

# The Oaxaca Learning Center



Making a difference, one young person at a time!

Tutoring | Women's Group | English & Computer Skills | Counseling  
Student Stipend Program | Designing The Future

[www.tolc.org.mx](http://www.tolc.org.mx)

[www.iicaprendizaje.org](http://www.iicaprendizaje.org)

## Fall 2011



*Proud author of new cookbook:  
Andrés Mesinas Cruz in the kitchen  
of the Center with a copy of the  
prized publication.*

### Cooking Up Something Special

The Friends of the Oaxaca Learning Center (FOLC) are kicking off a major fund-raising effort with the publication this fall of *¡Salud!*, a collection of Mexican vegetarian recipes adapted and perfected by the Center's superb cook, Andrés Mesinas Cruz. All proceeds from the sale of the cookbook will go to support the operation and ongoing expansion of the Center.

*¡Salud!* features over fifty healthful and easy-to-make recipes for soups, salads, main and side dishes, desserts, and beverages. The full-color, spiral-bound cookbook is designed to lie flat for easy reference. Recipes are written in Spanish and English and appear on facing pages to enable the cook to have a truly bilingual culinary experience. Most of the ingredients are readily available outside of Mexico, though acceptable substitutes are suggested.

The cookbook is the brainchild of Denise Galipeau, a long-time supporter of the Center, who not only gathered the recipes from Andrés himself but also designed the handsome, easy-to-read format in which the recipes appear. We are grateful to her for her long-standing commitment to this project, and to those who joined her during the final stages: Ruth Price, who encouraged Andrés to add personal comments about his recipes; Blanca Cue, who helped with the Spanish translation and editing; and Nan Newell, who proofread the recipes and text in English.

The cookbook can presently be purchased at the Learning Center for 200 pesos. Soon it will be available at various strategic locations throughout the city. Nan Newell, a devoted friend of the Learning Center, has offered to be the main distributor within the U.S. You can simply send a check for \$21.45 (the base price of \$17.95, plus \$3.50 shipping and handling) made payable to Nan Newell at 123 Meadow Heights Drive in Pittsburgh, PA 15215. When ordering, be sure to include your mailing address and also your email address.

Your support will be greatly appreciated, and you will be reminded of the Center with each recipe you prepare.

### *¡salud!*

*¡salud!* will make a wonderful addition to your cookbook collection -- but it would also be a perfect Christmas gift or a lovely memento of Oaxaca to tuck in your suitcase for friends back home!

## Summer School Yields Bumper Crop of Scholars

In 2011 the Center's annual, five-week summer course exceeded all expectations! A record 113 students - 51 young men and 62 young women - took part in the program. Word of mouth? Proven effectiveness? Improvements in teaching techniques? All these factors probably contributed to the number of students who availed themselves of the Center's support of their intellectual and personal development—all of it free for the asking.

Free of cost, yes; but no “free lunch!” The students who were accepted in the program had to justify taking up space that could have gone to another by demonstrating their commitment through hard work, regular attendance, punctuality and participation in the Center's collegial atmosphere. What they got out of it was certainly a free *launch*—a mega-boost into a real world of options and possibilities. They could choose from a selection of intensive courses to meet their individual needs and differing timetables:

- \* Math, physics and chemistry at all secondary and high-school levels.
- \* Basic and advanced computer skills; accounting; introductory and intermediate English.
- \* Workshops on gender issues, discovering and using one's latent talents, interpersonal communication skills, speaking in public, and the perils of various addictions, from drugs and alcohol to falling in love.

\* A discussion group focusing on a film or event relevant to the Center's work.

The task of managing this complex of students, material, flexible timetables, allocation of space and the monitoring of tutors' effectiveness all fell to the summer course coordinator, Armando Carmona. Armando is an outstanding example of the Center's ethic and process in action: a young person once in need of a boost himself, who discovered impressive managerial abilities and put them to work in the service of others like himself.

Armando is modest about his own accomplishments, giving thanks and credit instead to the many different hands that make the system function—the tutors and students for their “patience, effort and dedication;” the faithful band of volunteers for their “time and collaboration in making the summer course possible;” and to the students' parents “for trusting us with their sons and daughters.”

The summer program is only one of the Learning Center's ever-growing number of offerings, and the credit for the coordination and quality control of the Center's overall activity goes to another modest ex-student, Sonia Bautista Leon, the Center's Director. Says Sonia: “My special gratitude goes to all of you who have believed in our project and have helped in so many ways. Making this dream a reality would not have been possible without you. Thanks for being part of our grand family!”



*Seventy of the staff and students of the 2011 summer school program gather for a photo on a weekend excursion to the Centro de los Artes in San Augustin Etla.*

## After Graduating From High School . . . .

Our readers may lose sight of our students after they complete high school, so we wanted to tell you the status of two of our earliest grantees, Adrian and Jorge. We also want to mention two of the young people on the Center's staff who have been accepted to begin university level studies this fall.

