



## FALL 2016

# NEWSLETTER

AMIGOS DE SANTA CRUZ FOUNDATION

COMMITTED TO HELPING IMPROVE THE LIVES OF THE PEOPLE OF SANTA CRUZ THROUGH SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT



Dear Friends,



Pat Torpie, Director

It's been an amazing and transformative year on many levels. In 2016 we initiated several new programs: Santa Cruz Youth Corps, CECAP Industrial Arts Program, Early Education Teacher Training, and Technology in the Classroom. These are all programs that promote our mission and goals and we are very excited about them. I hope you will feel as proud as we do when you read about our accomplishments on the pages that follow.

Our current Strategic Plan provides an excellent road map for our programs. Transitioning to new leadership is part of that plan. After 18 years at the helm, I will be stepping down from my position as Executive Director at the end of 2016. Amigos has grown from the efforts of a few foreign residents who, back in 1998, wanted to help support the local school. Today, Amigos is a well run and highly impactful organization. Our staff of 20+, serves 6 communities, and is helping change hundred of lives through support for education and economic empowerment. I couldn't be prouder of our accomplishments and the role I have had the honor to play as Co-Founder and Executive Director. My work with Amigos has been a high point of my life. As I pass the baton to our new Executive Director, I will do so with confidence that Amigos is on a solid path into the future. I am as passionate as ever about our work and I hope you will continue to support us as we move forward.

## Amigos stands with the women & girls of Santa Cruz



In March, over 100 women and family members gathered to celebrate International Women's Day in Santa Cruz. They stood in solidarity with women all over the world to fight for equal rights and an end to violence against women.

Women's empowerment is about education. It is about women and girls finding their voices, exercising their rights, and realizing the economic independence to follow their dreams and help their families succeed. This is a long and slow process. It requires the breaking down of age-old cultural taboos that have kept women down throughout history. Though the going is slow, we are seeing lasting progress take hold and new opportunities emerge. Young women are now articulating their dreams and

taking a more active role in local decision making.

By educating girls, we are beginning to see the positive changes that come as a result. For the first time, Santa Cruz has an elected female representative on the local council. Also this year, one young woman will proudly become the first female university graduate in the history of Santa Cruz. Her ambition is to one day be the first female mayor, and others of her generation will surely follow in her footsteps. While women of

her mother's generation did not have the same educational opportunities, they are also finding their voice and achieving more economic independence through skills and productivity training. Women's voices are definitely on the rise in Santa Cruz la Laguna!

*"I want to be a different person, I am part of new ideas that will make Guatemala a better country."*

*Estela Simaj Garcia,  
1st female university graduate from  
Santa Cruz la Laguna*

## Teaching rural women new skills

Amigos has been working with women and children in the remote communities of Santa Cruz for the past 10 years providing mothers with the knowledge, resources and confidence to provide a healthier life for their families. This year we are focusing more on women's empowerment and training. One aspect of this is to offer training in productivity skills such as making beaded jewelry, embroidery and crochet. Our

instructors travel to the remote villages to work with groups of women who want to learn a skill that will lead to income. Most of these women have never attended school, do not speak Spanish, and have never earned any income of their own. Until now, their futures have been very limited. Now they are learning new skills that will hopefully lead to earned income, a greater sense of self-esteem and a self-determined future.



The women in Tzanjomel are learning how to crochet beautiful coasters for sale.

## Promoting gender equality in all that we do...

*"I am a woman and I have equal rights to a man."*

This may seem obvious to us, but in the machismo culture of rural Guatemala, it's a bold statement. Equal rights is still a concept that has not been integrated into everyday life. A patriarchal tradition remains strong in Guatemala where girls are often tied to a domestic role and have less opportunities to become educated and find meaningful employment than their male counterparts. Uneducated girls marry younger and have much higher than average number of children. They are dependent on men and lacking in skills that can lead to economic independence.

Amigos addresses this issue of inequity in all that we do. First and foremost we support education of girls from preschool through university. Today we are seeing young women who have reached the highest level of education in their communities and more and more are pursuing higher education goals through Amigos scholarship programs. We promote leadership and civic participation through our youth programs. All children from grades 4 through 9 participate in Sexual and Reproductive Health classes taught by Amigos staff in the public schools. Both young women and men are learning more about their bodies and reproductive health than the generations before them and will



Elena Yaxon "I am a woman and I have equal rights to a man."

be better able to make informed and responsible decisions.

