

Mardo Rivera joins the Scholarship Program

Mardoqueo “Mardo” Joel Monge Rivera is in his first year at the University of El Salvador in San Salvador. He receives a MASCP funded Popular Human Development (PHD) scholarship and is majoring in agronomy.

Mardo says, “As an agronomist, I could start a chicken farm in Arcatao, of which there is none right now, and that way generate employment for people there.”

“I go back to Arcatao practically every weekend. I help my father who is a farmer with no education because he had to work to support his family, and later because of the war. I’m also learning to guide historical tours from my mom, Rosa, an active member of the Historical Memory Committee who received a 2nd grade education. I pretty much know the history but I’m observing so I know how to do the tours, too.” Mardo also has two sisters, Edith, 24, who is a PHD scholarship student in her last year as a nursing student and Lilian, 16, who hopes to be accepted into the PHD program next year.

“The scholarship helps me a lot. I receive housing at the Casa de Gemelos where Edith lives, too, a transportation allowance, and the program pays my tuition. Without it, I wouldn’t be able to study. I also get support from the required monthly meetings, where we discuss how to live together in harmony and personal values. Also, the PHD staff is extremely important because they care about our grades.”

Mardo had this to say about gang violence in Arcatao: “There aren’t really gang members here like in San Salvador. It’s around 10 young people who are acting out by smoking pot and acting tough. Part of the explanation for this” he explained, “has to do with their fathers. Many of these gang members are sons of guerilla fighters,

who were very young themselves when they began to fight in the war, and there they learned to be macho and not much else. That’s what they are teaching their children. If I go up to them to say hi, they won’t engage in a conversation with me... they isolate themselves to feel more powerful.”

And about leaving Arcatao: “There are many young people who are leaving Arcatao because of a lack of jobs and a lack of opportunities like education. I think that the majority of these people would prefer to stay, but there seems to be nothing for them here.”

“Education plays an important role in combatting both the feeling of hopelessness and powerlessness in the youth in Arcatao. The PHD only accepts three or four of the six or seven that apply every year for their scholarships. They want to be able to accept everyone who wants to study, but unfortunately they cannot for lack of money. I am really grateful that I get this opportunity.”

Thanks to Cori Ring-Martinez, USESSC staff, who conducted this interview for us.



“Mardo” Rivera, MASCP scholarship student from Arcatao, will major in agronomy at the University of Central America in San Salvador.

Santuario de Los Mártires



The new “Sanctuario des los Mártires” in Arcatao.

MASCP continues to help fund the building of the “Chapel to the Martyrs” where the bodies of some of Arcatao’s war dead have been given their final resting place after exhumation from remote and secret burial sites. This is part of Arcatao’s Historical Memory Project. See the article in the November 10, 2014, issue of *America* magazine, “Truth,

Then Justice: Memory and healing in El Salvador” (americamagazine.org/issue/truth-then-justice).

Luke Hansen, S.J.



Mining Update: El Salvador & Wisconsin

by Al Gedicks

In 2009 Pacific Rim, now owned by Oceana Gold, a Canadian-Australian firm, filed a \$77 million lawsuit against the government of El Salvador because the government did not grant the company a mining permit for its El Dorado gold project in the northern province of Cabanas in 2004. El Salvador argues that the company lacked environmental permits for the project and did not have rights to much of the land covered by its concession request.

The International Center for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) has allowed Oceana Gold, to proceed with the suit under an outdated Salvadoran investment law that gave companies access to international tribunals. El Salvador amended its investment law last year, requiring companies with complaints to go through local courts instead of international arbitration courts but this law does not apply retroactively. The company is suing for \$301 million, far above the \$77 million the company claims to have invested so far. The final ICSID hearing opened in September 2014. The suit has cost El Salvador almost \$13 million to date. A verdict is expected in 2015.

El Salvador's Mining Moratorium and Local Municipality Mining Bans

Since 2008, the Salvadoran government has placed an "administrative

freeze" on mining permits. President Salvador Sanchez Ceren, a former FMLN commander, elected earlier this year, has also vowed not to allow mining in the country. However, all attempts to enact a permanent ban on mining have failed in the Arena dominated legislature.

In the absence of a national ban on metallic mining, the national anti-mining movement in El Salvador has organized the "Territories free of Mining" campaign with support from the National Roundtable against Mining and international solidarity organizations. "There are so many obstacles in the way of implementing a permanent prohibition on mining that we can no longer wait for that strategy to bear fruit...", said Marcos Galvez, president of CRIPDES, a local community development organization, "We have rebuilt alliances with the communities that gave birth and are the base of the anti-mining movement." Two communities in the department of Chalatenango—San Jose Las Flores and San Isidro Labrador—have declared themselves free of mining after 98% of the registered voters in the two communities said no to mining in local referenda this past fall.

