

Burlington-Alamance Sister Cities  
5<sup>th</sup> English Tutoring Trip to San Luis Potosi, Mexico  
May 8-15, 2010

by Ben Ansbacher

Participants were:

Ben Ansbacher, Sister Cities board member  
Mary Frier, Associate Director of Service Learning at Elon University  
Cauline Howell, retired Wisconsin teacher of ESL  
Alexa Jordan, Attorney and formerly with Alamance County Social Services  
Carole Lipkin, part-time professor of mathematics at Winston-Salem State University  
Sandi Moulton, Alderman of Gibsonville, NC, former Sister Cities board member

Tec Superior

This was our first trip to Instituto Tecnológico Superior de San Luis Potosí, a five-year engineering school. It is not located in our sister city of Soledad, but rather in the industrial zone of the city of San Luis Potosí. Engineer Raphael Cardoso Chávez is the Director General of the school. He has been involved with our Sister Cities program since its inception. Until this year he was Rector of Universidad Tecnológico, the two-year technical college in Soledad which hosted our previous tutoring trips.

Our contact was Selene Ramos, head of the Languages Department. She did an outstanding job of arranging an interesting and busy schedule for us and of preparing the teachers and students for their contact with us.

Real de Catorce

Real de Catorce is a mining ghost town that is being restored as a tourist attraction. Its big attraction is the entrance via a 1½ mile tunnel completed in 1901. On Tuesday we had an all-day outing to Real de Catorce with about eight students and four teachers. Each student had been assigned a site to research and describe to us in English. In addition, we used the bus rides to have extensive conversations with the students. The Institute treated everyone to a lunch in a very nice restaurant in the town.

Casa de la Caridad Cristiana (House of Christian Charity)

On Sunday evening, we visited Casa de la Caridad Cristiana, a shelter for migrants. We learned that they mainly served migrants from Central America who were riding the freight trains through San Luis Potosí, on their way north to the United States. Some were victims of crime or accidents en route. All were in need of a night's lodging and food. The bulk of their clients spent just one night in the shelter, showering, sleeping, doing laundry, and eating supper and

breakfast. They serve 27,000 clients a year, as many as 150 a night, with two men sometimes in a single bed.

We broke into small groups to hear the migrants' stories. The two with whom I spoke were both on their way back to the United States after having been deported, because their families were desperately in need of the money they hoped to earn.

Mary Frier made useful contacts at the Casa for Elon student projects.

### Fire Department

On Thursday we visited with Chief Adolfo Benavente, first at the headquarters and then at Station 3 which is in Soledad. The department has a total of seven stations. Station 3 has just relocated to a modern, new structure with covered open-air parking for the trucks. This is the station that is eagerly waiting for the fire truck that Sister Cities is donating.

Firequip, Inc. of Burlington is donating hose to go with the donated truck. Chief Benavente said he is preparing a regular order for additional hose for the SLP fire department. If that works out for them, he would like to work with Firequip to sell hose to other fire departments in Mexico. This could develop into the first instance of Sister Cities being the catalyst for new business between Alamance County and Mexico.

### City of Soledad

Officials of the City of Soledad de Graciano Sanchez joined firefighters, teachers, Eng. Cardoso and our group for a late two-hour lunch. The officials included Mayor Ricardo Gallardo, Public Relations Officer Fernando Abud, and Special Events Coordinator Erika Briones. Although we had been dealing with Jessica Ortiz, she is now on maternity leave and Erika, who gave birth two years ago, is now back. Erika organized our last official visit and told me that she would be our main contact. She was supportive of our desire to establish a Sister City organization in Soledad that would survive future changes in elected administrations.

### Future trips

It has proven difficult to get volunteers for a fall trip, so our goal should be to have a spring tutoring trip every year. I have asked Selene to suggest date around Easter, April 24, 2011. This gives us all fall and winter for our recruiting.

I delivered to Eng. Cardoso an invitation from Janyth Frederickson for his staff to come to Alamance County for English training and cultural exchange. He accepted immediately for eight faculty, as well as himself and his teenage son. We should try to gather all the details by June 4.