

Wisconsin/Nicaragua say citizen diplomacy is working

By **AMY WIZA**
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Citizen diplomacy is working. On March 2, U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua, Robert J. Callahan, addressed the American Chamber of Commerce in Managua. The event was timely, as on this same date a delegation of 20 persons from Wisconsin were departing Managua following 10 days of interaction and cultural immersion with their Nicaraguan counterparts.

In addition, a week prior, another Wisconsinite traveling with a Partners of the Americas program returned from Nicaragua following his two-week consulting services to the USAID-sponsored Farmer to Farmer program, and a month prior 18 from Wisconsin had returned after fitting nearly 2,000 pairs of eyeglasses in a week.

During Callahan's speech, titled "Fact and Fantasy: The United States and its Policies in Nicaragua," he cites past history, government programs, relations between the two countries and most importantly to Wisconsin citizens, he emphasized the valued work of private American citizens who

offer their time and resources to enhance the quality of life for each individual involved.

Wisconsin/Nicaragua Partners of the Americas Inc. (W/NP) is one of many private, nonprofit organizations from the U.S. that provides and facilitates volunteer opportunities that strengthens the bond between the people of both countries. People to people projects in education, women and development, agriculture and humanitarian assistance fully utilize available resources, and build human capacity as well as increase the economic outlook for participants.

W/NP travel offers Wisconsin citizens international opportunities and experiences to broaden their knowledge about culture and society, while developing new friendships and an increase in global awareness along the way. One of the founding principles that led to the development of Partners of the Americas was to discover avenues that would lead to mutual understanding among peoples of the Americas.

In February the group of 20 Wisconsin citizens received a warm Nicaraguan welcome to kick off the 2011 Annual Learn-

ing Center Trek, organized through W/NP. Through the Partners' model of citizen to citizen relations, participants shared their time and talents while serving as citizen diplomats, learning about a new culture while sharing their own culture, meeting new friends, and representing their country in various meetings, workshops and events. They participated in many activities that provided exposure to Nicaraguan culture and history, provided opportunities for community service, and helped build each other's capacities.

Some of the Learning Center Trek highlights included sharing a broad variety of workshops in Managua, Leon and Ticuantepe,; delivering books to the Sherin Bowen lending library that were collected by Ben Franklin Junior High School Spanish students, as well as hand-made books from high-school students in Oak Creek; hiking up and peering into the active Masaya Volcano; learning to make pine needle baskets; sand boarding down the Cerro Negro Volcano; shopping at local markets; and delivering the new treadle sewing machines to

the Learning Centers that were donated by the Stevens Point Star Quilters Guild.

Highlights also included sharing paramedic supplies and experiences with the Nindiri volunteer fire department; birding hikes through Montibelli Reserve; picking pineapples, star fruit, mangos and other delicious fruits while talking with the local farmers; and much more.

Many volunteer opportunities exist within the W/NP network. More information on the Wisconsin/Nicaragua Partners is available online at wnp.uwsp.edu or by calling 715-346-4702. Partners of the Americas began in 1964 as the people-to-people component of President John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, and has since evolved into a private nonprofit organization. W/NP is one of 60 chapters throughout the U.S. Areas of work include education, cultural exchanges, health care and the environment.

Editor's note: Amy Wiza is program director of Wisconsin/Nicaragua Partners, which is headquartered in Room 134 of Nelson Hall at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.