

Report No. 8 from Alto Cayma - 17 Feb 08

How Green Was My Drywash

Those of you who have been here will find this hard to believe, but in the wake of the unusually heavy rain, there is actually grass growing wild on the hills and in the ravines of Alto Cayma. I still do a double take every time I pass through an open area and see green. If it can happen here, I guess it can happen anywhere.

Serving Alto Cayma

Thursday, Feb 14, was El Día del Amor y la Amistad (the Day of Love and Friendship) here in Peru, and we elected to celebrate by inviting the staff of our organization out to dinner. We thought this invitation to be appropriate, because we have no better friends here in Alto Cayma than the people who work closest with us day after day, and that's our greatest blessing. These people are a real gift. Only Lidia was unable to join us, because she had a big project to present at the University the next morning. We'll certainly be glad when she finishes her studies in just a few more months.

Visitors

Dwight Hartsell, who comes twice a year to teach woodturning in our woodshop, completed the second of his three weeks with us this week. Besides teaching classes, he's been spending quality time (including a nice shopping outing on Friday) with the 3 girls he and his wife Susan are sponsoring here.

The group from the Charlotte Rotary Club was here only through Tuesday before departing for Cuzco at first light on Wednesday. These were 10 people who were all first-time visitors, so we did our best to expose them to all the experiences of Alto Cayma in the little time we had available with them. It was a great visit, as you'll see from the stories scattered throughout the rest of this report. (It's hard to believe we did so much in just 2 normal weekdays.) This was the second annual large group to visit from that club, and this year's group intends to recruit a large group for a third visit next year, as the first year's group recruited them for this year's trip. Coming from a Rotary Club with over 300 members, it will be interesting to see how far this process will extend. (Whoever thought that Alto Cayma would become a "must see" tourist destination?)

Now that the Charlotte group has departed, we're all "alone" as far as visitors are concerned for the rest of our current stay (not counting Dwight, who has been here so many times now that he's more like a regular fixture than a visitor). We'll miss the excitement of interfacing with new people, but at the same time, we have more than enough business to clean up in the few weeks that remain before we return to the States the end of March.

Creaciones Angel Cardmaking Group

Our visitors love to interact with the girls in Creaciones Angel. Dwight Hartsell is one who always does his best to spoil them. It seems like every time we turn around, he's sneaking in the door carrying another bag from the Ibérica chocolate store downtown.

The interaction with Kathy McElroy from the Charlotte Rotary Club group was especially interesting. Kathy has her own interior decorating business back in Charlotte, and she ordered 280 custom-made cards to use in her business. Fortunately Gloria has trained a few of the girls in new product development, and it's exciting to see how they're able to successfully respond to new ideas in as short a time as the Charlotte Rotary visit afforded. And of course the Charlotte Rotarians departed carrying hundreds of cards back to the States for us, as all groups who visit us do.

Lest you should think it's all fun and games in the cardshop, this week was also devoted to retraining all the girls in how to make the most challenging Canson (vellum) cards. This training was conducted primarily by Ninfa, our most expert girl in this technique, before she leaves the group to have her second child. Constant retraining such as this is required to maintain the superlative level of quality for which Creaciones Angel has become known.

Adventure in Faith Woodshop

A week ago we announced the opportunity for new people to join Dwight Hartsell's woodturning classes and, not surprisingly, more turned out than can be optimally handled. Dwight is doing everything he can to give the opportunity to everyone who wants it, including adding classes 3 evenings a week. He is very pleased with the work of all his students. They are turning out beautiful pen and pencil sets.

Acercádonos ("Coming Together") Sponsorship Program

On Tuesday we took the Charlotte Rotarians on a walk around the neighborhood to visit a couple of Acercádonos homes. As we were approaching the second home, we ran into a couple of kids in the street, a 10 year-old girl and her little brother. The little brother was barefoot, but it didn't matter. His feet didn't touch the dirt, because he was wearing a pair of pants that were at least 8 inches too long for him. We asked Tulita about him, and found that he was on the waiting list for a sponsorship under Acercádonos. When we made that known to the visitors, one of the couples decided to sponsor him right there on the spot. On that same walk, we spotted 3 more houses to include in the Roof Project. As you can see, it pays to get out and about.

