

Report No. 6 from Alto Cayma - 3 Feb 08

Late Again

Since there are actually people who worry that something might have happened to us if these Reports don't come out on Sunday as advertised, let me offer my standard lame excuse: we haven't had internet in Primero de Junio for over a week. Assuming we don't get it back today either, I'll take this downtown tonight and send it from Capriccio.

Calamina Roof Project

Victor is continuing to "raise the roof" all over Alto Cayma. When he goes down to the city, as often as not he returns with a dozen or so sheets of calamina (corrugated sheet metal) tied to the roof of his car. He stages these out of the Acercádonos warehouse, and delivers them to houses whenever he can open up a window of time in his busy schedule. It is good that the weather is continuing to cooperate, because this project is going to be ongoing for some time yet. I'll have updated stats for you in next week's report.

Visitors

Dr. Michelle Ong's group finished their activities on Monday and attempted to fly to Cuzco early Tuesday morning, but the weather gods wouldn't cooperate. The flight was cancelled, and they were rebooked for the same flight the next day. When that day came, the same thing happened again. At that point they threw in the towel on going to Cuzco/Machu Picchu, and decided to just return to Lima early and spend some extra time there. Travel here in Jan and Feb can always be chancey, but I must say that this group had more than their share of bad luck.

Dr. Wayne Centrone from Portland, OR, was here from Tues to Sun. He came primarily to talk with Father Alex about big projects for here in Alto Cayma, but he also spent a little time giving Gloria and I his advice for a volunteer healthcare network project we're discussing with the Rotarians in Bogotá, Colombia. Gloria and I will be traveling to Bogotá toward the end of February to meet with the Rotarians and define this project.

We had a visitor come up from downtown Arequipa to visit us on Friday. She was Angela Delgado, the Cultural Director for the Peruvian-North American Cultural Institute, the outfit that translates all the letters for us in the Acercádonos sponsorship program. She came up to spend a morning finding out more about what goes on in the projects here, and we hope to get her more personally involved in the future. It's pretty unusual to

be able to persuade Arequipeños to come up here at all. We probably get 30 visitors from the States for every one we get from downtown Arequipa.

Saturday was another big day for visitors, as Dwight Hartsell arrived early in the morning to begin his 3-week stay and Kelly Morris came in with a group of 4 in the afternoon to begin a 5-day stay. Kelly's arrival snagged us an invitation to Sunday lunch at the home of Dr. René and Nercy Portugal, whom we know through Rotary. It was a good chance for the visitors to see how people similar to ourselves live in the city of Arequipa itself, as opposed to the Alto Cayma settlement.

Acercádonos ("Coming Together") Sponsorship Program

Saturday was yet another monthly meeting with all the "ahijados" (sponsorees) in the Acercádonos program. (How quickly they come around!) Kelly Morris' group came directly from the airport and joined the meeting in progress. I always love to see the reaction on the face of visitors when they walk into one of these meetings and receive a standing ovation from people who have never even seen them before. At this meeting we had a list of names of around 80 "ahijados" who could pick up letters and other things from their sponsors in the Acercádo office the following week, and diabolical Victor somehow managed to maneuver me into reading the list of unpronounceable Quechua surnames. Thanks, Victor!

Salir Adelante ("Getting Ahead") Educational Sponsorships

The selection process for the few scholarships we have in hand continued full tilt this week with in-depth interviews of the 10 finalists. It's going to be hard to select the most deserving of these candidates because all of them represent a good investment in the future of this community and this nation.

Rotary Projects

The Charlotte container finally came out of Customs in Lima on Tuesday, and the good news was that it didn't have to be opened and unloaded. It was driven to Arequipa on the bed of a truck on Wednesday, and was parked on the new property Father Alex has bought overlooking the Chili River valley. When we opened the container, I was astounded to see that it looked as if it had never left the loading dock in Charlotte. Everything was exactly in its place and the contents hadn't even shifted. Then, on Thursday, we attempted to swing the container off the truck bed to the ground with a rented crane, and that's when the "fun" began. With chains running from the 4 corners of the container to the crane's hook in the center,

the crane operator had just begun to put tension on the chains to lift the container when ¡POW! (that's right - in South America things go ¡POW! with inverted exclamation points), the chains snapped and went snaking off all 4 corners of the container. Then 20 minutes to rerig, another attempt to lift, and ¡¡POW!! - another failure. Then a third attempt with nylon strapping in addition to the chains, and ¡PING-PING-PING-POOM! At that point Father Alex told the crane operator to take a hike. Fortunately the bottom of the container had never separated from the bed of the truck, so there was no damage to either the container or its contents. The next day (Friday) we partially unloaded the container while it was still mounted on the truckbed in order to lighten it somewhat, and on Saturday we were able to swing it safely to the ground from the hook of a different crane. (What a relief! I felt like the Eagle had landed.) Now we need to unpack the contents and decide beforehand where everything is going to go, because we have to maintain 100% accountability in order to satisfy government inspectors who will come at any time and demand to see proof that the donations were actually used for charitable purposes and weren't just sold to buy capuccino.

A Final Note on Carnival Sunday

Those of you who have been reading these reports for a while probably remember the stories of how the youth here celebrate Carnival, the time period immediately preceding Ash Wednesday and the start of Lent. They do it by putting on the world's biggest water fight. Gangs of kids roam the streets armed with water guns, buckets and balloons filled with water. They're primarily looking for good-looking girls to drench, but they are often ambushed by other gangs similarly equipped, and end up the "drenchees" instead. It's all good clean fun, as long as they leave ugly old Gringo tourists out of it.

And that's the news from Alto Cayma for another week. Until next week, don't miss a single opportunity to

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

Jim