



Ejido Cardenas Celebrates the First Anniversary of the COTA Dining Room with a Fiesta, 4/19/08

Hi Everyone,

In April of 2007, we opened our dining room at the Antonio Maria Melendrez public school in Ejido Cardenas--a remote area a few miles south of the colonias in which our other dining rooms are located. The ejidos, a word that literally means "farm," are unincorporated areas of land where originally people simply squatted and built rough homes. Things have changed a bit in that land is now bought and sold, but not as much as we'd like: there are still no utilities or roads or any of the other material signs of community life that we recognize here in the U.S.



Children line up outside the dining room for the fiesta breakfast at the school.

We have been working at the Melendrez school and in Ejido Cardenas for several years now, repairing the school damaged by rains and upgrading and finishing the interior of classrooms. Then last year, we outfitted one of the classrooms as a dining room, and Leti Garcia and her husband Don Jose took over as managers of the operation and began feeding breakfast to up to 100 children a day 6 days a week. Leti is amazing in her devotion to the children, and Don Jose is amazing in that we don't have many men who get involved in this work due to cultural differences. But Jose does repair work and upgrades and helps with the meals in any way he can.

To celebrate their first year of operation, Leti and Jose planned a fiesta for the children, and we were invited too. They went all out with balloons and red tablecloths and special treats for the kids--a rich soup called posole, fried corn tortillas, and a watery, drinkable oatmeal formed the main course.

Once again, Leti and her helpers were thanking us, but we are endlessly grateful to the work and devotion they show every day for the children. It seems we can never outgive them in their generosity. Now, Leti and Olivia, our staff person in Mexico, are working to secure a piece of land and community support in order for us to build a bigger dining room that can accommodate more children--more to come on this story. So take a look at these photos and see how connected a community without utilities or roads can be.



Adding finishing touches to the decorations.





Children lined up and patiently waiting outside.



Finally, kids were allowed to come sit at table in shifts, with five or six more coming in at a time when seats opened up.



Mmm, posole, a real treat with the fried tortillas.



Yes, I want some--notice the heart-shaped balloons as centerpieces.



Meanwhile outside the line begins to shorten.





Here's that drinkable oatmeal--not bad, but a bit of an acquired taste.



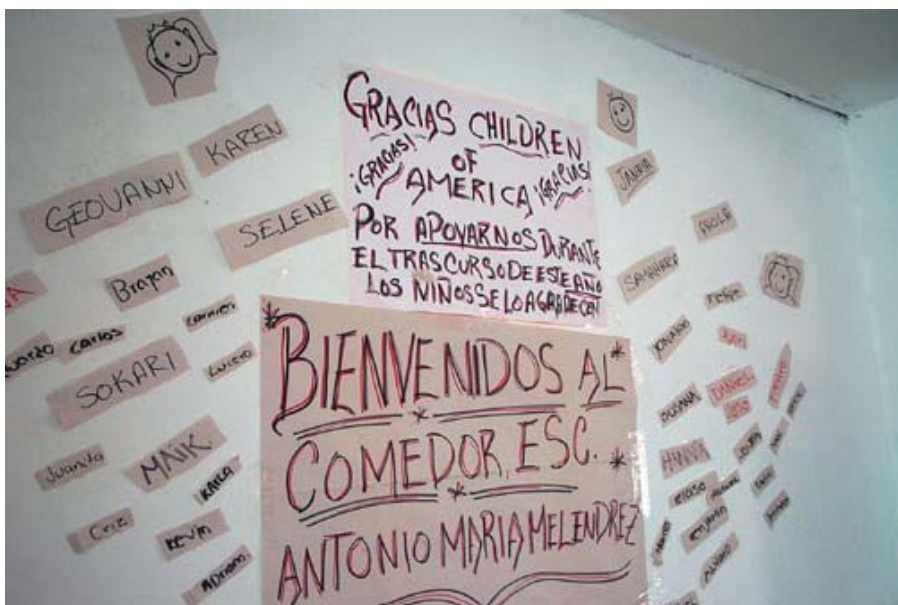


I never get tired of these faces--love to see them up close through the camera and otherwise.





Leti, on the right in her best clothes, presiding over the fiesta and making sure everyone is served.



The women put up this sign thanking COTA and welcoming everyone to the dining room. Many of the children signed their names on little pieces of paper to add to the design.



And here are some of the guests and workers: from L to R, Rose, Olivia, Yollie, Don Jose, Leti, Norm, and Chuy and children in front.



And this one is what it's all about.

And so we are endlessly grateful to Leti and all her helpers in the ejido--and also to you for continuing to make this work possible.

Blessings always!

Dave

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