Carmen Newsletter

At the International Convention in Atlanta in June of last year And Smallwood introduced me to PDG Gladys Maldonado from D 4271 in Cucuta, Colombia.

That introduction led to three Rotary Global Grants worth over $232,000;

Five Smart virtual classrooms in each of four public schools along with two audio devices serving 3,300 students – R.C. of Katy serves as the International Partner Club - $55,600. Seven Districts including D 9920 in New Zealand and our D 5890 contributed to this project.

Emergency equipment for the Pediatric ward of the Erasmo Meoz hospital in Cucuta - R.C. of Baytown $49,600. Eight Districts, including D 3680 in Korea, and our D 5890 contributed to this project.

Medical equipment for the Gynecology ward of the Erasmo Meoz hospital – R.C. of Space Center $127,300. Eight Districts and eighteen clubs (16 from D 5890) contributed to this project.

The host clubs on these projects were the R.C. of san Jose de Cucuta and the R.C. of Cucuta II.

Each of these projects was assembled and managed by PDG Gladys Maldonado in Cucuta.

In mid September Joan and I spent five days as Gladys’ guests visiting each of these projects in Cucuta. The city of Cucuta is on the border with Venezuela so we took the opportunity to walk on the Simon Bolivar bridge separating Cucuta and VZ where we witnessed a never ending stream of Venezuelans leaving their country due to a lack of food, medicines and jobs. It is estimated that over 800,000 Venezuelans now “live” in Colombia.

On our first day in Cucuta we did a short tour of the city followed by a wonderful evening/dinner at Gladys’ home along with several friends. After dinner she arranged for a four piece band playing Colombian music.

On our second day we visited each of the four schools where the entire student bodies were awaiting our arrival to say “thank you” complete with marching bands and student entertainers. The students come from very poor families and some walk great distances to get to school. Many of these students are children from abused mothers and sometimes they are displaced. Foe them the school is the only place they can find love and support. And of course many of the students are from VZ. At the conclusion of each visit the Principal of the schools invited Joan and I to wade into the crowd and mingle with the entire student body. It was crazy.

Gladys arranged for interviews with the local TV and radio stations and then a visit to the local daily newspaper for another interview.

On our third day we attended the inauguration of the two projects at the Hospital Erasmo Meoz where representatives of the City and then the head of the hospital spoke to thank Rotary and then I was asked to speak. I took the opportunity to thank Gladys for her amazing work and also to compliment the hospital for their compassionate understanding in receiving the Venezuelans. Some 60% of the births in the hospital are from Venezuelan women.

On the fourth day we visited a food project for Venezuelan refugees where Cristal Mantanez and Isis Mejias, both Venezuelans and from our E-Club of Houston, have raised funds to provide 140,000 meals shipped from Houston.

Later that day we visited one of the collection points where slightly used tennis shoes, many collected and sent from our clubs in Houston, are being provided to the Venezuelan walkers. While there we met seven Venezuelans who were walking to Peru a walk of at least 45 days in search of jobs. Each of the seven was fitted with “new shoes” to replace their sandals. This is another project of Cristal and Isis and their E-Club.

Gladys Maldonado is one of three Spanish language instructors at GETS and is a wonderful person.

Sincerely,

Bill