

The Oaxaca Learning Center



Making a difference, one young person at a time!

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Summer 2014 Newsletter

“Ensuring The Future” Campaign Gets Under Way

As a friend of The Oaxaca Learning Center, we're excited to bring you news of an extraordinary opportunity. You may know that a core element of Gary's vision has been for the Center to be run by those who have benefited from its services. Indeed, the Center's leadership and most of its tutors and counselors are former students, assisted by many fine volunteers. The final step is for the Center to become fully self-sufficient. Now, as Gary celebrates his 80th birthday, he has presented the Center, its supporters and its friends with an extraordinary opportunity to achieve this ultimate goal.

To Ensure the Future of the Center, we have initiated a Capital Campaign with the goal of obtaining the building that has been the home of the Learning Center since its beginning. The building has just been appraised at \$540,000 and Gary will donate \$340,000 of the building's value if we can raise the balance of \$200,000. Gary's generosity and our raising the remainder will insure the evolution and sustainability of the organization.

The funds we raise will allow the building to be transferred to the Center's Mexican non-profit corporation, to be owned free and clear, unencumbered by legal issues and financial burdens. This will free the Center leadership to focus all their energy on delivering outstanding services and plan for the future.



Congratulations to Mirel Duarte, Jaasiel Quero and Sonia Bautista, three of our outstanding senior staff, who received Masters degrees in Education from LaSalle University Oaxaca at commencement exercises on August 23.

Kudos For The Learning Center

The Secretariat for Social Development (SEDESOL) of the Mexican government, which has awarded operational funding to TOLC in five recent years, named The Oaxaca Learning Center “one of the five best youth programs in the entire country” in 2013.

We hope you will help us achieve this goal. There are several ways to make a tax-deductible contribution to the Ensuring the Future Campaign: by check, through corporate gift sharing, through American Express Members “Give On Line”, through PayPal, and by making donations of securities (stocks and bonds). The U.S.-based non-profit Friends of the Oaxaca Learning Center will be handling all tax deductible contributions for the campaign.

To learn more about the Ensuring the Future Campaign and how you can contribute, please contact Gary Titus by email at Gary@tolc.org.mx. We'll get back to you immediately. Or, you may donate right now by using the PayPal link below:

To make an instant donation to the “Ensuring The Future” capital campaign, click here:

Donate Now!

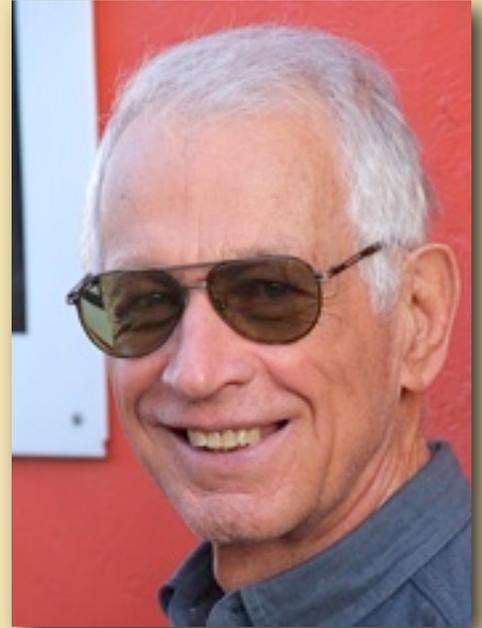
Honoring A Man And A Vision

The world is blessed to have those who dream of a better reality -- and who have the ability and dedication to make that dream come true. Such a person is Gary Titus, the visionary community activist who co-founded and has been the guiding light of The Oaxaca Learning Center.

