

**SISTER ISLANDS**

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**SOMOS ISLEÑOS**

"Justice cannot be for one side alone, but...

... must be for both ." Eleanor Roosevelt

**Spring 2004**



*Farmer delegation meets producer family.*

## **BAINBRIDGE CAMPESINO DELEGATION DIGS OMETEPE**

*by Ela Esterberg*

The new year began with an exciting start for the Sister Islands Association when the first ever local “*campesino*” delegation traveled to Ometepe in early January. As farming is by far the largest activity of daily life on Ometepe, and the future of farming on Bainbridge is the focus of intense community concern, the time to connect “*productores*” of both islands seemed long overdue.

The group included seven organic farmers: Bainbridge Islanders Art Biggert of Ocean Sky Farm; Susan and Mark Shaffer of La Siembra Farm; Elizabeth DeQuine and her son Devon Sampson, a Sustainable Agriculture major at UC Santa Cruz and former BHS student delegate; as well as former Islanders Rebecca Slattery and Bill Richards, owners of Persephone Farm in Indianola. The delegation was coordinated by Kim Esterberg and Ed Kushner.

While the trip was replete with many “high points,” the *campesinos* from the North found that these were made all the more special because of a shared interest in nature and in “working the land.” For example, the usual 15-minute walk up to the *cafetal* from the *hacienda* at the Magdalena Coffee Cooperative took several hours due to our visiting farmers’ intense interest in all the vegetation and insects (both beneficial and pest) they encountered. Other days, the *campesino* delegation worked alongside their Ometepe counterparts and learned about the crops grown there--staples such as plantains, corn, rice and beans, tropical fruits such as mangoes and pineapples, and others such as ginger

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## Campesinos... contd from pg 1.

and tumeric and even vanilla orchids.

The farmers discussed problems the Ometepinos encounter, for example, the relationships between pesticides, fertilizers, crop yields and their personal health; and the economics and practical aspects of producing good quality food using strictly organic versus traditional farming methods. The *norteamericanos* learned about much-needed farm credit loans available through a couple of local nonprofit programs, and visited local community water systems and housing projects. Delegates also had a two-day homestay which included experience working on small family farms.

Language was sometimes a challenge, but photos of Bainbridge farm animals, vegetable gardens and compost piles proved to be fertile fodder for many conversations between the farmers of the two islands! While the farmers from the North got a window on agriculture in the developing world, they also shared stories of their own efforts with small scale organic farming. As always, we expect that the seeds sown through these new friendships will grow over time and blossom into a mutual understanding of the basic struggles and successes of those who produce the foods we all enjoy.



*Bainbridge farmers in coffee forest.*

## ISLAND IMAGES

*by Susan Shaffer*

As much as you try to imagine it, you never can really know about a people and place until you have had a chance to experience it first hand. That is how my husband, Mark, and I feel now that we have had an opportunity to visit Ometepe. We recently returned from a week on our sister island as part of the Farmer Delegation. Up to that time, I had been on the Sister Islands Board for a little over a year. When I told Lee Robinson, another Board member, what a great time we had, she said, "It all makes sense now, doesn't it?" Yes, it does make sense, but there are still many questions, and a deeper desire to learn and experience more! You can't help leaving Ometepe without wondering "How and when can I return?"

Images of our sister island linger in my mind...Just as I have seen in the logo on our coffee bags and t-shirts, those two volcanoes of Ometepe really do pop out of Lake Nicaragua, and we learned that



*December 2003 coffee delegation with some of their harvest.*

Ometepe is a Nahuatl word meaning “two hills”...Riding in the back of trucks from pueblo to pueblo, one has to hold on for dear life because you just never know when the wheels will find another pothole (and they do very often!)...I noticed how clean it was around individual homes, and then realized that each day, the dirt around each house is raked and the debris burned. Somehow, I sensed a sort of peace in caring for one’s place. And when I saw these cared-for homes, I felt a sense of peace myself.

