



# Partners in Health Of Maine

*Compañeros en la Salud*

Volunteers sharing the gift of health

December 2010

*Our Mission:*

*Partners in Health of Maine is a group of medical professionals and technical experts who have given their time and expertise to improve the health care in Central America. Since 1976 we have been providing medical care, equipment, education, and technical assistance to the people of this area. Our belief is that caring individuals becoming "Partners in Health" with their third world counterparts can foster long-term improvement.*

**Kenneth  
Hunter  
Serapio,**  
Bob Bach,  
[bob@pihom.com](mailto:bob@pihom.com)

This newsletter is dedicated to Dr Kenneth Hunter Serapio who is one of the finest human beings that I have known in my lifetime. He is a humble, talented, dedicated, kind, and extremely patient man who made incredible sacrifices to become a surgeon who could serve his Miskitu people.



Today he is still an active surgeon concentrating on pediatric surgery at the hospital and treating all types of medical problems at his office where financial remuneration is never a concern.

On Sundays you will find him playing the organ at the Moravian Church, having taught himself over the years.

His smile and gentle manner put everyone at ease. I have never heard him degrade anyone or ever seen him lose his temper. To me he is someone whose life speaks for itself. It has been an honor and privilege to work with him over the years.

Thank you Kenneth for all that you have done.  
Your PIH family

Dr. Kenneth's biography can be found on our website: [www/pihom.com](http://www/pihom.com)

## **My friend and hero Dr. Kenneth**

Your destiny to heal others was part of  
God's design  
When you were born a new star over Raiti  
began to shine

The obstacles along the road to your education  
were appalling  
Thank God a missionary nurse recognized  
your calling

When you left the East Coast discrimination  
raised its ugly face  
So off to Guatemala to medical school was  
where you forged ahead

Then there was the time they put you in prison  
during the war  
When they thought you were associated with the  
CIA's core

Once a surgeon, your hands began to heal both  
day and night  
You performed all types of surgery and made  
sure you did it right

I never saw you loose your temper when things  
didn't go your way  
You were always kind to your patients and the  
nurses throughout the day

Your spirit of goodness and giving has always  
gone the extra mile  
On Sundays one will find you playing the organ  
with your gentle smile

Your star over Raiti always shines brighter when  
you return  
That you are revered and loved by so many is  
easy to discern

So may God continue to bless your hands and  
gentle soul  
For as a true servant of God you have always  
lived that role

with admiration,  
Robert Bach

## Miskitu Literacy Project Update, Joan MacCracken, joanmacc@aol.com



In January 2010 Joan MacCracken, Miki Macdonald, and Elizabeth Weiss traveled to Bilwi (Puerto Cabezas) and arranged for visits to three villages within the area. We met with school teachers (though school was not yet in session) and presented them with a wooden trunk filled with Spanish children's books. The teachers were very thankful for the books but also told us of their school's deficiencies. They were short on textbooks, notebooks, and pens and pencils for the children. With our funds we purchased enough of these supplies to distribute to the children for the new school year in Krukira. In addition, the teachers hoped they could get personal backpacks to carry their supplies

back and forth to the school, so that the supplies would not get stolen. With the funds from the sale of *Trisba and Sula* we provided these for them. These backpacks were purchased in the local Bilwi market which pleased the store owners. At the Department of Education in Bilwi we learned that the Miskitu textbooks that the teachers requested had been destroyed in the hurricane and new ones had not been printed. Trilingual textbooks may be made available in the future. At a local pre-school in Bilwi we donated several durable Spanish picture books. At the relatively new public library the boxes of books were joyfully accepted. It is so apparent that all these schools need the most basic supplies and the government is unable to supply them. What we accomplished was only a drop in the bucket of need. But it was a start.



Carmen works on the CAIMCA mural.

### **Pathology Services**, John Benziger, thebenzigers@gmail.com

Pathology support to Puerto Cabezas and the RAAN continues. Pathologist Janine Tenorio has been providing full-service surgical and cytologic pathology diagnoses with the help of technicians Javier Carcamo, cytotech Justo Saballos and lab aid Suzanne. We are sorry to lose Janine's services (she is joining her new husband in Managua), but will be helping to recruit her replacement. I visited the lab in Feb and Aug 2010. The building is holding up well.. The FileMaker database is handling all the reports and records of the service. The prototype microwave tissue processor is in routine use. This year I received a second CAP Humanitarian Grant to further develop the microwave tissue processor, develop an alternative microtome, and help HEODRA hospital in León to initiate special immunologic staining to aid in cancer diagnosis. Should these ventures prove successful, they could make it much easier to start up pathology services in other remote locations in Nicaragua.

