



It is possible to create a world in which fewer innocent children suffer. Camus

one child

30 years of loving children.

1st Quarter 2006

Life in the Ejido

Ejido Cardenas: Important New Projects and a Look at Daily Life

In Spanish, *ejido* literally means a ranch or farm. In usage around the outskirts of Tijuana, the ejidos are unincorporated areas, poor communities with little or no utilities, services, and amenities. In terms of the poverty of the people there, they rank even lower than the colonias a few miles away where our two current dining rooms are located. We've been working in Ejido Cardenas for about a year and a half now, focusing on the public school and a nutrition program feeding around 70 children on Saturday mornings. In 2006, we'll be stepping up our work in the ejido with a new dining room (*see article this page*), continued construction work, and emergency aid where needed (*see articles inside*).

As we begin these new projects, we want to introduce all of you to the ejido and the beautiful people who live there. Last September, on a trip to the ejido, one of our board members, Teri Sanitate taped a conversation with Marcela Avalos and her family in an effort to better understand their conditions and their lives. A few excerpts from this conversation should give you some vivid detail to life in these rolling hills--within sight of the ocean and the resorts at Rosarito beach, but without the utilities and other services that keep them a world away from life as we know it.

Marcela: We used to live near Camino Verde, but we had no place to stay, no home. We were renting a different place, and the kids always suffered. We bought this land we live on now and

pay \$100 a month. Spectrum Ministries built our house; it took three years to build it. (*It's about the size of a garage and only partially finished inside.*) We're very happy to be with our family in our house. My children are very good. They stay at home and don't go out into the street to play.

They go to school and come back home to study. They don't drink or take drugs.



Fernando, Marcela's son, being taped as he talks to our Teri Sanitate.

Jose Luis: (*Marcela's husband*) Thank you for all the help you brought to my family. Without your help we would be stuck--

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Little Marcelita, and her father, Jose Luis in front of their home in Ejido Cardenas last September.

A Brand New Dining Room...

With Marcela in Charge, a New Full-Time Dining Room in April

Marcela Avalos, below with her daughters Carla, Lissette, and Marcelita, has been feeding over 70 children every Saturday from her home in Ejido Cardenas for over a year and has been wanting to start feeding them every day of the week for almost as long. As our resources have been low, we've held off making that commitment, but starting in April 2006, Marcela's new *comedor*, dining room, will be open 6 days a week. Marcela will join Rosenda and Chuy as the manager of our third nutrition center in Mexico.

Our resources are still low, but we couldn't wait any longer to go. As excited as we are to be able to serve these children better, it's nothing compared to Marcela's excitement and joy at being able to begin. We met with her April 1 and introduced her to Oliva, our staffer in Mexico, who is



Marcela with all her girls on April 1st as plans for the dining room are being finalized.

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Ejido Life and New Projects

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with no way to have better lives. I am so happy with all that we have, and I am always thanking God.

Marcela: Ernesto from Spectrum Ministries once asked me what I would do if I had a lot of money. I said that I would help children in any way that I can. But I have no money, and I cannot help anybody. Later he said he had a surprise for me. There is a person who will bring breakfast for the children. He introduced me to Norm and Children of The Americas, and that's how we started with the breakfast program on Saturdays. I thanked God that I can finally feed children. Thank God I met Norm and Pastor Dave--without them there would be no breakfast program.

I'm very happy to be able to give breakfast to these children who really need it. There are many kids who don't have shoes or clothes, and they have nothing to eat. When it rains no one can go out, and there is no food for anyone (*the unpaved roads are impassable and nearest markets are miles away*). They are so happy because of the breakfast we have. There are 70 kids who come for breakfast, but there will be more tomorrow to get backpacks. For breakfast we have cereal, sandwiches, fruit, tortillas, chocolate milk, juice--whatever Norm brings. We have no water or electricity, so he brings water in a big drum, paper plates and cups too.

Fernando: (*Marcela's son*) I thank you all. Because of you I can keep going to school and keep studying. My school is Miquel Salceda Heredia #78. It is in La Gloria. My favorite subject is English--that's what I am most interested in. But my school does not teach English, and they have no computers in my grade (2nd year high school).

(*Asked what he wants to do in life.*) Next year I

would like to have a typewriter, and I would like to teach myself computer. I would like to have a CD player to listen to music too. I'd like a ball to play soccer, and I would like to play the flute. After I finish school I want to be a mechanic, an engineer, or a lawyer. I want to be somebody. I will stay in school so that I can have a career. I don't have bad habits, and I just want to be a good son. I want to have a better job than my Dad. I want to help my Dad, help in the house and buy a car. My Dad gets so tired from working hard. I like to read.