The current youth of Santa Cruz represent the first generation to begin to think and act differently. By giving girls the opportunity to work in a carpentry shop, we are encouraging a shift in the mentality of the community to see that girls are equally capable and that experience empowers self confidence and growth.

### Meet Elena

Elena is a smart and hardworking young woman. She is a first-year university student studying to become a teacher and currently works with Amigos as a Youth Corps intern. Elena's generation, the first to go on to high school and beyond, are more aware of their rights than ever before. They are standing up for themselves and pursuing their dreams. Girls like Elena will change the world, one community at a time. She will have a better job, earn greater income, and have a smaller and healthier family than her parent's generation. And Elena and her generation will have a greater opportunity to participate in community decision making.



Girls participate in industrial arts classes for the first time and boys are participating in sewing classes at CECAP.

## Making a difference for the children of Santa Cruz

This year, Amigos' Model Classroom Program is excited to be partnering with **La Puerta Abierta**, an early education program in Santiago Atitlan, to provide ongoing monthly training for our model classroom teachers. The focus is on creative learning and reading. Our teachers are sharing resources and collaborating with

some of the best early education professionals on the lake to learn ways to improve the education for Santa Cruz's youngest learners.

We currently have 88 children, ages 4 to 7, participating in our early education program. Our program is gaining in recognition and popularity among parents. For the first time parents began to put pressure on the local schools to hold classes everyday by signing an ACTA confirming their support for the no-cancellation policy upheld in Amigos-supported classrooms. Our policy defies the tradition of frequently cancelled school days in Guatemalan public schools. Parents are beginning to find a voice to fight for their children's right to a quality education.

nificantly more positive attitude toward school and a higher level of social development for children who participate in our model classes as compared with those who do not. These children are gaining a positive first experience with education, one that they will take with them for the rest of their lives.

### Technology in the Classroom!

This year, Amigos received a small grant to purchase a dozen education tablets to be used in our primary school classrooms. Based on their demonstrated interest in using technology as a teaching tool, we selected two teachers to work with our technology instructor to implement this pilot project. This is our first step in the direction we have been wanting to pursue for some time: technology that offers

teachers and children a wide range of learning opportunities that we, in the developed world, often take for granted. The use of tablets in the classroom will open up a whole new world for learners and teachers alike. Exciting!



This year we are piloting the use of tablets in the classrooms with selected teachers.



Model teacher training at work!

An independent survey conducted at the end of 2015 indicates a sig-

# Highlights of the Year 2016



## CECAP expansion completed!

We did it! Once again we've seen how hard work and determination can make dreams come true in Santa Cruz. The CECAP building expansion project, which includes a newly expanded rooftop restaurant and artesenia gift shop, was completed this spring. We celebrated the opening of the new cafe with a fantastic Easter Sunday brunch attended by over 60 guests. Since then our cafe, which is run by graduates of the CECAP Culinary Program, has been operating out of the newly expanded kitchen and receiving rave reviews from our visitors who enjoy the best food and views in the Lake Atitlan area. Our gift shop, Manos Cruceñas, has more

then doubled its retail space showcasing beautiful products and crafts made by our CECAP artesenia graduates. Both of these social enterprise businesses provide employment for dozens of Santa Cruz women and youth and a strong sense of pride within the community.

CECAP's expansion and the completion of a social enterprise business plan were major steps toward our goal of sustainability for CECAP over the next 5 years. More visitors to Santa Cruz will have a significant impact on the economy of the future and will help to put Santa Cruz on the map as a tourist destination.



*Above, visitors can enjoy spectacular views from our rooftop cafe. Below, Manos Cruceñas gift shop offers beautiful products made by our artisan graduates.*

## Giving youth a better chance through skills training

This year, CECAP initiated a new year-long, 20 hour per week Industrial Arts Program, modeled after the success of our Culinary Arts Program. Seven Santa Cruz youth, mostly street kids, have been participating in this program and gaining valuable hands-on skills that we hope will lead to better chances of employment in the future. Students participate in classes five mornings per week that include basic carpentry, welding, electricity and plumbing. These young men are not only learning basic skills but are putting those skills to work by helping to build furnishings for the new store, kitchen and café in CECAP. The



*Industrial Arts Program, Class of 2016*

shop is always busy with projects in the works and our students are actively engaged in hands-on learning every day. They are also learning how to make products that can be sold in the gift shop, such as children's wooden puzzles

and wrought iron candle holders. The program will include a one month on-the-job practicum for each student in one of the trade areas, working alongside trade professionals in real life workshops.