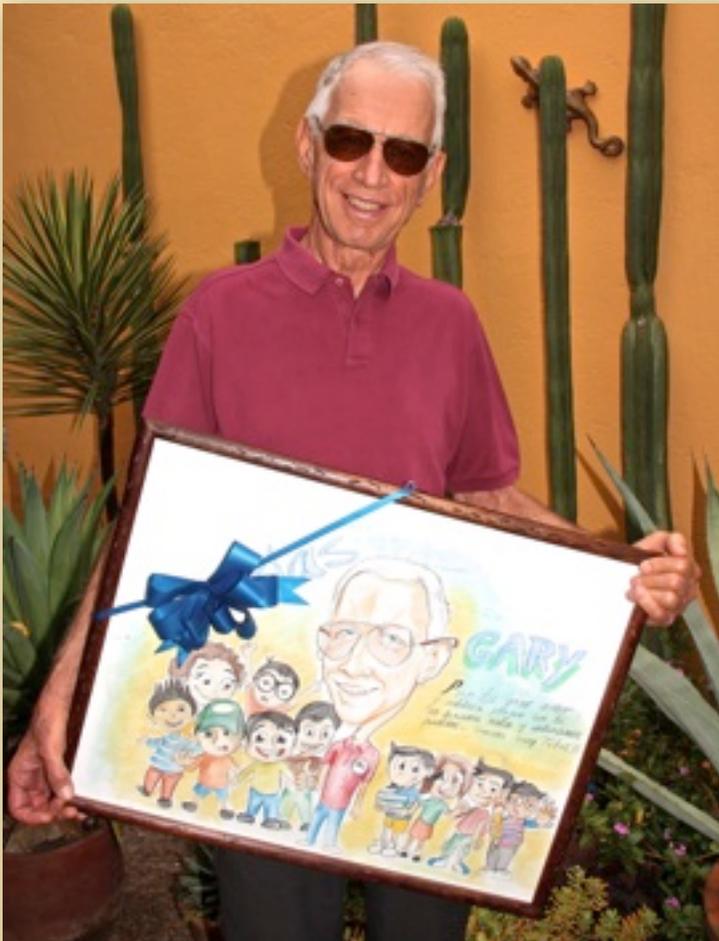
Gary was a social worker in the San Francisco area for 32 years before retiring and moving to Oaxaca in 1992. Already aware of the crying need of young students for tutoring, Gary worked with one or two kids at a time, using his living room as a classroom. Then an inheritance in 2002 provided the wherewithal to make the jump from a one-man operation to an actual learning center. After several years of careful planning and physical construction, The Oaxaca Learning Center opened its doors in 2005. It has been a heart-warming and life-changing success ever since! So many lives have been enriched by Gary's selfless dedication and what has followed!

Over the past nine years, TOLC has nurtured hundreds of students, helping them through junior and senior high school, and providing many of them with the resources (academic, financial and emotional) to pursue university studies. The Learning Center now has a highly professional staff of four senior administrators; a staff psychologist; five program coordinators; sixteen tutors; a cadre of volunteer teachers; and a network of supporters and donors. Who says dreams don't come true?

This past August 29 Gary turned 80, a significant milestone! Friends in Oaxaca and from way beyond gathered to celebrate the occasion and honor Gary for his remarkable achievements. While Gary is trying to slowly fade into the background, it is his fervent hope and ours that the legacy of The Oaxaca Learning Center will continue for many years to come -- and that he will be around to savor this achievement!



Gary Titus



At his 80th birthday party on August 29 Gary was presented with a caricature of himself surrounded by students saying, "Gracias, Gary!"

"HERE'S TO YOU, GARY!"

Once upon a time, in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, King Friday XIII gave his loyal subjects the gift of a new word he had concocted. It was "sloperyozafofanandapuk," and it meant, said the king, "What a difference one person can make!" That incident occurred on the landmark PBS educational series, Mister Rogers' Neighborhood.

With this issue of our newsletter, we celebrate Gary Titus's 80th birthday and note with huge satisfaction what a difference this one person has made in the lives of so many young people in Oaxaca!

Gary would be the first to say he didn't do it alone. While that is true, The Oaxaca Learning Center wouldn't have come about without his vision. Nor would have it have flourished as it has without Gary's long experience as a social organizer and his insightful understanding of what it takes to make a pro-social organization work.

Gary could add a "Social Organizing for Dummies" volume to that popular series. The subtitle of those volumes is constant: "A reference for the rest of us." How much better a place the world would be if we were all to stay mindful of the example The Oaxaca Learning Center offers us! King Friday, with his fantastical word of wisdom, got it right: One person can make a difference in the lives of others.

Gary, we salute you from our hearts and with our profound admiration and respect. Happy birthday!



A small-group setting for summer instruction at the Reforma Center.



Students and staff of the Center's summer school program pose for a group photo at the Seven Regions Fountain.