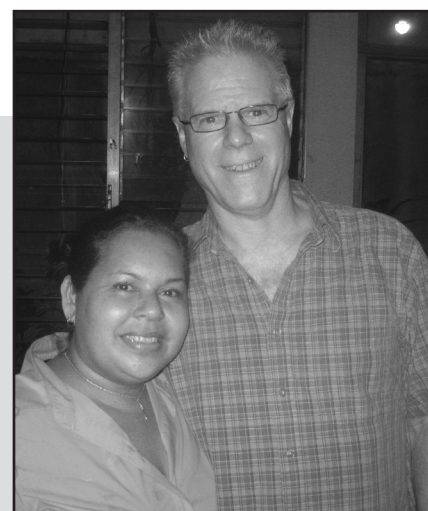
David Morales, the Salvadoran state's attorney for human rights, said the vote in San Jose Las Flores was more than symbolic. He added, "It will be a very important victory

in the legal fight against mining in El Salvador."

Meanwhile, in the Penoque Hills of Wisconsin...

According to Bob Seitz, a spokesperson for Gogebic Taconite (GTac), the company has postponed submitting its mining application until the fall of 2015 because their consultants "have found more sensitive areas than are on the latest state Department of Natural Resources map (Wisconsin State Journal, "Gogebic may avoid hostile territory," 9/5/14). In addition to underestimating the amount of wetlands at the mine site, GTac was surprised when Ashland County passed a mining ordinance that would require GTac to pay county costs of hiring scientists to evaluate the extensive environmental studies the company will submit prior to issuance of a county mining permit.

GTac responded to the ordinance by threatening to leave about a third of the four-mile-long deposit in the ground. "We've let them know that the ordinance makes it not viable to mine there," said Seitz. Whether leaving such a large portion of the orebody in the ground changes the economics of the project remains to be seen.



Life-long activist Marc Rosenthal with Lorena Martínez in Arcatao.

MASCP Activist Leaves for Sierra Leone

Marc Rosenthal, a long time activist with MASCP and a nurse with the University of Wisconsin Department of Family Medicine left on November 30 to help staff an Ebola treatment unit in Sierra Leone for two months. Here's how Marc explained this important decision:

"As the depth of the Ebola crisis became clear, (my wife) Julie and I talked at length about the need to respond. The scope of suffering was overwhelming and the greater danger evident.

We asked ourselves: if not me then who? History presents us with these moments and choices. Its about being on the right side of history. This is a continuation of the solidarity work and health care work I have done all my adult life.

I am fortunate to have the opportunity to work with Partners in Health. We share an understanding of health care as a right and that poverty and lack of health care come from structural choices. I plan a three-week quarantine on my own before returning to Madison so I'll be gone for about 3 months. Life is filled with great beauty and pain. Both are always present."

Marc's activism reaches a level that most of us can only imagine but different levels of activism are the norm in the MASCP extended family. MASCP supporters and participants—including those of you reading this newsletter—are working against sweatshops in Asia, serving on the Common Council, working on political campaigns and against the Penoque Iron Ore Mine. Some are active in 350.org and many give support to organizations focused on social justice. We are proud that MASCP is part of the fabric that creates activists for the many struggles in the world. As Marc often says, "We take the long view and just keep going."

MASCP Sponsors Activist to El Salvador

MASCP was honored to recruit Aurora Conley, an anti-mining activist for the Bad River Tribe in Wisconsin to attend the first ever International Allies Against Mining/U.S. El Salvador Sister Cities Joint Delegation in September 2014 in El Salvador. MASCP funding allowed Aurora to attend this important event that brought together anti-mining activists from around the world for a week of discussion, training and observation in El Salvador. On September 25, San Jose Las Flores declared itself a territory free of mining with 99% of the municipality's inhabitants voting against mining in their territory. Aurora was a member of the International Observer Delegation in San Jose Las Flores for this referendum and also visited our sister city of Arcatao. Here's what she had to say about her experience:

"Thank you so much for one of the greatest experiences of my life. Words cannot express what I witnessed there.

The week that led up to the elections was vital. It was crucial that we were in the communities learning about mining issues and people's concerns because when we came to the Sunday election it was really clear what the issues were. We



Aurora Conley holding children's hands in mural of Salvadoran anti-mining activist

were there as international observers but we knew that we were all part of something larger.

When I later visited Arcatao it felt like they were ready to see how the referendum worked and how they could take on such work. After my presentation, many people came up and asked how we were fighting mining on our reservation. Arcatao and our tribe have so many similarities. In Arcatao, they have their community base; they are

trying to grow from the land and looking at sustainability like we are. We both have strong ties to our culture and we value education. They have just come out of the war and we have faced some of those atrocities also, some of them 70 years ago. Both peoples were displaced.

They have our same mind set: mother earth, people, the water... coming from an Indigenous perspective it was the same... we share the same heart!"