### **Adrian Edson Barriga**

Adrian became a recipient of Learning Center support when he was 15 years old and participating in the self-study high school program ("prepa abierta"). Then he completed his undergraduate degree in political science at Universidad Vasconcelos in Oaxaca where, after graduation, he was a faculty member teaching political theory. At this same time, he also worked with microfinance projects in Oaxaca. In late 2010 he was invited to serve in the new state government within the Technical Secretariat of the Institute of Education as a policy advisor. In this role he negotiates with the local teacher's union and develops state level education policy. In addition, he just began his MBA at Universidad Anahuac in Oaxaca. Through this program Adrian will develop his expertise in management and investment with a focus on social venture capital and its role in development.

### **Jorge Rosario Aragon**

Jorge came to Oaxaca from his village, Santos Reyes Nopala, in the summer of 2002. He met the Learning Center's founder, Gary Titus, who gave him a job gardening and a place to live so that he could complete secondary and high school studies. After graduating, he began intensive English classes which he both had a talent for and really enjoyed. In one year he made excellent progress and realized he wanted to be an English teacher. At that time he was also helping with the renovation of the building that would become the official home of the Oaxaca Learning Center. In 2006 Jorge was accepted at the Universidad Regional del Sureste (URSE) in the undergraduate program in applied linguistics. The Learning Center funded his education at this institution. Jorge was an excellent student at URSE and was several times on the Mexican equivalent of the



*Adrian and Jorge, two of our successful former students, still play a role in the work of The Learning Center.*

Dean's list. During his university studies he tutored students at the Learning Center in math and English. This year, in recognition of his teaching excellence, he has a full-time position at the new branch campus of La Salle University, where he teaches both high school students and a Saturday extension class for children 6-10 years old. In the future, Jorge plans to pursue a master's degree in TEFL in an English-speaking country.

### **Betsaida Arango Canseco**

"Betsy" Arango, who is coordinator of our Women's Program, received an 80% tuition scholarship to begin her undergraduate studies at Universidad La Salle/Oaxaca. Betsaida was accepted to complete a degree in tourism administration. The Learning Center plans to sign a formal agreement with La Salle/Oaxaca so that other participants will be able to study at the high school, undergraduate and graduate level courses offered at the Oaxaca campus.

### **Lorenzo Gomez Bazan**

Lorenzo Gomez Bazan, the Center's English program coordinator, is beginning a master's degree in education and pedagogy at the new La Salle campus in Oaxaca. His studies will not only benefit him professionally, but will also be instrumental in his developing and expanding the English curriculum at the Center.

## Oaxaca Learning Center Honors Cath Kumar

On the last Saturday of September, a select English-speaking group gathered at the Oaxaca Learning Center (OLC) to honor Cath Kumar, founder and director of the Cambridge Academy of Oaxaca.

Cambridge is one of Oaxaca's premier language schools, and for several years, Cath has offered tuition-free scholarships to high-achieving OLC students who are motivated to learn English. Several past and present students joined Sonia Bautista León, OLC director and a Cambridge alumna, and Gary Titus, the Center's founder, to offer a warm "thank you" to Cath for her generosity.



*Sonia, director of the Oaxaca Learning Center, presents a certificate of appreciation to Cath Kumar for her ongoing support of our students.*

ship alum and graduate of URSE, now teaches English in a prestigious local high school. Betsaida Arango Canseco, the OLC coordinator of the Women's Group, began at Cambridge last December and reported that she scored 99% on an English exam at LaSalle University, where she is in her first semester studying tourist administration.

Several of the attending scholarship students confirmed that Cambridge also helped them develop better study skills. To keep their scholarships, the students have to maintain an "A" grade average and attend classes regularly.

"I cry very easily," said Cath, in response to the students' appreciation. "It's a huge, huge gift to be able to do this -- helping people who really study hard and work hard. It's a privilege, really." Cath began Cambridge Academy nineteen years ago with one teacher - herself. "Most of the language schools in Oaxaca are run by business people, but ours has always been managed by linguists, and I think that makes a difference."

When asked what attendance at Cambridge had done for him, Andrés Mesinas Cruz, the chef for the OLC bed and breakfast, said, "Now I can speak English with our B&B guests and give them cooking classes. Plus, I'm teaching my kids English."

Some twenty OLC students have gone to Cambridge on scholarship, and for many of them the experience has had a life-changing affect. "It truly is a select group," Gary said. "We pick them very carefully."

Speaking in excellent English, Gerardo Reyes Rivera, said, "Going to Cambridge helped me get a scholarship to the Universidad Regional del Sureste (URSE) and to skip ahead three semesters in English. But most of all, it helped me discover what I want to do in life, to study languages and teach English."

Jorge Rosario, another Cambridge scholar-

### The Best Way To Learn Spanish

Visiting Oaxaca and learning Spanish is a great combination. What students learn in the classroom can immediately be put into practice exploring the city, its restaurants, boutiques, museums, and markets.

Cath Kumar's success in teaching languages isn't limited to English. Cambridge Academy's companion school, *Vinigúlaza*, has developed a unique system for successfully teaching Spanish as a second language.

