, midwifery training and an anti-domestic violence program.

John launched the 2500 mile / 4000 km trek – called 'Bi-CICLO for/por Amistad' – supplied with only what would fit in a couple of paniers and a bedroll.

From Myra Novogrodsky, Bi-CICLO Project Chair

In July a small, rag-tag group of CASA supporters met in Toronto to discuss ways of supporting John Murtaugh's proposed bicycle trip to SMA. What a huge pool of talent we uncovered as the project took shape!

Laura Solis, a midwifery student originally from Mexico City, is an amazing graphic designer. **Chris Sternberg**, former midwife and staff member of the Ryerson Midwifery School, learned the finer points of Facebook while **Alfonzo Esparza** kept the Amistad Website up-to-date. **Mark O'Neill** prepared a press kit (with much translation help from **Abdel Rassi**) and made contact with journalists in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico.

Deborah Barndt took amazing photos while student **Katrina Gevencer** made a promotional [video](#) and **Amanda Martinez** sang at the launch party which was attended by **Gustavo Martinez**, one of the two brothers who's 1956 bike trek from Mexico City to Toronto – called CICLO – was THE inspiration for John's journey.

Dozens of people helped with film showings, parties and events long the route. **Lorna Ferguson** gets the top prize for organizing events in Kitchener,

Kitchener-Waterloo was John's first port-of-call, and dateline of the first of his many Facebook dispatches. What follows are excerpts from John's nearly 20,000-word Bi-CICLO illustrated diary:

Day 2: I headed out for London at 8:40 into a beautiful sunny morning, armed with some printed directions and a Google map. I managed to drop the maps riding over rough road under reconstruction right in front of a group of children waiting for a bus. They asked me where I was going and I explained I was on my way to Mexico. "No, no", they said, " you should take a plane...that's what people do!"

This article continues by clicking [here](#). Or, for access to all of John's posts, and those made by supporters along the way, go to the [Bi-CICLO Facebook Group](#).

Ontario and San Miguel de Allende.

Most exciting was the number of donors who were touched by John's gritty journey and the remarkable diary of his "pedalea".

We hoped but didn't dare believe that we could make our goal of \$25,000 which June Oliver, tireless treasurer of Amistad, updated weekly. When we finally went over the top shortly after John arrived in SMA the cheers were heard from SMA to Toronto.

My thanks to the more than 200 donors who contributed money, and to the dozens of volunteers who helped at all the Bi-CICLO events.

As well, to the project's official sponsors: [Association of Ryerson Midwifery Students](#), [BarVolo](#), [Cask Days Cask Beer Festival](#), [Flight Network](#) (for flying John & his bike back to Toronto), [the Midas Letter](#), [Portfolio Management Corporation](#), the ShaRna Foundation, [The Spanish Centre](#) and [Cycle Solutions](#) in Toronto for keeping John's wheels in such good shape.

Most importantly *muchas, muchas gracias* to John himself who kept us all on the edge of our seats for 44 exhilarating days. Happy 70th Birthday, John!

Double the impact of your year-end Amistad donation

A San Miguel resident who wishes to remain anonymous is challenging Amistad members and supporters to raise 100,000 Mexican pesos (approximately \$8,000 Canadian dollars) for **Apoyo a Gente**

Emprendedora A.C., one of the non-governmental organizations we support in San Miguel. If we succeed by December 31st, the donor will match that amount.

Donations made via **Amistad** will be used to provide business training to about 50 candidates for Apoyo's *Entrepreneur Micro-lending Program*, particularly to women from rural areas. The anonymous donor's contribution will then cover up to 30 micro-loans.

The business training consists of workshops in the basics of marketing, business administration, strategy, and personal motivation. Once the training is completed, participants are invited to submit business plans and an application for a micro-loan of up to 5,000 pesos (C\$400).

And, if you would like to make a donation in someone else's name as a gift this holiday season, please pass on their email address and we will let them know of your thoughtfulness and generosity.

Again, please know that donations made to **Apoyo** via **Amistad** before December 31st will have double the impact.

Biblioteca Education Project Update

by Project Chair Jaci Winters

Since 1954 the SMA *Biblioteca* has helped educate young Mexicans in San Miguel and environs. Founded by Canadian Helen Wale, it was the first NGO to provide books to Mexican children to improve literacy and enjoyment of reading, and was also the first organization to provide scholarships so that children could stay in school longer and graduate.

During 2015 the *Biblioteca* awarded 50 scholarships to high school students and 53 scholarships to university students. The **Amistad Biblioteca Education Project** supported 12 of these students in 2015 – four in high school and eight in university for a total of \$40,000 pesos (about C\$3200).

As well as scholarships, every summer the *Biblioteca* offers free classes in art, computers, crafts, English, and chess to about 400 children. Parents appreciate this program as it ensures a safe and secure space for the children when they're working or taking care of other duties. They also know it advances their children's chance at a better future.

Amistad donors can improve access to higher education for many more Mexican youth, and receive a Canadian tax receipt for their gift, when they donate to the Biblioteca Education Project.

Emilio Hernández Ángel from Charco de Sierra is studying engineering. His dad is a farmer and bricklayer and his mother a housewife.

Francisco Uriel Jacinto Ramírez from Rico de Abajo is studying architecture. His father is a mason and his mother a housewife.

