

THE BURLINGTON/ (BILWI) PUERTO CABEZAS SISTER CITY PROGRAM
15 BEECH STREET, BURLINGTON, VT 05404
WWW.UVM.EDU/SISTERCITY

2020 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE CITY OF BURLINGTON

Board Members:

Michael Bergeron, Peter Clavelle, Tina Escaja, Dan Higgins, Adele Hohertz-Serpan, David Hutchinson,
Jane Kramer, Patricia O’Kane, Meghan O’Rourke

MISSION

The Burlington/ Puerto Cabezas Sister City Program was established by the Burlington City Council in 1984 to support interaction between residents of Burlington and residents of Puerto Cabezas, a municipality on the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua. While strategies have changed over the years, the sister city focus continues to be the creation of partnerships between like-minded groups and individuals in Vermont and Nicaragua.

2020 was the second year that there were no delegations traveling from Burlington to Bilwi. COVID-19 has meant that our interactions with our Hermanamiento partners in Bilwi have been virtual, relying on email and ZOOM conference calls. We asked for ways Burlington might help with the situation in Bilwi and were suggested two projects, both involving the Irma Cajina School that Burlington has partnered with for many years. First was a request for enabling the school to establish a connection for municipal electricity. Lighting will enable the school to hold night classes, as well as offer increased safety during the dark hours. We agreed to cover the costs of supplies and labor to bring electricity into the school. The second request we agreed to was for building portable sinks and running water where students could wash their hands during the pandemic. Teachers and health workers will use the area to demonstrate sanitation and good COVID practices to students and family groups in the neighborhood.



As part of the exchange we asked that a video be made that we could show in Burlington introducing the school, teachers, and students. One of the videographers we have worked

with in Bilwi has volunteered to help with the video. Meghan O'Rourke is communicating also with a young woman in the Mujeres Creativas group with whom she hopes Channel 17 can establish a regular exchange of videos documenting life in Bilwi.

In February the Sister City Program made a donation to Burlington's Global Roots Film Festival in support of a film showing how Nicaragua has been portrayed by media in the United States. The festival had to be cancelled because of COVID-19, but the films will be shown on line in October as part of the Vermont International Film Festival. We also made a donation to Partners in Health of Maine, an organization started by Dr. Bach in the 1970s, which continues to send doctors and equipment and has a major impact on the health situation in Bilwi.

Finally, we are open to any ideas for introducing Burlington to their sister city in Bilwi. The Burlington/ Puerto Cabezas partnership offers Vermonters a unique opportunity for exploring global issues through the perspectives of a long-term sister city relationship. Whatever someone's interest - arts, music, urban development, women's issues, media, or community gardening- we can arrange contacts with appropriate counterparts. During this period, with travel prohibited, that may be through photography, video, or zoom-ing. We currently have an exhibit of photographs by Dan Higgins of Bilwi poets and their writing that we'd like to use as a catalyst for an interaction of Bilwi and Burlington poets.

The Sister City Program is always looking to expand the board and seek members with new interests. Meetings before the pandemic took place at board member Jane Kramer's house, 15 Beech Street, in Burlington. We can be contacted through our web site: www.uvm.edu/sisterciy

Report submitted: Dan Higgins, Chair of the Board
September, 2020