## *A Message from our President, Dr. Robert Bach (bob@pihom.com)*

It has been another year of volunteers making a difference. They have worked with cultural sensitivity and grace in difficult circumstances to improve the lives of many underserved Nicaraguan people on the North Atlantic side of Nicaragua.

Mary Benziger has been putting together this newsletter with patience and expertise. The annual report has been completed. Along with all the paper work, Mary completed another mural in Nicaragua. Her murals are very popular among the Nicas, and touch the hearts of the Nicaraguan people, whom we all love so much.

Dr. John Benziger has continued to provide state of the art pathology services, not only in Puerto Cabezas but also to outlining hospitals. He has been in contact with the school of pathology to find a replacement pathologist for the pathologist who moved back to Managua.

Dr. Max Barus, Micki McDonald CNP, Dr. Elizabeth Weiss, and Dr. John Benziger in conjunction with Nicaraguan Dr Patricia Ballesteros have continued streamlining the Pap smear and colposcopy project. It is not easy to keep a project going in a country with limited resources and changing political environment and medical staff.

Dr Robert Holmberg, Dr. Peter Hauptert, Andre Herroitt, and Dave Hauptert have worked this year on the Bilwaskarma Outreach project. In these difficult financial times, they continue to look for grant money. The project is going well and yielding statistically significant results, including better maternal and child health.

Dr John Bergfeld has continued to support Dr. Ernesto Espinoza in his efforts to improve orthopedic surgery in Port. He sponsored an educational trip for Dr. Espinoza to Florida to learn arthroscopic surgery techniques.

Hanna Ekstrom DVM, her son Teo, and Sandy Smith Kozlowsky spent endless hours organizing an extensive dental outreach project that Hanna initiated two years ago. Previously, the emphasis was on hands on fluoride treatment for children. This time the emphasis was on teaching volunteer health leaders and teachers how to evaluate the condition of teeth, how to brush, and how to apply fluoride. They brought an incredible amount of toothbrushes, tooth paste and lecture materials. They visited many different communities. These visits were very well received due to the efforts of Teo. He understands that how you deliver services is very important. For more on Hanna's project see: [www.SaveTheirSmiles.org](http://www.SaveTheirSmiles.org)



Dr. Jim and Helen Mckendry visited Nicaragua to investigate the Managua wheel chair factory and help with locating people who needed limb prosthesis and arrange for transportation to a clinic in Leon. John and Mary Benziger along with Jim and Helen traveled with Sally Fellers. She has formed a foundation, the David Fellers Healing Arts Foundation ([www.healingartfoundation.org](http://www.healingartfoundation.org)), to provide wheelchairs to children and adults. Partners in Health has provided Sally with a place to store wheelchairs in Puerto. We have also introduced her to people in Puerto who are working with handicapped people who can identify people in need.

Jill Grant has continued to make the volunteer quarters in Puerto Cabezas into a comfortable home away from home with a conference room where educational lectures can be given, a shop where equipment can be repaired, and large storage to receive our shipments. Ernie Grant did many home improvement projects and made many new friends in Puerto. Thanks Ernie for all your help in packing all those boxes for the shipment.

Paul Currier, the manager of Central Maine Moving and Storage, continues to help us crate all the large equipment and supplies that we send to Nicaragua.

Robyn Frick, biomedical engineer, has continued to provide equipment and advice for improving maintenance at the hospital in Port. He is always looking for equipment and tools that are needed in Nicaragua.

Regina Coppens has worked tirelessly on setting up a system to distribute the Filtron water purifying filter. These filters clean water and greatly reduced the risk of bacterial, viral and parasitic infections. An educational component teaches the filter owners the importance of the filter and the proper use and care of it. The main cause of much of the illness in Nicaragua is contaminated water. This project addresses this issue house by house.

Dr Karen Burke continues to take teams from the University of Vermont to Bilwas. This past year she tackled several projects including hygiene, nutrition, gardening, and treatment of diarrhea. They gave lectures in Spanish to the villagers and health leaders and brought 450 lbs of supplies including seeds and medicines. They made a real impact with their educational approach. Thank you Karen and your team.

Steve Johnson continues to accurately and faithfully keep track of the contributions that come in, and all the distributions that go out for our projects.

My daughter Molly Marston has done a great job at revising the website making it more interesting and user friendly.

