

## **Report No. 11 from Alto Cayma - 9 Mar 08**

### **Serving Alto Cayma**

Perhaps someday Serving Alto Cayma will write a book about employee job satisfaction (at least that's one of the objectives we always have in the forefront of our minds). Take the case of Lidia, our 23 year-old administrator. Lidia wasn't happy because her parents weren't happy. Her parents weren't happy because her maternal grandmother, who has recently come to live with them, wasn't happy. Her maternal grandmother wasn't happy because she missed the chickens and other animals she enjoyed at her former home in a remote mountain village, and was making noises about moving back up there (to live alone, at age 80, to the consternation of Lidia's parents). Solution: Gloria and Victor went to the market and bought 8 live chicks and delivered them to Grandma, pointing out that if she moves out of Lidia's house, there will be no one to take care of the little yellow darlings. Now Grandma is happy with her chicks, Lidia's parents are happy she's staying, and Lidia is happy to be working for such a nut as Gloria. "Whatever it takes!"

### **Visitors**

As you know, we don't have any visitors right now. However, plans are already being made for our Jun-Sep 08 stay, and even for Jan-Mar 09. We already have a reservation in the Volunteer House for Dwight Hartsell to return in June, along with his daughter, Sherry, and we even have a Volunteer House reservation for members of the Charlotte Rotary Club to visit 7-11 Feb 09. The point is that once long-term volunteers are taken care of, the rest of the space available in the Volunteer House is available for short-term visitors on a first come, first served, basis. I know a lot of you are thinking of coming down, especially this summer, so I just urge you to pin your dates down as early as possible and be part of the "first come".

### **Creaciones Angel Cardmaking Group**

OK, the cat can now be let out of the bag as to who was the bride I gave away Saturday evening - it was none other than Maribel, the President of Creaciones Angel! By way of background, under the laws of Peru, a civil ceremony is required for a couple to be recognized as married, and an additional church ceremony is optional. Maribel and her husband, Donald, were originally married in a civil ceremony 14 years ago, and then focused on trying to get ahead despite all the challenges of being poor in Peru. Lately, however, they had been coming under increasing pressure from their two daughters to be married in the church as well, and they finally decided to do

it. They invited us to be their padrinos (sponsors), which is a great honor in this culture, and since Maribel's parents are both deceased, I became the de facto "father of the bride".

The whole thing was a very interesting experience, with many differences from what we are used to. For example, while Gloria took a whole year to plan the wedding of our daughter, Carol, the planning for Maribel's wedding was basically done in just 2 weeks! As late as Tuesday, just 4 days before the wedding, the girls in the wedding party were brainstorming new ideas with the waitresses at Capriccio, and the so-called "rehearsal" Friday afternoon was a very cursory affair.

Saturday was a madhouse, as you can well imagine. For openers, Gloria, Victor and I had the monthly birthday party in the Aldea to attend to in the morning. Then Gloria took all the girls in the wedding party to the beauty parlor for the afternoon (5 hair stylings, 1 facial makeup and 2 sets of nails done, all for \$50). The girls then all came to our house to get dressed and have something to eat, all in the space of about an hour and a half (during which time I was engaged in trying to remember how to tie a necktie, but nobody seemed to care). The ceremony was to begin at 7 p.m. sharp. When it was time to go to the church, everyone else went in Victor's car while Maribel and I waited for the bride's car. However, this car was being driven by friends who live way across town, and they got temporarily lost trying to find our house. While waiting for them to arrive, I was weighing our options - continue to wait for the bride's car and possibly be late vs. get a cab vs. take my motorcycle - but fortunately Maribel was able to solve the problem via cellphone and we got to the church right on schedule.

When we arrived, however, it turned out that the church wasn't quite ready to begin the ceremony, so Maribel waited in the car outside while the rest of the wedding party assembled in the doorway of the church. Then, with no warning, the wedding march suddenly began playing with Maribel still sitting in the car! The bridesmaids began their procession down the aisle while I sprinted to the car to get Maribel. Fortunately, we got to the door just after the last of the bridesmaids had started down the aisle, and from there on everything went just fine. Father Alex gave a very nice wedding mass, and Victor acted as official photographer with Maris, the Maltese nurse, as his backup plus official videographer.

The reception afterwards was a very festive affair in a rented hall across from the church. All the normal customs involving the bride and groom were tastefully observed but, this being Latin America, most of the evening was given over to frenzied dancing to 120-decibel music until 2 a.m. It was a lot of fun, and all in all, it was an experience we'll long remember.

## **Acercádonos ("Coming Together") Sponsorship Program**

I dropped in at the Acercádonos office around 5:00 Friday afternoon, and spent the next 2 hours witnessing mayhem. Granted, an exceptional number of pots had come to a boil all at the same time, but what I observed was very illustrative of what it takes to try to take care of the needs of 190 people, including a mix of children and elderly, to the depth we try to go in the Acercádonos program. First of all, there was the regular Friday afternoon invasion by the elderly looking for their foodstuffs. Then there were numerous parents of schoolchildren there to see Victor for authorization and briefing on how to buy their school supplies downtown. Meanwhile, Tulita and Luisa were busy taking in and reviewing letters from all the "ahijados" (sponsorees) to their padrinos which we will get translated and handcarry with us when we return to the States the end of this month. And finally there was Gloria, off in a corner, counseling on some of the toughest cases of family problems which Victor had referred to her. What I was seeing was a lot of hard work going on, but a lot of goodness being achieved as a result of this vital program.

## **Salir Adelante ("Getting Ahead") Educational Sponsorships**

This was another big week in Salir Adelante. We received a nice package of letters, from students in the Interact Club at Mallard Creek High School in Charlotte, to share with our students here. We also added one new member to the Salir Adelante family when Dwight Hartsell decided to sponsor Soledad Garcia to study English. Soledad is a 17 year-old girl who shows great talent for woodworking, and is a very sweet girl to boot, which made for a combination that Dwight couldn't resist.

The big story of the week in Salir Adelante, however, involved Shirley Soncco Merma, one of the new candidates who was awaiting sponsorship. Shirley graduated high school in 2005. She took the highly competitive exam to enter the National University to study accounting, and made it in on her first attempt (very unusual). After a year of studying accounting, she used her vacation time to prepare to take the exam to get into law school, and also passed this exam on her first attempt. Since she liked both accounting and the law, and saw that the two curricula could be synergistic, she went through her second year in the university taking a full class load in both departments simultaneously, and got good grades in both! Now she's entering her 3rd year of 5 in Accounting and her 2nd year of 6 in Law, and plans to take classes year round in order to keep up the pace. Just yesterday we learned that Kathy White, a CPA from Grand Junction, Colorado, has volunteered to sponsor Shirley's studies. As it happened, Shirley had

volunteered to help serve at the reception for Maribel's wedding, so we gave Maribel the honor of informing Shirley, right there in front of God and everybody, that she now has a full scholarship to see her all the way through her remaining years of university. You can well imagine the reaction!

### **Final Note**

Well, it's now coming onto Sunday evening, which means time to go down to Capriccio's for a cup of capuccino. This time we'll be asking the staff to pull out the stash of Colombian coffee we brought back from our recent trip to Bogotá so that we can enjoy the "real stuff". Yes, working on the front lines of social mission work can be quite taxing.

"Love God, Serve Neighbor/Serving Alto Cayma",

Jim