

The Oaxaca Learning Center



Making a difference, one young person at a time!

Tutoring | Women's Group | English & Computer Skills | Counseling
Work/Study Sponsorships

www.tolc.org.mx

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Summer 2015 Newsletter

TOLC Approved For Donor Funding

By The Silicon Valley Community Foundation

The Silicon Valley Community Foundation, inaugurated in 2006, helps build and strengthen communities by bringing together people and organizations who want to promote the common good. In 2014 SVCF awarded grants totaling more than 341 million dollars, including over 18 million directed to charities outside the U.S.

One of the four special focus areas of the SVCF is education. A statement on the SVCF web site reads: "Competence in mathematics is essential for functioning in everyday life as well as for success in our increasingly knowledge-based economy. Yet far too many students are not adequately prepared in mathematics. Our education grants support programs that improve mathematics instruction in middle school through professional development of teachers and that provide students who are falling behind with high quality, extended learning opportunities after school and during the summer."

This, of course, closely reflects the mission of The Oaxaca Learning Center. The Learning Center has been approved to receive funding from the SVCF. The fund-raising committee of the Friends of the Oaxaca Learning Center will be working with the donor relations group at SVCF to maximize our visibility to member organizations of the fund.

Capital Campaign Report

The Oaxaca Learning Center's "Ensuring The Future" campaign to raise funds to purchase the building on Murguia Street has been extended through the summer. We still must raise a little over \$60,000.00 USD to meet our goal. This campaign is one of several steps being taken to assure the future of the Learning Center. While the Center will always be dependent on the generous donations of friends and supporters, it's foundation will be more secure if it owns the building which is its home.

If you have not already done so, we ask that you please make a tax-deductible contribution now. Checks may be made out to Friends of the Oaxaca Learning Center (FOLC) and sent to Susan Connor, Treasurer, at 313 Linden Ave. in Wilmette, IL 60091. Or you may make an instant contribution using PayPal by clicking on the magic button above. Either way, you will receive a letter confirming your tax-deductible donation. If you have friends who should know about this important campaign, please share this information with them.

You can make an instant donation to the "Ensuring The Future" campaign by simply clicking on the button below.

Donate Now!

Transitions

Summer is a natural time of transition at The Oaxaca Learning Center. Students move from one grade level to the next - some of them going from junior to senior high, or from high school to university. The tutoring staff changes as some experienced instructors graduate from college and move on in their careers, while new tutors are recruited and trained. There are also other milestones in the lives of people connected with the Center. Here are some we would like to recognize.

Jorge Rosario Jorge was the Learning Center's first stipend student in 2005. Jorge got married on the 11th of April this spring.

Sonia Bautista Leon Sonia was one of the first of the Center's students to attend university. She worked as a tutor, later became coordinator of the first off-site tutoring center, served as women's coordinator and is now program director. Sonia married her sweetheart, Telmo, on April 18th.

Susan Connor Long one of the Center's most dedicated and generous sponsors and an active volunteer since 2007, Susan recently retired as a professor at a law school in Chicago and moved to Oaxaca. She has taken up residence at the Center where she helps in many areas.

Andrés Cruz Andrés was the first student from the Learning Center to receive a scholarship offered by LaSalle High School. He graduates this June and will enroll at Universidad LaSalle as a student in Civil Engineering.

Woody The great German shepherd mascot of the Center since it's founding, Woody died of old age and infirmities on March 26. He is missed.



May Monthly Activity

On the first Saturday of May the students and staff of the Learning Center boarded buses and journeyed to a land reclamation project in San Pablo Etla called "La Mesita." Just five years ago there was only barren rock on an eroded hillside here. Community planners and dedicated volunteers set out to create a new mountain park, spending many hours terracing the land to catch and hold water and planting new vegetation. Their labor has transformed the landscape and created a model teaching facility.



TOP LEFT Students from TOLC follow one of the several guides who provided excellent commentaries on the purpose and operation of La Mesita.

TOP RIGHT: Native plants grown in an on-site greenhouse are used to restore the parkland.

RIGHT CENTER: Jim Austin, a retired professor from Harvard University and an integral part of the La Mesita team, explains the significance of a statue of Mother Earth erected on the hillside.



BELOW: Sixty-seven students and staff from the Learning Center visited La Mesita. They were given detailed information on land reclamation and the use of natural resources, after which they were treated to lunch in the community kitchen.