CECAP, Center de Capacitacion, completed building expansion project with new rooftop café and expanded Manos Cruceñas gift shop.

Santa Cruz Youth Corps kicks off its first full class of interns. 11 high school graduates gain work experience, job skills and improve job seeking abilities.

Model Classroom Program expands into the primary school with a total of 88 children, ages 3 to 7.

Partnership with La Puerta Abierta brings peer-to-peer teacher training to model classroom teachers.

Technology in Education Program introduces tablets in the classroom.

Amigos Nutrition Programs transition to Women's Empowerment Centers in remote villages.

New yearlong Industrial Arts Program begins!

12 scholarship students graduate from high school in December 2015. Amigos welcomes 9 new scholarship students in 2016.

Amigos supports 28 high school and 9 university scholarship students in 2015.

314 participate in CECAP classes during first half of 2016.

591 students in grades 4 through 9 participate in Amigos on-going sex education program in the public schools.

Café Sabor Cruceño receives TripAdvisor Certificate for Excellence for 3rd year in a row.

*We need your support to keep our programs going. Your donation will go a long way in our hands!*

**USE OF FUNDS IN 2015**



3% Fundraising  
7% Administration  
90% Program

**Honoring our donors**

*Amigos programs are generously supported by:*

- Carson Foundation
- Seattle Foundation
- Miracles In Action
- CG Charitable Foundation
- SG Foundation
- Grousemont Foundation
- Summit Foundation
- Rotary Clubs of Maine and NH
- John Brown Family Foundation
- Innocent Eyes Project
- Mayan Educational Foundation
- Jan and Gary Jantzen Family
- Ramsey Shirk Foundation

*....And our many wonderful friends...*



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# Santa Cruz Youth Corps: "We are the change"



*Meet our first class of Santa Cruz Youth Corps interns: from left to right, Santiago, Andres, Sandra, Ezequiel, Elena, Jeramias, Juana, Gloria, Miguel, Manuel and Maria.*

Our Santa Cruz youth are growing up better educated and more prepared to enter the work world. The problem is finding a job. Our young high school graduates struggle to compete after graduation. In a limited job market employers will choose someone with experience over a brand new graduate. Further, our youth have the added disadvantage of coming from small, remote villages and lack experience in the work world in general. They lack the resources within their families and community to help provide examples for them in how to obtain professional work.

Youth Corps is taking on this challenge by offering our Amigos scholarship graduates a chance to

gain some real-life work experience. Eleven high school graduates (6 boys, 5 girls) were chosen in January as our first Santa Cruz Youth Corps interns. This is an outstanding group of young adults from the Santa Cruz communities who have motivation not only to improve their own lives but to improve their communities as well. They are working together to help their community while gaining valuable job skills and experience that will lead to greater employment opportunities. Each work 20 hours per week in one of several Amigos programs. They also participate in on-going leadership trainings that help them to gain the self-confidence and skills to pursue their dreams. This motivated group started off the

year by designing and creating a beautiful public mural depicting what they value most: their cultural heritage and their natural environment. This mural, located in the heart of the village, is the first mural to be painted in Santa Cruz and is a beautiful source of pride for everyone.

**Somos El Cambio**

Our Youth Corps' motto is "We are the change." That says it all. These young leaders will be instrumental in building stronger communities and better lives for themselves and their families. They are what Amigos de Santa Cruz is all about. We couldn't be more proud of them. This is a program that has great potential to change lives and we want to see that it continues. Your support will help.

## We can't do any of this without you!

Amigos has accomplished so much over the past 18 years, thanks to your generous support. We've been watching a generation become educated for the first time. Our impact is clearly changing lives. Our programs and staff are dedicated to helping improve the lives of the people of Santa Cruz through education and economic empowerment. Changes don't

happen overnight and we are in it for the long haul. We see the impact of our work everyday in the children and youth that we work with and who now work together with us to achieve our mutual mission.

*Nothing we do could be done without you, our donors. Please give as generously as you can to keep the momentum going.*