One day, we rode around the southern part of Ometepe (Cerro Maderas) with the Mayor of Altagracia, Alcides Flores. I was excited to see some of the projects I had been hearing about for years – potable water systems, playgrounds, schools, community centers, and the homes where student delegates have stayed while contributing to these projects. Many of the towns are sporting new signs (yet another Sister Islands funded project), reminding us—Ometepino and visitor alike—to use water wisely. Along with the message of conservation, the name of the town is proudly displayed. A true sense of pride in each of these communities was apparent to me. In addition, the water initiative has been a joint effort of the Fundación Entre Volcanes (FEV), Islas Hermanas (BOSIA), and the water committees on Ometepe. I felt a big heart-filled appreciation for all the work the Bainbridge-Ometepe Sister

Islands Association has done the past 17 years and know that we are indeed making a huge difference in the lives of people on both our Islands.

I encourage anyone who is interested to join one of our delegations and see first-hand why the people and places on Ometepe are so special.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Wedding Bells:** Long-term volunteer in the Sister Islands Office--Siri Kushner of Bainbridge--married Héctor Guillén of Ometepe on Dec. 30th at Altagracia, Ometepe. Congratulations and *Felicidades!!*

**Many thanks to The Traveler:** Every year, The Traveler in downtown Winslow donates a portion of its December sales to the Sister Islands. This year the donation was \$1,585 for purchasing school library materials for Ometepe.

**Delegation News:** In December a coffee delegation of 16 members and friends of the Sister Islands participated in the coffee harvest at Finca Magdalena, as well as presented encyclopedias and other teaching materials to schools on the island. The yearly student delegation visiting Ometepe this Spring comprises a record setting-38 students plus chaperones, divided among four towns and the Sí a la Vida project in Altagracia.

## TEACHER EXCHANGE

by Dee Caplan-Tuke

On December 29, Bainbridge Island greeted three adventuresome young teachers from Ometepe who had come to visit for six weeks. Darlin Mairena, Yissell Potoy, and Lucybeth Cruz all teach English on Ometepe. They braved the freezing dips in temperature to have an opportunity to practice their English and experience a remarkable cultural exchange. Their visit was supported by funds donated to Islas Hermanas via the One Call For All campaign, as it is exchanges such as this that underlie the principles and hopes of our organization.

Each teacher was hosted by a different family on Bainbridge every week, all eager to share experiences as well as daily life activities, and all grateful for the opportunity to get to know these remarkable women. The teachers were kept very busy with a variety of activities organized by Islas Hermanas and the host families. They visited elementary and secondary schools on the Island, and taught in the Spanish classes. They helped bag Ometepe coffee every week. They attended church services, toured sites in Seattle, and participated in the Sing Out to celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday, to name just a few of the many activities arranged for them.

This year the teachers were able to directly receive the check from Alice Mendoza's third graders at Wilkes Elementary, who raise money for Ometepe each year by creating and selling calendars. This was a highlight for the kids as well as for the teachers.

The visiting teachers also attended the January planning meeting of the BOSIA Board, where they shared valuable insights about their circumstances as educators. They described their need for very basic resources, like dictionaries, paper, and art supplies. Their input will better direct our decisions as we set priorities for the year ahead.

The teachers' visit was a community-wide event that culminated in the farewell party on February 6, where 100 people came to say *adios* to Darlin, Yissell, and Lucybeth, and to thank them for touching and enriching our lives.



Ometepe English teachers at city hall.

## WELCOME, DARLIN, INTO OUR LIVES

by Maggie Pettit

As a student who traveled to Ometepe last spring, I started attending BOSIA board meetings in October. There I learned of the Ometepe teacher delegation that would be coming to Bainbridge. I decided to host a teacher, and when my parents gave the OK, I realized the depth of this opportunity. By hosting Darlin Mairena, I could open their eyes to a passion of mine that has grown from my experience as a student delegate on Ometepe.

