

**Report of VOSH-Connecticut Mission  
San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua  
January 10-17, 2009**

**VOSH-Connecticut** held its eighth annual eye care clinic in San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua on January 10-17, 2009. This was the eleventh year of service at this site to the San Juan del Sur area, the eighth under the auspices of VOSH-Connecticut, along with three previous missions under the auspices of VOSH-NECO. The team consisted of six **Optometrists** led by Dr. Matthew Blondin and included: Dr. Jerry Hardison (6th VOSH-CT mission), Dr. Brian Lynch (8<sup>th</sup> VOSH-CT mission)(CAO Legislative Liaison), Dr. Abby Quinn (7<sup>th</sup> VOSH-CT mission), Dr. Michael Gordon(2nd VOSH-CT mission), and Dr. Robert Mingrone(1<sup>st</sup> VOSH-CT mission).

We were joined by 8 optometry students from the University of California at Berkeley: Jennifer Kuo(Leader), Melinda Bimberg, Georgina Blanc, David Leong(2<sup>nd</sup> VOSH-CT mission), David Murakami, Judy Rivera, Caitlin Walsh and Jackie Wray. We had fewer students than usual because we did not have any returning students from the Netherlands, which we hope to have again next year, so all of these Berkeley students worked extremely hard and did a terrific job all around, and were well-served by their dedicated student leader Jennifer Kuo.

In addition to the doctors and students, the following volunteers were included: **“La Jefa” Segunda:** Joyce Krinitsky (6th VOSH-CT mission), **Opticians/Dispensing** Dottie Byus (5th VOSH-CT mission), Mareshah Lynch (5th VOSH-CT mission), Olivia Quinn(6th VOSH-CT mission, High School Senior, Wilton, CT), Edward Gordon and Daniel Lynch(2<sup>nd</sup> VOSH-CT Mission)(College Students) and **Translators:** Cecilia Suarez(Leader-4<sup>th</sup> VOSH-CT Mission), Emily Hatton(High School Sophomore, Greenwich, CT) Katie Perham(MPH student UCONN Health Center), Orlando Sevilla(11<sup>th</sup> VOSH-CT mission), Courtney Shaw(Litchfield, CT High School Senior) and Mark Vieira. We were also joined in the mission by **Sally Lee**, Editor-in-Chief of Ladies Home Journal Magazine, who will be writing an article about the mission to be published later this year.

Joyce Krinitsky continues to do her outstanding job as second in command, and the mission would not be the success that it was without all of her continued help, assistance & support. The coordination of various bus transports throughout the local and southern Nicaraguan area proved extremely successful due to Joyce’s efforts, and we are extremely grateful to her in this regard. Opticians Dottie Byus and Mareshah Lynch along with their able assistant Olivia Quinn returned once again to run the dispensary and did an excellent job as always. The dispensary part of this mission continues to be completely self-sufficient, and for that we are eternally grateful for the leadership & support of Dottie, Mareshah and Olivia. In addition, Mareshah served as an Optometric Technician to Dr. Brian Lynch. This worked very well, as pre-testing was not a useful and effective part of this year’s mission. Going forward we will now change the format to eliminate group pre-testing and instead assign a volunteer Optometric Technician as well as a Vision Screener to each exam room. This will help to facilitate the refraction and move the patients along in a quicker and smoother fashion.

As in year’s past, approximately 50 local residents assisted with the clinic duties, led for the eleventh time by local doctor Dra. Rosa Elena Bello, with assistance of new school principal and former City Councilperson Veronica Sanchez.

Three thousand pairs of glasses were purchased by VOSH-Connecticut from the Virginia Lions Club, along with 3,000 pairs of sunglasses & 1,000 pairs of readers. Unfortunately,

approximately 2,000 of the 3,000 pairs of sunglasses did not make it past customs, a great loss to both VOSH-CT and the patients. For next year's mission we will be exploring other options locally to purchase and distribute sunglasses to avoid these issues with customs. Many of our other items also did not make it out of customs, including boxes of baseball caps, used clothing and other items and boxes of candy for distribution to the patients and children. All but one of the 64 boxes we shipped was accounted for, but unfortunately many of them were empty or nearly so.