On Saturday we had the monthly birthday party for Acercádonos, this time for 11 "ahijados" (sponsees). Sitting around 2 rectangular tables placed end to end, with the children on one side and the elderly on the other, it makes quite a sight when the ahijados get and open their two gifts apiece - a pile of gifts on the tables and a circle of smiles all around.

Salir Adelante ("Getting Ahead") Educational Sponsorships

We invited the visitors from the Charlotte Rotary Club to sit in with us as we conducted second round interviews with several of the remaining candidates in the group of 10 finalists. The visitors were so impressed with the candidates that 2 of the couples pledged sponsorships right there on the spot.

We held the regular monthly meeting of the Salir Adelante scholars on Saturday, and it was gratifying to see the payoff from our recent intensive efforts as the existing group of 18 scholars was joined by 5 new ones, the first fruits of our current recruiting campaign. The timing is perfect, as the new school year is about to begin. Four of the 5 obtained their sponsorships from the groups which have recently visited us here, underscoring what we already know - that when people come and see for themselves, they want to become involved. Our challenge is to convey the need, and the soundness of the investment, to those back home who are not able to come here in person. A number of our visitors have volunteered to help us spread the word, for which we're very grateful.

Rotary Projects

The Charlotte Rotary Club delegation visited the container site on Tuesday. Getting this container here was a project spearheaded by 2 Rotary clubs and 2 churches in the Charlotte area, and Father Alex and Serving Alto Cayma on the receiving end. The container was of special interest to Will Barnhardt of the Charlotte club, as he has volunteered to head the project should we decide to take on another container shipment this coming fall. We were informed that the government inspector only wanted to inspect medical-related items, so on Wednesday we started removing as much of the other stuff from the site as possible. As a result, we now have a roomful of cartons in the community room on the first floor of our house, the contents of which will equip a whole new workshop for teaching the art of decorative rubber stamping. Dwight Hartsell was also pleased to take delivery on a bunch of stuff he had sent in the container for use in his woodshop. The inspector came on Thursday, and there was no problem, so at last we can say that "The Container from Heck" has finally been tamed.

The Water Project was a major focus for the visit of the Charlotte Rotarians, since their club is the main sponsor of this project. On Monday morning we went down to the river to inspect the antiquated water plant which will be replaced by this project, and on Monday evening the Charlotte Rotarians and their wives were treated to a look at Rotary, South American style, as we visited the weekly meeting of Charlotte's partner club, the Rotary Club of Arequipa. The meeting was conducted with much more formality than we are used to in the States, including calling on Charlotte Past President Luther Moore during the opening ceremonies to deliver a tribute to the American flag (with absolutely no prior warning). The wives were very graciously received by the wives of the Arequipa Rotarians, who had attended the meeting just for this purpose. All in all, it was quite an experience for first time visitors.

On Tuesday, in the presence of the visiting Charlotte Rotarians, Father Alex' Rotary Club of Arequipa Cayma staged a VERY nice turnover ceremony to deliver the Eye Clinic and Police Vehicle to the community as the result of projects had been co-sponsored by Arequipa Cayma and several clubs from District 7680 (NC). Later that day we were gratified to see the police vehicle already out patrolling the neighborhoods.

Several members of the Arequipa Cayma club, who are also volunteer firefighters, requested a meeting with the visiting Charlotte Rotarians. The Arequipa Volunteer Fire Department has had a number of interchange activities with the Charlotte Fire Department under the auspices of the Sister Cities program, but now the Arequipa firemen are seeking donated

equipment to replace the 25 year-old gear they currently operate with. The Charlotte Rotarians agreed to use their networking resources to see if and how such donations could be accomplished.

Book Two for Bogotá

Gloria and I will be in Bogotá next Sunday, so I will try to send Report No. 9 from there. Until then, please don't forget to

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

Jim