Casa Midwifery Project Report

A New Generation of CASA Midwifery Students arrives in San Miguel!

by: Christine Sternberg, Amistad &

Maria Eugenia Torres, Clinical Director of CASA Midwifery School & Hospital

Classes began in early August for the 17th group of students at the [CASA Midwifery School](#). They will complete the three-year program in mid-2018 and, after fulfilling government requirements for practice, will receive the title of Partera Profesional (Professional Midwife). The 22 Students came from 11 states in Mexico, including San Luis Potosi, Queretaro, the Federal District (DF), Jalisco, Quintana Roo, Morelos and Guanajuato.

Tania Rocio Lopez from Guanajuato describes a flood of emotions when she heard she would be among the new students: "...of happiness, of hope and also of fear, knowing the great responsibility I would be assuming and the sacrifice and hard work, but , [also] how it

would be good for me and for my family.”

Another CASA student, **Gabriela Elia**, says “Naci para ser partera.” (I was born to be a midwife.) She appreciates the opportunity to study a model that, while scientifically based, includes ancestral, traditional knowledge.

New staff have been added this year, and there are now three Clinical Coordinators who work directly with the students in their clinical placements. They are CASA graduates **Fatima del Rosario Ramirez**, **Gabriela Cardenas** and **Marlen Mejia** who are now teaching the next generation. The additional staff will help to strengthen the program and allow for better organization of work to be done. **Maria Eugenia Torres** will continue as Clinical Director of the School and the CASA Hospital. Amistad donations fund the salary of one of these Clinical Coordinators.

Elegir Report

“Yo Me Quiero ... I Love Myself”

by Lorna Ferguson

Self-esteem was the theme of the day when CASA psychologist Isabel Morales Lopez drove fellow Amistad member Mark O’Neill and me out to the rural village of *Trojes de Belen*. The community of about 100 is isolated, far from the highway over a rutted dirt road, so we took it slowly.

Isabel is the coordinator of **Elegir**, CASA’s anti-violence program. Support from Amistad Canada pays her salary and this was an opportunity to visit one of her support groups designed to break the cycle of violence which affects many Mexican women and children.

Isabel ran two group sessions on self-esteem, the first with 16 children ranging in age from 6 to 11. The message was clear – each of them is special and deserving. A wooden “treasure” box offered up proof as one by one, Isabel carefully drew out a large gold star and

gently set it in the hands of the child whose name it mysteriously bore. Then one by one the students placed their stars on the white board.

A second session with six women also focused on self-esteem. The high-spirited, high-speed Spanish discussion was harder to follow, but the need for the

program was clear, judging from the looks on the faces of the women as they opened up with the group.

We rode home feeling humbled by the experience and very glad that Amistad funds this program.

Together We Can. . .

by Margot Young

Left to right: Kim Maxwell, Sandy Rafos, Bob Rafos, Margot Young, May Maskow, Lynda Freeman, Joan Walder, Wayne Walder and Joy Gilbert. We met over margaritas, coffee and cake, celebrating Karina and getting to know each other better.

Last June, **Jóvenes Adelante** sent out a nail-biting call to friends and supporters because they had more deserving students they wanted to give scholarship packages to than available funds. Immediately I wanted to help make a difference in the life of one of those deserving students.

Following the example of a friend in the U.S., I emailed a small group of friends, proposing that together we each pay a share of the cost of one student's university education for five years, which is Jóvenes' commitment. I targeted friends who, like me, winter in San

Miguel, plus others who have volunteered in developing countries.

Imagine my excitement when emails of support came back from six friends! Some gave a full share, others committed part shares, and one even obtained contributions from her friends! Together we raised enough to enable one student to attend the university of her choice.

Being able to send our money to Amistad, at a Canadian address, and obtain a tax receipt, eased the process and gave confidence to those not familiar with San Miguel.

We are thrilled to be helping fund the education of **Karina Rioyos Munoz**. She is studying Industrial Relations at the University of Guanajuato. Those of us who spend time in San Miguel look forward to meeting with Karina.

Bram Morrison In Concert(s)

Amistad Canada supporter **Bram Morrison** (of *Sharon, Lois & Bram* fame) is once again lending his considerable talent to benefit our partner NGOs.

He will present three concerts in San Miguel in early 2016: February 22 & 29 and March 7. All are Mondays at 5pm at Teatro Santa Ana at la Biblioteca.

One performance is a benefit for la Biblioteca, one is for CASA, Apoyo, Jóvenes Adelante & la Biblioteca, and proceeds from the third will go toward covering Amistad's general expenses.

Please pencil those dates in your calendar; more details will follow in the New Year.

If you are not currently a member of **Amistad Canada** and would like to be OR, if you are already a member and would like to nominate someone for membership, please contact Joy Levine, Secretary, Amistad Canada at volunteer@amistadcanada.org.

Please forward this newsletter to anyone to whom it may be of interest.

As we work to build our mailing list, please do advise us by email – volunteer@amistadcanada.org – if we have misspelled your name or there are any other corrections required. Should you not wish to receive further communications from us, please use the unsubscribe feature in this Newsletter.

Amistad Canada's work is built upon the efforts of Canadians who feel a strong connection with the Mexican town of San Miguel de Allende, as described on our website under Our History.

To make a donation to Amistad Canada

If you wish to make a donation to any or all of our Amistad Projects, please go to our website - www.amistadcanada.org and click on the donate tab. All the required information is there, including a "click here to download a printable donation form." Please be sure to mark on your cheque the project you are supporting.

Via the Internet

Easy, quick and secure donations can be made through CanadaHelps.org. For detailed information, see our website www.amistadcanada.org.

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