*Vinigúlaza* is just a couple of blocks away from the Center, occupying a beautiful colonial building in the heart of the Historical District. There are classes for adults at every level from beginning to advanced, and classes for children. For more information, visit their website at [www.vinigulaza.com](http://www.vinigulaza.com).

## Designing The Future

Since its founding, the Oaxaca Learning Center has focused on free tutoring for disadvantaged urban and rural youth, primarily junior-high and high-school students. That's where the need was and is, but with success comes new responsibilities.

After the students graduate, then what? Where might their aptitudes and abilities take them? What should they study at a higher level? Where? And what about any available scholarships?

"More and more, we were finding that our students didn't really have any vision of the future," Gary Titus, the founder of the Oaxaca Learning Center, said. At first Gary and the Center's coordinators and tutors informally counseled graduating students in career development. But that wasn't enough.

"We began developing our new counseling program, *'Designing the Future,'* last December," said Sonia Bautista León, the Center's director. "And now we are putting it into action, with its own coordinator, Jauri Sanchez Cruz."

Jauri, a third-semester law student at the University of Vasconcelos in Oaxaca, first came to the Learning Center in 2008 to study English. "I got so much help and attention then, besides the English instruction," recalled Jauri. "I realized that the Learning Center wasn't only focused on teaching subjects; it cared about the well-being of its students."

His new job is an expansion of that concern. *Designing the Future* includes a number of tools to help students nearing high school graduation make informed choices about their future. Jauri is currently building a database of higher education resources in Oaxaca state, including public universities, normal schools and private universities. The database will include information on careers offered, courses, contact information and scholarship opportunities, along with links to relevant web pages. Once the state schools are in place, Jauri plans to add the national universities that would be most attractive to OLC graduates.

Working with the Center's psychology coordinator, Edith López Nicolás, the new program also provides free diagnostic testing, so that students better understand their aptitudes and possible career direction. "We're trying to be as specific and realistic as possible in our counseling and recommendations," Jauri said. "We want to help match students with schools that are feasible for them."



*Jauri's quick wit and sharp intellect serve him well as a law student and our new coordinator of the "Designing The Future" program.*

Another important aspect of the program is shared personal experience. Previously OLC only tracked its graduates informally as they moved into higher education. *Designing the Future* will also include in its database the Center's graduates that are at various universities around Oaxaca. They, in turn, will be an invaluable source of hands-on information for young OLC graduates.

"We also plan to draw on our graduates in universities for orientation sessions for our students," Jauri said. This is especially important because OLC students typically have a lot of doubts about being able to continue their education. Many are the first to graduate from high school in their families. *Designing the Future* will now be there to help them build a more successful tomorrow.

## On To The University!

We are proud to say that thirty of the young people who studied with us for the entrance exams for university level studies this fall were accepted as first-year students. Our congratulations and best wishes to:

Magaly Alcántara	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México	Latin American Studies
Nuria Arellanes	Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana	Social Communication
María De Los Reyes	Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca	Biology
Vincente Duarte	Universidad Tecnológica de la Mixteca	Electrical Engineering
Jordy Flores	Instituto Politecnico Nacional	Computer Engineering
Rocio Hernández	Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca	Medicine
Emilse Leyva	Universidad del Mar	Communications
Idalia López	Universidad de la Sierra Sur	Nursing
Estafania Martínez	Universidad Jose Vasconcelos	International Relations
Natali Mendoza	Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca	Medicine
Alvais Montaña	Escuela Normal Bilingue e Intercultural de Oaxaca	Languages
Alma Morales	Universidad Tecnológica de la Mixteca	Administration
Armando Teran	Universidad LaSalle	Business
Sandra García	Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca	Dentistry
Erendira López	Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca	Computer Science
Javier Salvador	Universidad de Chapingo	Nursing
Miroslava López	Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca	Human Rights
Sandra Sánchez	Universidad Anahuac	Communications
Itzel López	Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca	Architecture
Liliana Martinez	Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca	Medicine
Eugenia Ruiz	Universidad Tecnológica de la Mixteca	Business Administration
David Garcia	Instituto Tecnológico de Oaxaca	Mechanical Engineering
Elizabeth Aria	Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca	Philosophy
Nayeli Bautista	Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca	Nursing
Laura Luis	Universidad de la Sierra Sur	Nursing
Aline Martínez	Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca	Medicine
Jesus Martínez	Instituto Tecnológico de Oaxaca	Chemical Engineering
Ivonne Palula	Escuela Normal de Educacion Especial	Special Education
José Pérez	Instituto Tecnológico de Oaxaca	Chemical Engineering
Betsaida Aragon	Universidad LaSalle	Tourism Administration

### The Oaxaca Learning Center

*Our bed & breakfast has two bedrooms, one with a double bed and the other with two twin beds. Both have private baths and access to the patio. We also have a rooftop apartment for rent. 100% of the funds raised from the B&B support the programs and operation of The Oaxaca Learning Center.*



*For more information or to make a reservation, go to [www.tolc.org.mx](http://www.tolc.org.mx).*