



Meetings: Tuesday 12 Noon

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**CREATE
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SEPTEMBER IS BASIC EDUCATION AND LITERACY MONTH

Happy Birthday

Sep 23 Mark Vosper

Happy Anniversary

Sep 25 Adrienne & Warren Dale Sep 25 Chantal & Ivan Despot
Sep 26 Mark & Linda Vosper

Upcoming Speakers:

Sep 22 No Speaker
Duck Race Cheque Presentations

Sep 29

Oct 6

LAST WEEK'S MEETING

President **Eric Mollema** presided.

Guests

Ron Langley

Speaker Presentation –

Sasha Warmington - Rotary Club of Baños, Ecuador

Introduction to the Speaker by Ineke Boekhorst

Sasha is a Rotarian and community service leader from Baños de Agua Santa, Ecuador, and is the general manager of Hotel Sangay, her family's hotel in Baños. She has spent much of her life in the community and has developed a strong connection to its people and surrounding rural areas. Sasha joined Rotary in 2024 and served as president of the Rotary Club of Baños during the 2025–2026 Rotary year. She also co-founded the Martha Albán Foundation with her mother, Martha, and currently serves as its vice-president. The foundation supports individuals and families facing difficult circumstances, with particular attention to vulnerable children, families experiencing extreme poverty, young mothers and their children, people with special needs, and a home for teenage mothers and their children. Ineke highlighted Sasha's commitment to community service and her growing relationship with Rotary clubs in Canada.



Sasha's Presentation

Sasha spoke about the close relationships that have developed between Rotarians in Canada (including members of our own Meadow Ridge Rotary Club) and Ecuador over the past three years in the development of two previous water-project grants:

the first project installed water-treatment plants in eight schools, benefiting more than 5,000 students, and the second project involved six rural schools, benefiting more than 2,000 children and young people. The benefits extend beyond the students. In rural communities, school projects also benefit families and other residents who use or are connected to the schools.

Sasha presented the next stage of their community development work through two further international Rotary initiatives: the **San Nicolás Cheese Factory** and the **Vizcaya Ecotourism Development**, that are intended to support economic development, create sustainable local employment, strengthen community businesses, and encourage young people who have left the region to consider returning.

Geographic and Economic Context

The town of **Banos** is located near the entrance to Ecuador's Amazon region, and has a population of approximately 25,000 people, and is surrounded by mountains, rivers, waterfalls, and other natural attractions. **Viscaya** is a rural hamlet located about 5 to 6 kilometers (3 to 4 miles) east of the center of Banos. Approximately 90% of the local population in both of these areas is connected to tourism-related employment. Compared with the busy tourist centre of Banos, Vizcaya could attract visitors seeking a more peaceful and authentic rural experience. The proposed projects would connect agricultural production, local food, nature, and tourism.

Project Component One: San Nicolás Cheese Factory

The San Nicolás Cheese Factory in Viscaya is an existing community enterprise serving local milk producers. The intention is to enable local producers to turn more of their milk into higher-value products. This would increase local economic activity and potentially improve the incomes of participating families. The cheese factory currently works with approximately 11 families, representing roughly 50 people.

Sasha explained that the facility's existing capacity is insufficient to process all the milk available from local producers. Some milk must therefore be sold without being processed into cheese. The producers currently sell cheese to a larger, well-known cheese company in Ecuador. However, the producers receive relatively low prices because they lack their own brand, appropriate certification, and the necessary food-safety and quality systems.

Proposed Improvements

The project would provide assistance with new or improved cheese-processing equipment, improved sanitation and hygiene procedures, and business and marketing development. The proposed improvements are expected to increase production capacity substantially.

Project Component Two: Ecotourism Project

The current situation with the ecotourism project in Viscaya is that its management requires strengthening. The project needs improved administration and planning capacity so that it can move from an initiative with potential toward a properly managed tourism business. Many of the young people involved have some experience because they have worked in hotels, restaurants, and spas in Banos. However, they have limited financial resources and limited business experience. This project will provide additional experience in marketing, project development, and finance. Many of members of this second project also work in or own hotels, restaurants, and spas in Banos, so their practical experience can help the Viscaya community improve and market its tourism activities.

There are many attractions in the area, including trout fishing, lakes, waterfalls, and beautiful rural landscapes. One visitor recently spent approximately six hours walking in the area, sometimes through mud up to his knees, and returned extremely happy with the experience. However, there is currently very little signage, and some of the local guides do not speak English. Improvements are therefore needed so visitors can feel safe, understand where they are going, and communicate more easily.

Proposed Intervention

The proposed intervention includes an improved administrative and operational space from which the tourism project can be managed. Training will also be provided so that the partners can develop a business plan applicable to their actual circumstances. The intention is not simply to create a business plan for them. The project will also train the participants so they learn how to develop and use business plans themselves. The area contains beautiful lakes, trails, and rural attractions. Proper signage will make these attractions easier and safer for visitors to access.

Sustainable tourism will improve destination management and provide visitors with a clearer and more enjoyable experience. Another goal is to work with the municipality in Banos. Although the relationship has sometimes been difficult, it is gradually improving. The hope is that the municipality will include Viscaya in its marketing plans, radio interviews, and other promotional activities, both within Ecuador and internationally through the internet and social media.

Sustainability and Responsibilities

The community beneficiaries will operate and maintain the investments, participate in training, and assume responsibility for the continuity of the enterprises.

The local sponsor, the Banos El Santa Rotary Club, will manage and execute the project in the territory. This includes coordinating acquisitions, monitoring beneficiaries, and providing accountability.

Reading Corners Project

A question was asked about the reading-corner project in Banos being supported by the Meadow Ridge Rotary Club through a District Grant. The project involves establishing six reading corners or small libraries in six rural schools. The furniture has recently been completed. A few shelves and other items are still needed, but most of the furniture is finished. The books were obtained through another organization that is supporting the project. The decorations, carpets, curtains, and other features still need to be completed to make the reading corners attractive and welcoming.

Training is also very important. Sasha said they need to hire someone to work with the teachers and help them encourage children to read. In Ecuador, children and adults do not read very much, particularly in this area. Finding someone who reads even one book a year can be unusual. The objective is therefore to teach children to enjoy reading for pleasure. Teachers will be trained to use games and other activities to get children excited about books. Photographs of two of the schools were recently shared. The books were delivered to the schools shortly before the trip, and the children were extremely excited.

Club Business and Announcements

Ray conducted an auction for two tickets to the upcoming Peter Tam concert (see last week's meeting notes). Alex was the successful bidder.

Mark Forster presented a certificate of appreciation to Centra Lawyers in recognition of their support of the Meadow Ridge Rotary Duck Race. Additional certificates were distributed for delivery to other supporters and contributors. The certificates recognized the assistance and community support that helped make the Duck Race fundraising initiative possible.

September 20: Area M Hawaiian picnic.

October 1: Peter Tam Concert in Mission (see last week's meeting notes).

October 20: District/Assistant District Governors visit to our Club

President's Closing Quote



The older I get, the more I realize that I don't know anything,
but I'm much better at pretending that I do.

Submitted by Laurie Anderson