I would finally like to thank wife, Gail Bach who remembers all our friends in Nicaragua with her kindnesses.

May this season bring blessing to all of you.

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## Prosthesis Project Metamorphosis, Jim McKendry, jboatmck@aol.com

As I understand it, a friend of a friend led Sally Fellers, of the David Fellers Healing Art Foundation, to Partners in Health of Maine, and ultimately, to me. Presto----a new partnership was born. For several years I had been working with disabled people in Nicaragua, and in retirement from orthopedic surgery I had been fitting people with prostheses. Sally had recently started raising money for her foundation (see: <http://www.healingartfoundation.org>) committed to improving the lives of disabled people, especially children, in underserved countries. It was a perfect fit!

In February, 2010, seven of us (Jim and Helen McKendry, John and Mary Benziger, Sally Fellers and her son Nate, and Gina Coppens) traveled together to Managua, Leon, and Puerto Cabezas. In Leon, Sally was introduced to Santiago Castillon who is the director of both a prosthetic shop and a wheelchair manufacturing shop staffed, for the most part, by disabled people. In no time Sally, with basically no Spanish, began meeting people, buying wheelchairs, and arranging transportation for them to Puerto Cabezas.

Through Martha Downs, director of the *Organization for the Disabled* in Puerto Cabezas, Sally was introduced to more people with needs for wheelchairs and prostheses.

With Sally spearheading the project in the future, many more disabled Nicaraguan people will enjoy a better quality of life with their new wheelchairs, prostheses, and other assistive devices. I will be available for whatever comes along in the future.

## A few words from Sally! Sally Fellers, [sally@healingartfoundation.org](mailto:sally@healingartfoundation.org)



**Orlando before receiving his wheelchair**

Words cannot express how good it felt to return to Puerto Cabezas in May and bring Orlando a custom made wheelchair! At the age of 12, this is the first wheelchair he has ever had! He is now attending school a few hours a day!

If you would like to support our project, please make a check payable to the David Fellers Healing Art Foundation, 1421 Galisteo St, Santa Fe, N.M. 87505

Your help will directly effect a disabled person living in poverty. The profound impact of your support can not be put in words.

There is one little boy who I was especially touched by. Orlando has no ability to use his body. Like our son, David, the only thing he can do is smile. He has a large family with many cousins. The cousins ran in and out of the room where we were talking to this child. They would jump up on the bed and give him a little attention before running off to play. Orlando's quick, bright eyes followed their every move. The Foundation had a special chair built for this special boy so he too can go outside and enjoy a fuller life. If possible we will arrange for him to attend the special education program being developed in Puerto Cabezas.



**Orlando in his new wheelchair!**

## Autumn 2010, Ernie goes to Nicaragua, by Jill Boudreau Grant, Jgrant6198@aol.com



I have traveled to Nicaragua for nearly eighteen years and each trip is always a new experience. This trip, for the first time, was with my husband of thirty years. He always stayed behind to care for our son. Our son is now on his own and it was time for Ernie to visit Nicaragua. Ernie has spent years packing shipments to send to Nicaragua and helping me pack my bags, so this was his time to understand what was so attractive about Nicaragua.

We arrived on a Monday afternoon after three flights. Ernie tolerated the air travel well given his dislike of plane travel and his fear of very small planes. Once his feet were on the ground all he saw were projects that needed to be done. Ernie is the kind of guy who lives to repair things. The Partners in Health guesthouse was begging for his touch. Ernie had purchased a Craftsman worm drive skill saw, that was a

hit among the Nicaraguans he worked with. His checked bag had the skill saw, electric drill, drill bits, tape measures, a square, chisels, and two boxes of his favorite screws. As he put together a new base cupboard for the kitchen, his Nicaraguan counterparts watched his every move. Ernie does not speak Spanish, but it did not matter because they were communicating in construction. They seemed to know when he was looking for a tape measure and what the next step was. The "Nicas" installed the ceramic counter top and the base cupboard was done.

The front wall and gate of the guest house needed maintenance and repair. Ernie learned so much about cement working from his Nica compañeros. He followed their lead and worked alongside them. After we had been there for two weeks, the house had a new picnic table on the porch, new kitchen cupboards, the kitchen floor painted, a new stand for the water filter, all new light sockets, two new receptacles, all rotted boards on the porch replaced, porch painted, the front fence painted, and the front fence cement resurfaced and painted. With the new skill saw, the "Nicas" built a new set of steps for a disabled girl's home. The saw made it possible to complete the job in three hours instead of two days of hand sawing. All of the tools are staying at the house to help with projects that volunteers will do in the future. Ernie had impressed everyone with his work ethic and his willingness to teach and learn. Though he will never love the small planes, Ernie is talking about his next trip and what needs to be done at the guesthouse. At a restaurant our last night in Puerto, he was asked what he thought of Nicaragua. He said he felt he had been treated like a king and all the people he met had been so kind.