Also assisting with the over-all organization on the ground was local resident Chris Berry, Esq., along with his able assistants, Vilma Bustos, Katie Horn and Mara Jacobsohn. We also thank the entire helpful & knowledgeable Pelican staff, including Kathy Knight & Photographer Cesar Paniamogan, for all of their time & wonderful contributions to the mission. As previously stated, because of the current global situation, it is no longer possible to transport any mission supplies with us. This mission is only able to continue because of the generosity & support of Chris Berry & Pelican Eyes, who allowed us space on their shipment container. We cannot emphasize enough how appreciative & grateful we are to Chris Berry, because as stated, without him, this mission will cease to exist.

In addition, because of the existing political climate in Nicaragua, we are extremely grateful for the continued support & assistance of now former San Juan del Sur Mayor Eduardo Holmann, and newly elected Mayor Jorge Sanchez Santana. VOSH-CT was honored for its years of service to the San Juan del Sur community during the tenure of Mayor Holmann. Mission members received honorary certificates, for which we were very humbled and honored to receive. We are also grateful to Jane Mirandette & the Villa Isabella for all of their help & assistance for many of the mission members who stayed there, and our assistant Nicole Rolli for her help & assistance with all aspects of this mission.

The clinic was held for the eleventh year at the Centro Escolar Enmanuel Mongalo y Rubio. It was set up Sunday, January 11, 2009 with 5 examination rooms, a pre-testing room, dispensary & lunchroom. The clinic officially opened on Monday, January 12, 2008 at 8:00 a.m. Breakfast was provided each day by VOSH-Connecticut beginning at 7:00 a.m. Patients were seen from 8 a.m.-1 p.m., with a break for lunch provided by VOSH-Connecticut from 1:00-2:00 p.m. Clinic then resumed from 2:00-5:00 p.m. As in the past, VOSH-Connecticut provided for all expenses for both mission members and local volunteers relating to the clinic including breakfast, snack, lunch and the closing banquet. 115 people attended the closing banquet, with terrific local entertainment provided by Pelican Eyes and a beautiful photo montage by Cesar, and Dottie Byus and Mareshah Lynch were presented with 5 year Certificates of Appreciation from VOSH-CT.

Over the four-day clinic period, we saw 2,674 patients broken down as follows:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Total
1/12/08	1/13/08	1/14/08	1/15/08	
572	786	720	596	2,674

These totals represent an increase of 246 patients over last year's total of 2,428, and a total increase of more than 300 patients over the last two years. During each of the first three days of clinic, patients were seen until after dark, the first two days beyond 7 p.m., which presented some challenges in the limited school facilities, along with an intermittent supply of power.

Despite an increase in some economic development throughout the southern Nicaraguan area and in the San Juan del Sur area in particular, there is an increasing level of poverty and need

for all types of medical and dental care, including eye care, due to the worsening global economic picture. As in years' past, university students under the direction of Dr. David Gullette of Simmons College provide translating services for the clinic, for which we continue to be very grateful. This coming May Dra. Rosa Elena Bello will be honored with an honorary degree from Simmons College in recognition of all her work and efforts on behalf of the San Juan del Sur area and surrounding communities.

Throughout the mission, all communications were held in both English and Spanish, as in years' past, and we wish to particularly acknowledge the assistance of returning mission member Cecilia Suarez and her granddaughter Emily Hatton who provided tremendous translating services throughout the mission. They were helped by Katie Perham, Courtney Shaw, Orlando Sevilla and Mark Vieira, who all provided excellent and outstanding translating services for which we are very grateful and appreciative. Common pathologies continue to be encountered including cataracts, pterygia, glaucoma, corneal foreign bodies, toxoplasmosis, conjunctivitis, retinal disease, hypertension and some cancers. Our paid security staff returned once again, and provided excellent & safe services for all not only at the gate but at each exam room as well. Follow-up treatment facilities continue to be lacking, and while lists of names were kept of needed patient cataract surgeries, other medical conditions such as goiters, heart problems and possible carcinomas remain untreated with little or no further treatment options.

Numerous drugs were donated by Alcon Laboratories, Inc. and Allergan Pharmaceutical. These were most appreciated and used throughout the mission, however by the third day of the mission, we had run out of all dry eye lubricants. For next year we need to try and increase our supply of these types of lubricants in order to have sufficient quantities for those patients in need. Leftover drugs were donated at the conclusion of the clinic to Dra. Rosa Elena Bello. Encore Optical continues to be very generous in their donation of lenses & services to patients with special needs, for which we are very grateful.