Edgewood and MASCP take the Long View

The 11th Edgewood student trip to Arcatao is coming up in January. Professor Ian Davies of the Spanish department at Edgewood and Marc Rosenthal, both long time MASCP members, lead the study trip that is in the middle of a two-semester course on the political and cultural history of El Salvador. In this article, Ian and Marc talk about why they teach this class/study tour.

How did this class get started?

Marc: In 1996, Edgewood asked me to talk about MASCP work in Arcatao and then to offer a class. I accepted as long as they included a trip to El Salvador in the requirements. Ian joined me soon after and provided his expertise as an educator. We are both dedicated to encouraging critical thinking and social change so it's been great ever since. Edgewood deserves kudos for its commitment to community based, experiential learning and social justice.

What keeps you going?

Marc: I believe education is a tool for social transformation. It is central to MASCP's work and I embrace the model of popular education which links classroom learning to real life experiences. This class also allows me to keep up my personal relationships in El Salvador.

Ian: As an educator, it is awesome to be present when students experience and really understand things for the 1st time. To witness students' eyes opening, worlds expanding and perceptions changing is really wonderful. It's what keeps me energized and committed.

How has the class changed over the years?

Ian & Marc: We get lots of guidance for the class from MASCP and US-El Salvador Sister Cities. At first the emphasis was rebuilding infrastructure and community after the war but now the challenges are more political and have a lot in common with our challenges here in Wisconsin. For example, now we address mining, water rights and neoliberalism in both contexts. The common threads over the years are accompaniment, community organizing and economic and social justice.

I understand that the UW pulled out of the class and trip this year after a successful first collaboration two years ago. Why?

Ian: The UW administration didn't join Edgewood in offering the class this year for safety and liability reasons. Because the Edgewood administration had experience with our strong local relationships in El Salvador and our long history of attending to the highest levels of security, the class is continuing at Edgewood as usual. In El Salvador, we always travel with local drivers and guides. The US-El Salvador Sister City staff who lives and works in-country plans every experience carefully and accompanies us throughout the trip. It's these relationships that provide security, entrée and extraordinary learning experiences. We greatly appreciate Edgewood's trust in us and deep understanding of our program. Like MASCP and sistering, we plan on offering the class for many years to come.

USESSC National Gathering 2014

by Molly Todd

Every year, representatives from the 17 US–El Salvador sistering communities meet to assess efforts from the past year and to set priorities for the coming year. This year the meeting was in Austin Texas and I was MASCP's rep to the meeting.



**U.S.-El Salvador
Sister Cities**

We spoke about successes and challenges. El Salvador has a new national law to combat violence against women and has the continuing challenges of mining pressures and the interlocking economic and political interests that contribute to the country's "insecurity." Themes of concern in the US were political polarization, rights and social relations, health and medicine, land and natural resources, immigration and human trafficking,

and the militarization of U.S. policy. Board members, sister cities affiliates and delegation participants led discussions on the successes and challenges experienced by each committee, immigration, organizing among Salvadorans in the United States, mining, human rights and militarization in Honduras, and a new historical memory research project.

Key objectives for next year are:

- **Leadership:** How can we keep SC sustainable with new people, especially youth?
- **Mining and extractive industries:** How will we shift our work in the wake of the Pacific Rim/Oceana Gold decision?
- **Elections:** How will we support a transparent and democratic election in El Salvador in March 2015?
- **Honduras:** Increased solidarity with Honduras is important because many Salvadorans were offered refuge in Honduras during the war. How can we support civil society organizations there?

Austin's East Side Group, proved to be a phenomenal host. Throughout the weekend, we were joined by local students and their families, as well as Austin residents who were curious about learning about El Salvador and the work of Sister Cities.

Thank you to
the City of Madison
which continues to
support MASCP and
sistering with Arcatao.

We also want to thank our
many financial and volunteer
supporters in the community.

You are the best!

Your donations allow us
to support projects and
scholarships in Arcatao,
create cross border delegations
and provide sharing and
outreach here in Madison.

Muchísimas Gracias!

Save the Date! International Fest! Saturday, Feb. 21, 2015

Travel around the world in one day at Overture Center's annual family friendly International Festival.

Enjoy performances, cuisine and crafts from cultures and people around the world.

MASCP will show photos of Arcatao, sell embroidered items from the women's cooperative and we'd love to talk with you about Madison's oldest sister city, Arcatao, El Salvador.

Hope to see you there!

Madison Arcatao Sister City Project

Madison Arcatao Sister City Project of the U.S.–El Salvador Sister Cities (USESSC) network and their Salvadoran partners provide mutual support and raise awareness about our common struggle for peace, justice, and democracy. As partners, our central focus is building grassroots coalitions both locally and on an international level as we organize around common issues of sustainable agriculture, fair trade, labor and immigrant rights, and environmental preservation.

**MASCP
1986**



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Madison ~ Arcatao: 28 Years of Sistering

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