

Report No. 5 from Alto Cayma – 6 Jul 08

To Be on the Safe Side

Since the eruptions of the Llaima and Chaiten volcanos in Chile earlier this year, every morning when I open my door and see the bulk of El Misti rising 2 miles into the air over Alto Cayma, I find myself saying, “Good morning, Misti. Now, don’t blow up or anything today, OK? Good volcano, nice volcano!” I’m pleased to report that so far it seems to have worked.

Serving Alto Cayma – the Handicapped Medical Fund

The great event – the cochlear implant operation for 13-year old Miguel Angel Soto Huarca – has now become history. On Thursday there was a press conference regarding this first-ever cochlear implant operation in Arequipa, and that afternoon a full-page article appeared in one of the sections of the newspaper La República, with an 8-inch high photo of Miguel Angel dominating the page. The article explained all about how the implant works, and did a good job of capturing the principal facts. Arequipa is very proud of this event, because even in Lima they’ve only been doing these operations for 2 years, and now Arequipa is already starting to catch up.

The operation itself took place on Friday morning. We spent many hours waiting with the parents, who told us over and over that they never thought this dream would ever come true, yet here it was. At about 11:30, Dr. Rondón came out and announced that the operation had been a complete success. Part of the operation consisted of threading 22 thin electrodes into the cochlea of the patient's ear. Typically, only a dozen or so of these electrodes will enter the cochlea successfully and be available for activation, but when the audiologist from Lima tested Miguel Angel's electrodes, she found that all 22 had successfully entered!

I visited Miguel Angel in the hospital on Saturday morning and found him in good spirits. Now we have to wait one month for the surgical wounds to heal. Then it's off to Lima to activate the implant and begin the rehabilitation process.

Visitors

Dwight Hartsell had an organizational meeting in the woodshop on Monday, at which 16 students showed up. He’s organized them into 2 groups, and has been giving woodturning classes every afternoon. He has also spent a lot of time this week on his second-favorite passtime – taking the 4 girls he and his wife, Susan, are sponsoring shopping.

Dwight's daughter, Sherry Fowler, had another action-packed week. She devoted a lot of time and resources to addressing the needs of Carmen Rosa, Rosmeri and Mérida, the 3 new sisters she's sponsoring (see last week's report). She bought beds and many other needed items for each of them, but best of all, she now has them embarked on a course of medical and psychological treatment. At ages 7, 10 and 13, hopefully they can still recover from the years of neglect they suffered growing up in the mountains with hopelessly alcoholic parents. One thing for certain is that Sherry will stay the course with them.

Sherry left right after the Acercádonos meeting on Saturday afternoon (see below), taking over 800 cards from Creaciones Angel with her. She was headed to Lima to meet her husband, Richard, who is joining her for a week of tourism in Cuzco/Machu Picchu. Dwight will spend that week here in Alto Cayma before joining them again in Lima for the trip home.

Creaciones Angel Cardmaking Group

We expected to see 2 new girls join the group on Monday, but only Noemí showed up. Her sister, Charo, is still trying to recover from a persistent respiratory illness, and hopefully will join us next week. We have great hopes for these girls, because they have overcome huge obstacles to get to where they are today. Noemi is now 31 years old and has been married for 1 year, with no children thus far. Her father recognized her when she was born, but then abandoned her and her mother. Charo is now 26 years old and is still single. She was born as the result of a second relationship of her mother, but her father abandoned her without recognizing her, so she was given the surnames of her grandparents. With abandonment by both fathers, the family with whom the girls grew up consisted of the grandparents, the mother, some aunts and uncles, and the 2 girls themselves. Their grandfather died when the girls were 8 and 12 years old, at which point the mother and grandmother went to work bringing foodstuffs from agricultural regions to resell in Arequipa as a means of supporting the family, and the girls helped out by working as street vendors. Two years later the mother was hospitalized, underwent some costly operations which the family had to struggle mightily to pay for, and subsequently died. By this point, the family had to borrow money even to be able to bury her. The girls were aged 13 and 17 at the time. Noemí then worked steadily to insure that Charo could complete high school and continue on for technical training in secretarial and computing. Noemí herself has had very little training beyond high school. Throughout all these problems, the girls never lost the will to struggle to get ahead. Hopefully they will be able to use Creaciones Angel as a springboard to a better future.

On Wednesday we descended on the movie theater at the Saga department store with 21 people to see the latest Indiana Jones movie, thanks to the generosity of Tim and Dana O'Connell of our Rotary Club. It was the first time that 2 of the girls had ever been in a movie theater, and everyone enjoyed the film thoroughly.

Acercádonos (“Coming Together”) Sponsorship Program

One 14-year old boy in the program got some good news this week. Last December his “madrina” (sponsor) had bought him a new bicycle, but just after we delivered it to him, we learned that he had goofed off during the school year that had just ended, and that he had flunked the year. So we went back to his house and showed him how fast a new bicycle can disappear if he doesn't do his part. We told him that he would get his bicycle back as soon as he could show us acceptable grades in the coming school year. Those grades just came out, and he's doing very well now, so this past week we delivered his bicycle to him for a second time, with a commitment that we're going to stay close to him and keep him on the path to success from now on.

We had the monthly Acercádonos meeting yesterday. We introduced 5 new “ahijados” (sponsees) who have been added to the program in the past month. Three of these are the 3 sisters that Sherry Fowler is sponsoring, and she was on hand to personally welcome them into the program. The other two are being sponsored by the mother and grandmother of Victoria Palmer, the Davidson College student who is volunteering with us this summer, and she too was on hand to represent the sponsors. We also handed out the nearly 100 letters which had been sent with us by sponsors this time. After delivering these letters to the happy recipients, we asked everyone who had not received a letter to stand up and raise their hands. Approximately half of the people present stood up, and they didn't look as happy as the recipients did. Remember, sponsors, you can send a letter by mail at any time, addressed to Project Acercádonos (name of “ahijado”), c/o Victor Galdos, Casilla 158, Arequipa, Peru.

Aldea “Sagrada Familia” (The Orphanage)

Father Frank just returned from a 3 month home leave in Malta, with a side excursion to the Holy Land. Sherry Fowler had the opportunity to meet him before she left, and presented him with some photos of the Vacation Bible School activities at her church in Charleston, SC. She proposed, and Father Frank accepted, the idea of promoting an exchange between the kids in Charleston and the kids in the Aldea. Sherry also committed to sponsor

the purchase of sweatsuits for all the kids in the Aldea, in the name of her church.

Rotary Projects

Having now entered a new Rotary year on July 1, the Matching Grant application for the Alto Cayma Feeding Program will now be resubmitted to The Rotary Foundation. This application had been returned to us last year because there was one overdue report outstanding on a previous Matching Grant involving the sponsoring clubs. Remember, Rotarians, “it ain’t over ‘til it’s over”, and in the eyes of the Foundation, that means the reports are submitted as required.

Our House

There’s a smile on the face of many a guinea pig and bunny here in Alto Cayma this weekend, as another alfalfa crop has just been harvested from our field. If only those critters knew why they’re being so well fed, perhaps they wouldn’t be so optimistic.

National Strike Month

I call July National Strike Month here in Peru because it seems like every July they call a general strike over something here, and make life miserable for everyone. Now we’re scheduled for a general strike to begin this Wednesday, and who knows how severe or prolonged it will be, so on Monday and Tuesday we’ll be laying in a supply of necessities and preparing to lead the simple life (meaning sans capuccino) for a while.

“Love God, Serve Neighbor/Serving Alto Cayma”,

Jim