This year, under the direction of Joyce Krinitsky, VOSH-CT hired two buses to bring patients in from the local & surrounding areas including Tola for all 4 days, & provided 4 days of bus service from the San Jorge area, in addition to a second bus which was provided daily from the San Jorge area with the help and assistance of San Jorge Councilman Felix Lopez. During the 4 clinic days, we also saw several hundred Pelican workers, providing a very nice addition to the clinic, and on Tuesday a busload of children and young adults traveled from the Nagarote area under the auspices of the Norwalk, CT Sister Cities program and led once again very ably by Sarah Proescher.

Many local mission volunteers returned to help us for the 11<sup>th</sup> time, as the mission celebrated its 11<sup>th</sup> year of service in San Juan del Sur, a very special and meaningful show of support to both Dr. Blondin and myself. San Juan del Sur continues to grow and develop, further displacing local residents, although many have adapted to the changing community by starting up small businesses and restaurants, all contributing to an increase in prosperity to the local community and residents. Cruise ships now regularly stop in San Juan del Sur, with some added tourism growth as a result. Mayor Holmann has done a beautiful job in improving the cityscape with building repairs, painting, lighting, trash removal and road improvements, particularly the main road into San Juan del Sur and the surrounding downtown area and town square around the Catholic Church. A new casino will be opening soon in the downtown area, and it remains to be seen how that will further impact the changing character of San Juan del Sur.

Overall, this year's mission went very smoothly, although we did have a problem with one mission member's knapsack containing money and expensive camera equipment stolen in the

downtown area and two near-misses with large scorpions. This mission continues to be successful due in large part to the fact that so many mission members have worked so often and so well together in the past, and continue to recognize service above self. We are very grateful to have the continuing support of the Berkeley optometry students who have been with us all 11 years of this mission, and without whom this ongoing mission would not be possible. It is also an absolute pleasure to work alongside so many caring, giving individuals, both as returning mission members and locally in San Juan del Sur, who all work together in a team spirit second to none. Over the years it has given us great pleasure to work with not only so many returning adult mission members, but to be able to provide the opportunity for our mission members to share their experiences with their children and grandchildren who this year included Olivia, Edward, Emily and Daniel. Olivia has been with us every year since she was 11 years old and will now be entering college in the Fall. She epitomizes what it means to be a VOSH member, who has given unselfishly of herself as a young person year after year in help and service to others.

Orlando and Courtney as members of our family also did a terrific job in translating and helping out over-all with various mission tasks. It is particularly wonderful to us to see how much Orlando has grown and developed over these past 11 years, from when he first appeared at our mission door as a little 9 year old boy living up the hill behind the school speaking no English whatsoever to a college student here at Northwestern CT Community College. We are very grateful to be able to provide these opportunities to Orlando, again with the help & assistance of Chris Berry, and most appreciative of the fact that on our way home Orlando was eventually able to make it out of customs in Houston having all his paperwork in order despite being detained for almost an hour. Chris has been so instrumental to the success of this mission in so many ways, that we cannot begin to thank him and his terrific staff for the countless hours they donate year in and year out to help make this mission the success that it is.

It was an honor and a privilege for us to have Sally Lee join us to profile us in an upcoming edition of Ladies Home Journal Magazine. This past year VOSH-CT was profiled in the AOA Newsletter, and we are very appreciative of the recognition these types of publications give to our members. Escalating mission costs continue to present a challenge. Total mission expenditures are now close to \$10,000 per mission, funded solely through volunteer donations solicited primarily by myself through the CAO, as well as through our yearly mission fees and the generosity of our close friends and Joyce's association at Prudential Realty. We will continue to examine ways to enhance and improve our fundraising activities, in order to ensure the ongoing viability and success of the mission.

Once again, as our mission came to a close, mission members came away with a great deal of self satisfaction knowing that a great many in need were helped by their generous and unselfish efforts. VOSH-CT continues to be grateful to all of those, both here and in Nicaragua, who work together as one to provide eye care to so many who otherwise would have none.

Respectfully submitted,

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Matthew Blondin, O.D., F.A.A.O.  
Clinic Director

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Audrey B. Blondin, Esq., "La Jefa"  
Clinic Director

January 30, 2009