One of my most vivid memories from our week with Darlin is the Saturday night Contra dance. The teachers had been itching to go to a *fiesta* for weeks. Finally, when the night came, I attempted to explain to Darlin that I had no idea what a Contra dance was. It would be *una sorpresa*.

Darlin, my parents, and I arrived at Island Center Hall naive but excited. As we found out, Contra dancing is code for square dancing. We flew across the floor, stumbling through the steps,

laughing, swinging our partners through the crowd. The dancing seemed to pull a smile out of everyone. The teachers were beaming. Everyone was brought to the same level, just human to human interaction. I loved witnessing that connection.

Bringing Darlin into my life and the lives of my loved ones for a week was a very warm and refreshing experience. I brought the teachers to my high school Humanities and Poetry/Short Story classes. I listened to my Mom and Dad learn pieces of Spanish over dinner. I helped cook a *gallo pinto* lunch with my friends from Bainbridge and Ometepe. I saw this connection, this blend of *cariño* and curiosity, a hundred times that week. The experience caused me to become overjoyed at the fact that I will return to Ometepe this spring with a whole new web of *amigos*. More importantly, I was able to share this passion with my parents, welcoming a part of Ometepe into our home. Thank you, Sister Islands Association, for this wonderful opportunity.



*Maggie and Darlin at Fort Ward*

## North for the Winter

*by Linda Snyder*

December winds blew cold,  
With field and meadow lightly chilled.  
Bainbridge covered by winter white,  
Everywhere could be heard the words  
It never snows here....

But,  
the brisk air and iced roads melted away,  
Bainbridge Island had a secret recipe.

Invite three Ometepe teachers:  
Yissell del Socorro Potoy Sevilla  
Darlin Arguello Mairena  
Lucybeth Morgan Cruz.

Mix in a community worth of warm smiles,  
Add a dash of gracious home stays,  
Sprinkle in a pinch of daily service projects,  
farm visits,  
classroom projects,  
museums, Sing Out,  
local dances,  
ferry tours,  
first time bowling trips,  
Nicaraguan meals,  
coffee bagging,  
and....

Six weeks of winter flew by,  
Leaving our island feeling almost balmy.

The night before leaving, bags packed,  
In a mix of sadness and beaming faces  
we gathered.

Tables of food,  
Hugs all around,  
Warming good-byes,  
Ometepe songs and  
Dancing to the Recliners.  
Saying our farewells, promising to meet again.

February tumbles with blue skies  
As hearts and minds gain light for planting  
New ideas, new friends.  
Everywhere could be heard the words  
Can they come back?

## ISLAS HERMANAS ESTABLISHES GOALS

*by Dallas Young Shaffer, President*

The January meeting of the Board of Directors was devoted to reviewing the past year's accomplishments and planning for 2004. The priorities we identified for 2004 involve both what we do as an organization and how we do it.

### What we do:

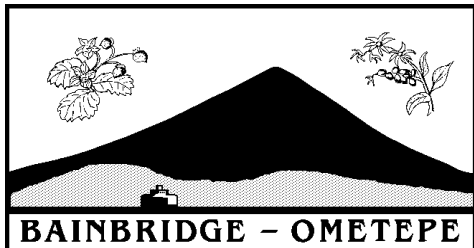
- 1) Water systems - Continue to support the ability of local water committees to maintain and manage community water systems.
- 2) Schools - Increase our efforts to help primary and secondary school teachers acquire adequate teaching materials.
- 3) Scholarships - Expand educational opportunities for Ometepinos by recruiting more scholarship sponsors.

### How we do it:

- 1) Community capacity building - Support empowerment and leadership by interacting with Ometepe communities in a culturally sensitive manner.
- 2) Volunteers - Include volunteer development and recognition in all our activities.

The planning session was greatly enriched by participation of the three teachers visiting from Ometepe. Thanks to Bainbridge High School teachers Susan Koch and Magaly McLaughlin for translating. And special thanks to Bonnie Snedeker for offering skillful guidance and facilitation, which led to a very productive and inspiring meeting.

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WAIT! Don't just recycle this —Pass it on to a friend!



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