Daniela's Story

My name is Daniela Camarillo López. I am 20 years old and am currently studying Mathematics at the University of Benito Juárez in Oaxaca. I live at home with my parents and three siblings.

I heard about The Learning Center thanks to a school friend when I was in my third year of high school and was having problems with calculus. I was confused and indecisive about what I wanted to study. I inquired



Daniela Camarillo

at The Center on the 4th of March, 2012. After three days of assessment, I decided to sign up to be tutored in mathematics. At first I felt a little strange; but, little by little, my tutor, who had studied mathematics, talked to me about the subject - about things that I had no idea existed - and so awakened in me a great curiosity about mathematics. Then he began to prepare me for the university admission exam, and after several months I was accepted and began

my studies, which now I am very motivated to continue. Upon entering university I realized that things were different, that the standard was very high and that the language for my course was quite distinct. Thanks to my tutors, I adapted quickly. They helped me overcome problems I was encountering.

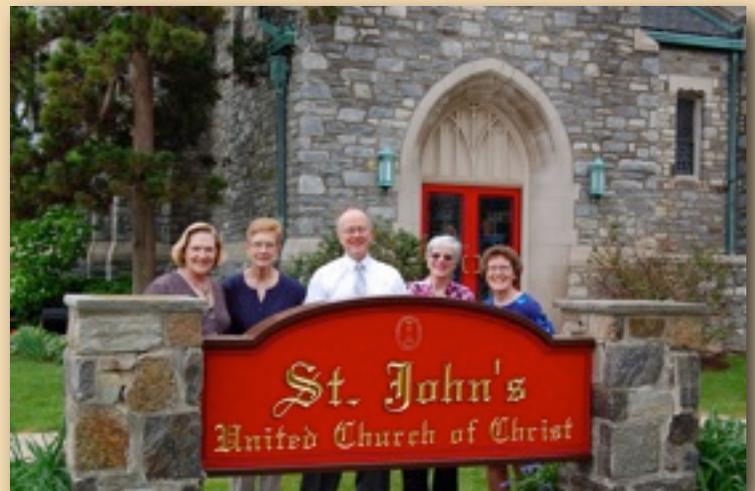
A year later, in March of 2013, the co-ordinator of the tutoring program at the Learning Center offered me a position with the team of tutors. Knowing that this was a great opportunity to learn more, and also that the payment I would receive would help me pay my tuition fees, I accepted. At first, this proved to be a great challenge because I had never been faced with trying to teach anyone, so it felt complicated. But, little by little, I gained experience, learned different ways of teaching the students and, especially, that all students do not learn in the same way. The entire experience has been very enriching, showing me what it feels like to be on the other side of the system, moving from being a student to a tutor. During the first five months I was both student and tutor and that experience helped me evolve in my new position. Over time I have matured and learned many new things, including how to transmit knowledge, how to approach issues of gender equality, and how to manage students in groups. Above all, this job has taught me how to adjust to other people and live with them.

In conclusion, I can say that the experience has greatly helped me to grow professionally and also as a person. If I had not come to the Learning Center, I would never have met the tutor who helped me so much when I was confused at such a significant time in my life. Sometimes I think, "Where would I be if my friend had not introduced me to The Learning Center?"

Connections

St. John's United Church of Christ (UCC) in Lansdale, Pennsylvania, is among the largest United Church of Christ congregations in southeastern Pennsylvania. The church is well known in the local community for being pro-active in helping those in need – the homeless, the hungry, those on the fringe. The church's membership itself has often been described as a "motley crew," coming from a variety of walks of life, with a great diversity of gifts, talents, and perspectives. The Oaxaca Learning Center's motto, "making a difference, one young person at a time," resonates well with the spirit of St. John's outreach to others.

David Furniss, the minister of music at St. John's, is no stranger to Oaxaca, his second home, having visited at least once a year since 1997. David made a personal commitment to provide college tuition assistance for a young Oaxaqueño friend through the Learning Center. When that young man needed a new pair of shoes, David had the inspiration to appeal to the church choir. Through the "shoe fund" (donations were literally collected in an old shoe!), St. John's members began to become aware of the Oaxaca Learning Center. In the following months, David spoke with members of the church's outreach committee about the Learning Center, and he wrote an article for the church's monthly newsletter describing the work of the Center. Eventually, the members' offering envelopes were designed to include the Oaxaca Learning Center as one of the options for designating their donations.



