



November 2013 Newsletter

# Co-partners of Campesinas

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*Co-partners of Campesinas* is a US based, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization that supports *La Nueva Esperanza (New Hope)* and other associations working for women's and youth education and empowerment in developing countries in Latin America. *New Hope* is an organization of sixty rural girls and women from four impoverished communities near Ilobasco, El Salvador, who meet weekly to learn income-producing skills and advance the education of members and their children. *Co-partners* also supports the *Asociación para el Desarrollo Indígena de El K'iche (ADIK)* and the *Asociación de Desarrollo Comunitario (ASDECO)*, indigenous organizations located outside of Chichicastenango, Guatemala with goals similar to those of *New Hope*.

## You did it! The new training center is up!

In August, with the support of *Co-partners* volunteers, the president of partner organization *La Nueva Esperanza* in El Salvador signed a contract for construction of a new, permanent center followed by a ceremonial ground-breaking at the site. Throughout August, September, and October, *Co-partners* volunteers Jim and Archer Heinzen monitored the construction via Skype and email. There were many challenges—a volunteer architect who dropped out just prior to construction and constant cost overages that were solved with continual fundraising and numerous donations from the Margaret P. Langlykke Fund. On November 11 Jim and Archer Heinzen, felt amply rewarded for their two years of work when they attended the inauguration of the new building (see [www.copartners.org](http://www.copartners.org) for more photos).



## Advocacy Training

Most rural women in Central America feel powerless in the face of male dominated government institutions. *Co-partners*, pursuing the third goal of our motto (*lead*), seeks to give the women we work with skills to pursue change in spite of the barriers they perceive. We use a guide developed by the Washington Office on Latin America and lots of role

playing to prepare women for action. They examine four questions:

- What do we need?
- Who has the power of decision?
- What do we have to do to persuade the person with the power of decision?
- How do we evaluate to know if our plan is working?

This year *Co-partners* offered advocacy training in both El Salvador and Guatemala. In El Salvador women were particularly focused on trying to increase the number of grades in their local school from six to nine so that children could continue in school without having to travel the long distance to Ilobasco. In the Guatemala training group, education was also a major focus. In an informal survey, the sixteen women from the municipality of Chichicastenango, identified 199 children in their communities not attending primary



Workshop members with written commitments

school. Nine of the women committed to interacting with the children's parents to see if school supplies scholarships would allow them to enroll their children.

## Guatemala Intensive English Course

Lydia and Ned Stone have just returned from their fifth year teaching English, predominantly to teachers, in Chichicastenango, Guatemala and report that they have had the best and biggest classes yet. This year Ned taught 28 “beginners”, while Lydia polished the skills of the seven members of the advanced class.

Each year Ned and Lydia return convinced that whatever the glories and beauty of Guatemala’s scenery and amazing crafts markets, there is nothing in this small country more beautiful and promising than its children. But Guatemalan women, full of promise themselves, working and struggling to ensure their children and young relatives get a chance to fulfill their dreams are also very impressive. An example is Adriana, a student in Lydia’s advanced English class, who won a two year scholarship to the United States to study electrotechnology but found on return that her hard-won knowledge of English led to jobs allowing more time for her family. She is currently teaching at a private school, continuing English study at a University an hour away from home, selling crafts that she and her siblings stay up late to fashion, raising two toddlers, and making many sacrifices so that her motherless younger sister can have the same educational advantages their late mother managed to give Adriana. Indeed, her sister, Estephany at 12 was the star pupil in Ned’s English class attended mainly by adult teachers.



*Adriana and Estephany*

## “Tapestry” Workshops

Implementing the first part of our motto, “Learn, earn, lead”, is easy compared with realizing the last two parts. Earning activities for rural women and youth are limited by location, low educational levels, lack of marketable skills and weak local and national economies. Most often, members of our partner organizations request training in skills they think have earning potential—this year’s course in hairdressing is an example, but sometimes we try an idea from a *Co-partners* member such as the embroidered canvas bags that were produced and sold in the early years of the organization. Quality control and marketing of these bags depended on the ex-patriot volunteers and could not be sustained once they were no longer closely involved.



Although compensation for work in handicrafts is often low, many rural women do have handicraft skills. Ilobasco, due to excellent clay deposits is an artisan town with stores selling vibrantly colored, low fired clay figures that are popular in El Salvador. We’ve often asked ourselves if we could develop a new artisan product that might be sold in the multiple stores selling clay figurines. Last year a show at the Virginia Quilt Museum of appliqué made by immigrant women in the US as part of a literacy class inspired the idea of trying this technique in Central America. Several women in Ilobasco are experimenting with the approach to see if it might be an additional artisan product for the Ilobasco and US markets.

### **Co-partners of Campesinas, Board of Directors**

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