

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

2017 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE CITY OF BURLINGTON

Board Members:

Michael Bergeron, Tina Escaja, Dan Higgins, Adele Hohertz-Serpan, David Hutchinson, Peter Clavelle
Richard Kemp, Jane Kramer, Meghan O'Rourke, Anne Scheffler

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.

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2016-2017

In June, 2016, a delegation from the Mayor's office in Puerto Cabezas visited Burlington on a fact-finding mission to learn about Vermont's Community Garden and Cooperative Farm projects. Mayor Reynaldo Francis, Vice-Mayor Anicia Matamoros, and Executive Director Rodolfo Spear arrived in Burlington on Friday June 17th for six days during which the group met with participants of community gardening projects, were hosted to a reception at City Hall by Mayor Weinberger, and were able to put a personal face on the sister city relationship.

In early February 2017 board members Jane Kramer and Dan Higgins traveled to Bilwi and made arrangements for Alex Halkin and Mike Bergeron to follow later in the month. Alex has been involved for years with community video production, in both Mexico and Cuba, and she brought down a stack of DVDS exemplifying that work. Dixie Lee arranged for a talk at URACCAN, where Alex showed one of her films and fielded questions by sociology students. She also left DVDs with Bilwi cable stations for showing on local TV. Through the connection with URACCAN we met Jilda Lopez, an enthusiastic graduate student enrolled in the Intercultural Communication Program, whose thesis involves an exploration around issues of health, women's needs, and environment in relationship to the Autonomy process.

Mike Bergeron became a Sister City board member last October and joined the delegation to familiarize himself with life in Bilwi. Mike works at a detention center for adolescents in Vermont and, because of Mike's job, Dixie Lee arranged through the Judiciary for Mike to meet with a group of kids in Puerto Cabezas who have been in trouble with the law. Mike spent an afternoon talking with them about his work and his personal history. He also spent hours walking around town, talking with people, and one afternoon met with Lloyd Cuthbert, a well known practitioner of herbal medicine.

During the month long visit we renewed old contacts and sought out new ones. The Mayor's office introduced us to projects they have been initiating around vegetable production, including field trips to large municipal greenhouses as well as to small garden plots in individual yards. Myrna Cunningham gave us a tour of a pilot environmental farm the organization CADPI is

creating out by the new BICU campus. At the Irma Cajina School, where the sister city program last year helped with construction of a comedor, we discovered they still had no tables for kids eating lunches. Thanks to the efforts of Julian Bello Fenly, a neighborhood hero, and with Burlington help obtaining materials, new tables were constructed for the comedor. <<https://vimeo.com/208181614>>

When in Bilwi we always seek out examples of arts and music as a way of promoting sister city relationships. At the Annual Casa Cultura Poetry Recital we announced board member Tina Escaja's vision for a Burlington/ Bilwi poetry exchange in the spring of 2018 and solicited poems from local poets. Our friend Mantá arranged for introductions with musicians, several of whose work I've been able to document. Here is a video link to Grupa Karma singing their song "Autonomía". <<https://vimeo.com/208179384>>.

Finally, Margarita Antonio and the group Mujeres Creativas presented the sister city board with a proposal for a project called "In and Out Around Cocal- People to People Learning". This is a multifaceted proposal, coordinating with various community organizations in an exploration through art classes, dance classes, and radio the unique history and culture of the neighborhood of Cocal. We are enthusiastic about this community-oriented proposal, especially as it includes workshops for kids we've worked with that attend the Irma Cajina School. The board is contributing financial support for the project and looking forward to sharing the work in Burlington.

In short, we have numerous connections in Puerto Cabezas, with potential for exciting collaboration on a number of different fronts. But we are falling behind in making connections in Burlington. If the sister city program is to be relevant to Burlingtonians we realize we need a more active outreach. One idea under discussion is a citywide festival celebrating Burlington's different sister cities. Phet Keomanyvanh, who works with CEDO, has suggested that City Hall might be interested in hosting an event like this in 2018. We are also discussing hiring a coordinator- someone other than a board member- whose job it would be to seek out new connections, start conversations, and facilitate the agenda of the board. The Sister City program will be organizing a delegation sometime in February/March 2018, and we invite any residents of Burlington who'd like to participate to contact us. Whatever someone's interest - arts, music, urban development, women's issues, media, or community gardening- we can arrange contacts with appropriate counterparts.

IN SUMMARY

The Burlington/ Puerto Cabezas partnership offers Vermonters a unique opportunity for exploring global issues through the perspectives of a long-term sister city relationship. We are always looking to expand the board and seek members with new interests. Meetings take place at board member Jane Kramer's house, 15 Beech Street, in Burlington, and we can be contacted through our web site: www.uvm.edu/sisterciy

Report submitted: Dan Higgins, Chair of the Board
July 31st, 2017