As Ernie was doing all the repairs, I had a chance to do what I love. I had been asked to assist some ongoing projects. The David Fellers Healing Arts foundation had asked me to deliver 12 wheelchairs to designated recipients. We also identified more people in need of wheelchairs. Gina Coppens had asked me to investigate more places that would offer the Filtron water filters. We found two more places to sell the filters. Dr. John Benziger asked me to see what was being done in the Pathology Lab to replace the pathologist who recently left. Dr. Bach asked me to deliver two electrocautery foot pedals to Lenin Fonseca Hospital in Managua. I held a movie night at the guesthouse where we showed "Avatar" in our conference room complete with popcorn and hotdogs. The Sunday after we arrived I cooked a thanksgiving dinner with six chickens and all the fixings. We had seventeen people around our conference room tables. What a good time to share thanks with all our friends. One of the many benefits to having our own guesthouse is being able to host social events. For my next trip, I am planning to cook pizzas and will be working on making a pizza sauce with local ingredients.

### Partners in Health Annual Appeal!

A donation to our annual appeal helps ship equipment and supplies that are so necessary for improving the quality of life for so many people. If you would like to earmark your donation for one of the projects that you read about in this newsletter (or see on our website), please do so on your check. Please make your check payable to *Partners in Health* and send it to:

**Partners in Health  
c/o Steve Johnson  
959 Kennebec Road  
Hampden, ME 04444**

Your donation is tax deductible. Thank you so much for your generosity.



### Filtrón! The Clean Drinking Water Project! Mary

Benziger, thebenzigers@gmail.com

New volunteer Gina Coppens has taken the Filtron clean drinking water project to a new level. What is more basic than clean drinking water? The Filtron, developed in Central America and manufactured in Nicaragua, is a simple and effective method to deliver potable water. The filter unit is a simple design consisting of a seven-liter ceramic filter and a 30-liter plastic receptacle. Water is poured into the ceramic filter and is filtered at a rate of 1.5 to 2.5 liters per hour. Nearly of the bacteria and parasites (99.9%) are filtered out, leaving fresh,

potable water. This simple invention has the potential to bring potable water to every home in Puerto Cabezas.

The ceramic filter was introduced to 12 families in Bilwi by Hampshire College student Rachel Singer in 2008. The PIH guesthouse has been enjoying clean filtered water from the Filtron ceramic water filter ever since. Now, the challenge is to promote widespread use of these filters. Gina's research concluded that the micro-enterprise model is the best way to get the filters into homes. People who buy the unit will take pride in ownership and take better care of the unit. In addition, when replacement parts are needed, people can find them in the marketplace. Gina has hit the ground running, purchasing 100 units, having them delivered to the PIH guesthouse, and identifying businesses and people to sell them. A revolving fund has been set up whereby businesses that sell the filters reimburse the filter fund at cost when the filters are sold. Pharmacies and hardware stores in Puerto Cabezas are now selling the filters.

Gina is seeking funding for introducing the filters to third and fourth grade classes in Port. With the help of Erna Patterson (a nurse in Port), and medical students from the medical school in Port, we will provide health and hygiene talks to these students, their teachers and parents. Students will also receive a water bottle that they can fill each day so they have potable water while at school. Teachers will also receive a filter for their homes and will be allowed to sell them as well. The Filtrones will also be sold to other NGOs working in the RAAN.

### Website!

Please visit our website at [www.pihom.com](http://www.pihom.com). Molly Marston has done a great job of providing easily accessible information. Learn more about our history, mission and accomplishments, and see back issues of our newsletter when you visit our website.

**Thank you for your interest in and support of Partners in Health and your caring. It means so much to the people of the RAAN of Nicaragua.**

### **Nica Nick Names!**

**Puerto Cabezas:** Our Atlantic coast hub city is actually “**Bilwi**” in the Miskitu language, however is often fondly referred to as “**Port.**”

**Bilwaskarma:** Village on the Rio Coco is often referred to as “**Bilwas**” for short. (Not to be confused with “**Bilwi.**”