(*Asked what he needs.*) I need white paper, notebooks, pencils, and pens. The kids need backpacks and school supplies; I think the teachers need everything.

Maricella: (*Same question.*) We would like to have lights. It's very scary when it gets dark. There are owls. You can hear the coyotes, tarantulas, spiders... and there are snakes that bite. There are lots of crickets and flying insects.

For our schools, we pay 1,800 pesos for each uniform. I spend about 4,500 pesos--in total about \$400. We pay 700 for Fernando, 200 for enrollment, 160 each for insurance, testing, and water. We have to pay for everything. I couldn't buy "los tennies" (*sneakers*) for Lissette & Carla.

In December and January when it rains, it gets very slippery. The trucks and busses don't come, and we have to walk to school. Someone is always falling in the mud. It gets very ugly. We cannot get out to buy supplies in la Gloria--and that is very far away. You need a car, but the car won't go in the mud, and we have to walk. It takes

two hours to walk to La Gloria. Norm's pick up truck (*4-wheeler*) can make it through the mud. Last year he brought the supplies. He helped us a lot. If he didn't come we wouldn't have anything to eat. It's cold from November to May. We wear lots of clothes to keep warm.



Teri Sanitate talking and taping her conversation with Marcela and her family.

Last year there was a very sick baby with a high temperature and seizures. They couldn't get to La Gloria because of the mud. It's very important to have a 4X4 to get out of the mud in an emergency. The doctors in La Gloria are not very good, but they're all we have, and the hospital is all the way in Tijuana. ■ (*Thanks to Teri Sanitate for the transcript of her tape.*)

New Ejido Dining Room

(Continued from Page 1)

responsible for keeping all our dining rooms stocked and for acting as a liaison between us and Mexican government agencies. They hit it off well and got right down to business developing a menu and schedule. Rather than serving breakfast as in our other two dining rooms, Marcela will be serving after school to avoid crazy-early start times since the children have so far to walk to school. As in all our dining rooms, Marcela and her helpers are fully in charge, making decisions that are best for their community.

As we were finalizing details, Marcela kept thanking us over and over for our help. I tried my best to make her understand that we are partners--equals--in this project for the children. She supplies all the labor and management, and we supply the materials. Equals. Partners. *Companeros*. I know she understood, but I'm not sure she accepted it. The humility and love and sense of service in someone like Marcela is truly breathtaking. We love her, and the children of the ejido are the winners. ■



Marcela and Olivia meeting for the first time.

Construction in the Ejido

Finishing the Second of three Classrooms

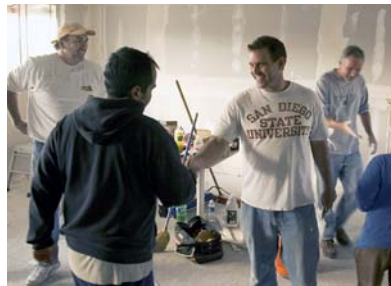
The Maria Antonio Melendrez school is the public school that serves the area of Ejido Cardenas. Last year, severe winter storms tore off part of the roof, and we sent a crew out to repair it and plaster the outside of the entire building. Since then, we've taken on finishing the interior of the three classrooms in the building. The first was finished in early 2006, and our Norm Kremiller prepared the second for drywalling over the last few weeks, installing ceiling joists and insulating the walls.



Griff Stone of San Diego getting dust in his eyes.

walling the entire room (walls and ceiling), trimming out the windows, and applying two coats of mud to the joints. I think we were all surprised at how much we were able to accomplish. Then when a friend from the colonias, Carlos Delacruz showed up with chicken for lunch, that was the icing on the cake. Carlos and his son Carlitos showered us in gratitude and food, and then stayed to clean up around the school.

Norm will be back with smaller crews to finish the windows, mud, texture, and paint. It's wonderful to see how not only the children, but the teachers are reacting to the new rooms. It makes such a difference to come to a bright, clean, and insulated room to teach and learn. It's costing around \$1,000 per room, and we



Arriving at the school and the bare, but insulated classroom ready for drywall.

thank you all for your donations that are making it possible.