Key contributors to the Learning Center, from left to right: Anne Kinsey, Lillian Panachyda, David Furniss, Nicole Groff, and Rev. Dr. Susan Bertolette, Senior Pastor.

While the contributions from St. John's Church are not huge, coming mostly from a handful of faithful supporters of the Learning Center, each dollar that is sent to the Learning Center is making a difference. The members of St. John's Church are kept up-to-date on developments at the Learning Center through occasional announcements in worship and articles in the monthly newsletter. David's hope for the Learning Center is that St. John's United Church of Christ will continue to "make a difference, one donation at a time."

Success Deserves Recognition

As every parent is acutely aware, kids grow up. We at The Oaxaca Learning Center are privileged to watch not one or two, but dozens upon dozens of young people maturing before our eyes, month by month and year by year. Not all of the youngsters who come our way are cut out to be strong students or have the determination to meet the standards the Center sets. Some try mightily, but simply have too many adverse conditions -- fractured families, inadequate educational background, daunting financial needs, etc. -- to literally "make the grade". All the more reason, then, to celebrate with those who manage to climb the academic mountain and reach the pinnacle of a university degree. Such an achiever is Angelina Hernandez Messinas.

Angelina, 23, graduated last February from the Autonomous University of Benito Juarez in Oaxaca with a Bachelor's degree in public accounting. The second of seven children, she still lives with her family in Cuilapam, a Mixtec community just a few miles from Oaxaca city which most tourists know as the site of a never-finished 16th century Dominican monastery. Angelina has been a dedicated participant in the Center's programs for five years. Her usual routine was to come to the Center three days each week in the afternoon from 2 until 6 to be tutored or do homework assignments. She was a willing participant in the various auxiliary conferences and workshops the Center provides to help students broaden their horizons and dream of new goals. Angelina says she especially appreciated the friendly atmosphere that pervades the Center and the academic and psychological support she so readily found here. "The Center is a place to learn more; where there is a great respect for school; where there are tutors eager to help," she says.



Angelina Messinas

Make A Difference!

You can have an impact on the life of one or many of the young people studying at The Oaxaca Learning Center. Make an instant donation using PayPal by clicking on the magic button below.

Donate Now!

This past year Angelina stepped across several of those thresholds a young person passes over into adulthood. She finished the academic program at UABJO last summer and then last March completed a six-month professional internship, working as an accountant at the regional office of the Mexican Secretariat for Social Development (SEDESOL) in Oaxaca. After that, with freshly minted degree in hand, she began work in May at a respected construction and engineering firm in the city.

Angelina is a credit to her family and a source of pride to her uncle, Andrés Messinas, who is the cherished cook at the Learning Center. She is also an inspiration to her younger sister, Jessica, who is presently in junior high school and likewise an eager student at the Learning Center. Staff and students alike congratulate Angelina on her achievement and wish her well as she continues her journey through life!

Using Her Talent To Support The Learning Center

Nora Jacquez is a wonder! A native of Colorado and a retired lawyer, Nora has had a winter home in Oaxaca for nigh on twenty years. Always one to promote social justice, Nora has been an active supporter of The Oaxaca Learning Center from its inception. For a number of years she has spearheaded a winter workshop on public speaking designed for university students in the Center's scholarship program.

Nora is also a writer. She has published two volumes of short stories, a book of poetry and an anthology of Latin American women poets. She also wrote and starred in a one-person stage production recounting the adventures of her grandmother in the wild southwestern United States in the 1800's. Her books and the play are bilingual, with Spanish and English on parallel pages of text and the dramatization presented first in English and then repeated in Spanish. The books include a CD with Nora telling her tales in both English and Spanish.

This spring, Nora released her second book of short stories, entitled, "Bravo - Stories Medium True." Bill Stone from Oaxaca says: "With a few strokes of her pen, her characters come alive. Nora shows her considerable versatility by writing stories that contain humor, emotion and pathos. . . . It is an enriching experience to read and absorb Nora's creative and always fascinating stories."

Proceeds from the sale of the book will be donated to organizations dedicated to social justice and non-violence. The proceeds from any books ordered by Learning Center supporters will be donated to the Learning Center if so indicated by the buyer.

Nora's latest book can be purchased at the Learning Center or ordered online by contacting norajacquez@hotmail.com. The price of "Bravo" is \$20 USD. Books ordered to be sent through the mail must be paid for in advance at a cost of \$23 USD to cover postage expenses.



Nora Jacquez