Summer School At The Oaxaca Learning Center

We are proud and happy to report that the 2014 summer school program sponsored by the Learning Center was, once again, a great success! This year there were 36 girls and 39 boys enrolled in the free program offered at the Murguia and Periferico locations, while another 39 students paid fees to participate at the *Espacio de Apoyo a la Educaci3n* in Colonia Reforma. Both programs ran four weeks, from 21 July through 16 August. Classes in a variety of subjects were held from 9 am to 6 pm daily, with breaks from 2 to 4 pm for workshops on such topics as emergent technologies, organizational skills, self-awareness, gender equity, chess, English and drawing.

Teacher and grade school students spent eight hours in class each weekday during the Center's summer school.



Several tutors and a group of students interact in one of the Center's summer workshops held at the Murguia location.



Students are treated to a vivid demonstration of the phenomenon of electricity during one of several mini-seminars at a special day-long "Science Fair" held Saturday, August 2.

Using Psychology At The Learning Center

In the Spring 2010 issue of this newsletter we highlighted Edith López Nicolás as she became the Center's first Coordinator of Psychology ("A New Dimension at the Learning Center"). Her appointment to that role came from a staff awareness that in addition to learning help, many students needed assistance adapting to the often unfamiliar attitudes and behaviors that successful Center participation would require of them. Students from distant villages in the mountains, moreover, could find themselves feeling overwhelmed by life in a major urban location. Today, four years later, Edith's program has become an essential component in what the Center offers. That it was both needed and eagerly welcomed by the students is borne out by the time Edith puts into it. At the start, she was spending 18 hours a week at her job. Now, she puts in 35—even as she still finds time to work at a professional psychology clinic in the city.



Edith, in white on the right, unpacks a board game she will use in her interaction with Learning Center students. With her are Betsy Arango and Hugo Yescas.

Edith is quietly gregarious with a wise and thoughtful look way beyond that of most 29-year-olds. She came to the Center eight years ago as a tutor and notes the changes she's seen with gratification and justifiable pride. She points first to the much augmented English program, but her emphasis, naturally, turns to her particular area of concern.

"The development of strong self-concept and healthy interpersonal relationships is now treated as a priority, a necessary foundation on which to build academic skills in, say, mathematics and chemistry. We now deal routinely and openly with such concerns as gender differences and gender equality, dating and sexuality, violence and problems within the family."

Part of Edith's work naturally involves one-to-one counseling. When asked what problems she encounters most frequently, she unhesitatingly cites problems arising from the

use of texting and engagement with Internet social networks such as Facebook. Such non-personal interactions can often become an intrusive burden. "For instance, getting repeated texts from a boyfriend or girlfriend demanding to know where you are and what you are doing every moment can be unpleasant and unwelcome. How to respond?" But it's working with students in groups that Edith finds particularly fruitful. "Learning that one's own problems are widely shared, and benefiting from the experience of others facing these same challenges, has been enormously helpful."

In this regard, two innovative programs Edith has helped implement are Laugh Therapy and Movie Therapy. "When it comes to feelings, there's a tendency to focus on anger, depression and despair. But humor is just as basic a human feeling, and it can be an enormously valuable coping skill. As for movies, they naturally deal with personal problems, family problems and societal problems, so they're a great starting point for group discussions. 'Who can relate to the particular dilemma?' 'Which character in the story do you identify with?' These questions open up a lively conversation."

Another area Edith has been instrumental in expanding is vocational counseling. Most students, she notes, have a severely limited notion of their various capacities and often fail to consider a range of career possibilities. She is currently working with Jauri Sanchez Cruz, another of the Center's Coordinators, on a proposal to bring to the Center practitioners from a wide range of professions so that students can get a more immediate sense of what those careers are actually like. "Considering a profession in the abstract is like looking at a flower from afar. You may think you like it, but when you get up close and touch it and smell it, you may decide you don't like it after all."

Up close to her chosen work for some years now, Edith likes it a lot. She has seen first-hand what a boost thoughtful psychological counseling can give uncertain, inexperienced but ambitious young people. Coming from the mountains four hours away from the city, growing up with parents who never had the chance to make it past primary school, she remembers how vital such support was to her own success. She dreams one day of perhaps teaming up with a brother, who has become a teacher, and starting a counseling center in her village of origin, helping others move ahead in life just as she, herself, has successfully done.