Carlos Delacruz (in dark sweatshirt) brings lunch to the crew (upper left), and the room as we left it—ready for texture and paint...almost. ■

On April 1st, a 7-man, energetic crew arrived to drywall the room. Led by Norm and Duane Brooks, a building contractor in Orange County, the rest of us unskilled types got an amazing amount of work done: dry-

Destruction in the Ejido

Three Homes Burn--Three Families Homeless

Just over a hill in the next valley behind the school, in a little group of small dwellings, a fire broke out and quickly engulfed one home, then jumping to two more adjacent to it. The three homes, more like garages or storage sheds by U.S. standards, were almost completely reduced to ash along with all the contents. Miraculously, no one was hurt, but the three families are now homeless, staying temporarily in the homes of neighbors in their already overcrowded dwellings. Further, all their belongings were destroyed, leaving them literally with only the clothes on their backs.

We went to the site of the homes to see what we could do and spoke with one family member, Mari, a young woman probably in her early twenties with a small daughter in



The site of three ejido homes burned to the ground.

town. With no electricity, the fire probably started with a candle being knocked over, and now the task and expense of rebuilding seems insurmountable. Mari had another story to tell as well. Just a few weeks before the fire, Mari's parents came to visit, bringing her four brothers and sisters, and then just abruptly left--leaving all Mari's siblings behind now in her care. There is no word on the parents whereabouts. Stories of this kind of abandonment are growing more common as finances and hope run out. Mari said the only way they were coping was that her husband's parents were supportive. They were in the process of trying to add another room on their home for the extra four children when the fire broke out.

The look on Mari's face was devastat-



Mari with her 2 year old daughter at the site of her burned home.

ing, but we brought clothing, food, and a little money to spread between the families to get them started, and promised to see what we could do to help get construction going on the rebuild. Her first question of course was, "Cuando?" When? We had no answer, but are trying to work with other agencies and groups in Mexico and the U.S. to see what we can arrange in materials and labor. Mari asked if they should start clearing the burn area, and we said, yes, of course. That's the first step, but we'll need to work on the next. *Please see additional photos and the "We Need Your Help" article on back page for more on how you can help these families.* ■

Ejido Hula Hoops

Santa Barbara Church Responds

When our board member from Santa Barbara, CA, Teri Sanitate, came to the ejido, she learned from the principal of the ejido school that the children had no playground toys. Asking what would be best, hula hoops and jump ropes was the reply. Going home and talking it up, Grace Lutheran Church in Santa Barbara, pastored by Lynn Bruer, a long-time Children of The Americas supporter, responded by buying 48 hula hoops and 48 jump ropes and shipping them to us to take to the kids.

As you can see, they love them! Thanks Lynn, Teri, and everyone at Grace Lutheran for these smiles on these faces. ■



We Need Your Help!

If you can help the children

by helping us with any of the projects in the ejido listed below, please let us know. If you're near the CA-Mex border and can help provide materials or labor, or if you're anywhere and can help fund the projects, your help is really needed. Especially in the case of rebuilding the burned homes, time is critical, and we don't have available resources to respond right away.

We guarantee any checks marked specifically for one of these projects will go to that project dollar for dollar. Just put the title of one of the projects below on the memo line of your check or cc autho to dedicate those funds to that project.

1. Rebuild Burned Ejido Homes
2. Complete Ejido School Repairs
3. Maintain New Ejido Dining Room

Your donation can be of any amount; it all adds up. Call/email for more information, and thank you for caring for these children.

Parting Shots...

A few more shots of the damage to the burned ejido homes. Clockwise from upper left: remains of cooking utensils, box springs, bicycle, and rubber duck. At bottom, all that's left of one home.



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Please join us at 7AM every morning for two minutes of prayer for all children.

*Give a man a fish,
 and you feed him
 for a day. Teach
 him to fish, and you
 feed him for a life-
 time. With your
 help, we've been
 teaching children to
 fish for 30 years.
 That's a lot of fish!*



Our work began in Santa Teresita Orphanage in Tijuana, Mexico on March 31, 1974. Paul Weiss and his friends founded an interfaith organization, Los Ninos, to help the gifts of Santa Teresita. The work and the dream grew and by January, 1984, a new structure was needed. Children of The Americas was created to match the work with the expanding dream to reach children throughout our hemisphere, but especially kids in the US and Mexico. Help us continue to create hope, one child at a time.

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Administration
 67 Gingham Street, Trabuco Canyon, CA 92679
 949.709.0673 TEL | 949.709.0674 FAX
 4kids@americaschildren.org EMAIL
 www.americaschildren.org WEB



Address Service Requested

Children of The Americas
 67 Gingham St. | Trabuco Canyon, CA 92679
 949-709-0673 TEL | 949-709-0674 FAX

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