

El Sol Shines

"Working Together for a Better Community"



June 2009



President's message

Our volunteers are our heart and soul.

Each month, we feature a "volunteer of the month" in *El Sol Shines*. This month, we focus on Tom Choate, a "milagro," or miracle, who is in charge of information technology at El Sol. In the past two months, we featured Diane Williams, who created our health program, and Sally Isham, our volunteer coordinator.

But each of our volunteers is truly a "milagro." El Sol is an organization that pretty much runs on volunteers. We have only three paid staff, yet, as a reader of our quarterly report would see, through our "volunteer power," we are able to do programs that only a much larger organization could provide. Our volunteers contribute close to \$1 million a year in services to El Sol, while our "cash" budget remains at less than \$200,000. Volunteers staff our ESL programs, day and night, our literacy program, our health program and our legal program. They staff the employer desk, and run our

kitchen, giving breakfast and lunch to more than 100 people a day, as well

as buying food, donating food, and organizing food

delivery. They oversee the computer labs and classes. Our "handyman"

is a volunteer. They write and publish this e-newsletter.

A unique thing about our volunteer programs is that the workers, too, participate as volunteers in various projects. They have contributed many, many hours to Habitat for Humanity's project to build new homes in Jupiter. They participate annually in the Great American Cleanup, and on June 5, helped to paint and landscape a house on Cheyenne Street in Jupiter as part of "Rebuilding Together," a project of the Solid Waste Authority. Joanna Aiken, director of the project for Solid Waste, said that in 18 years, the volunteers from El Sol "were the best volunteer group that we have ever had." Other workers help out at El Sol, and last February, the workers, through the Workers Council, volunteered to honor the volunteers at our annual volunteer recognition dinner.

And our volunteers are also our ambassadors to the community at large. For instance, one day I walked into the kitchen and found a clutch of kids there. Well, we don't usually let kids in the kitchen, but in this case, our volunteer said, "I just had to show them El Sol, El Sol is all they hear Grandma talk about!" And, by the way, that same grandma also talked so much about El Sol and the work they do in the kitchen to a friend, that her friend ended up making a sizeable donation to help us to feed the hungry.

So, believe when I say we have the greatest volunteers in the United States. And I thank you all for all of your good work. You've truly changed our community in Jupiter and you are an inspiration.

Jill Hanson

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A home of their own

El Sol partners with Habitat for Humanity to exchange volunteer work here for new houses in home countries

A group of Jupiter migrant day laborers are moving closer to realizing their dream of one day owning their own new home in their homeland, thanks to a collaborative program El Sol has developed with Habitat for Humanity of Palm Beach County and their affiliates in Guatemala and Mexico.

Under the new program, immigrants who qualify will be able to earn sweat equity hours toward the purchase of a new home in Guatemala or Mexico by volunteering on Habitat for Humanity home construction in Jupiter. Seven El Sol workers with families in Tzibaj, Guatemala, a village associated with Jacaltenango, Jupiter's Sister City, have just been approved for the program. They were screened by the Habitat for Humanity affiliate in Guatemala and work is expected to start in about 15 days, said El Sol Associate Director Dora Valdivia.

Roberto Montejo, 45, is one of those whose applications were approved. He said he's "happy and excited" that he will be able to replace the cramped, one-room adobe house that his family of four resides in.



These two photos show how little construction techniques have changed in nearly 100 years in Jacaltenango, Guatemala, sister city to Jupiter. The photo on the left was taken in the early 1900s of villagers replacing a church roof. In the photo on the right, the same church is getting a new roof by roughly the same methods. El Sol workers in Jupiter, by volunteering to build houses for Habitat for Humanity, are learning roofing and other construction techniques they hope to use back home to help improve their villages. Photos courtesy of jacaltenango.net



Roberto Montejo paints a Jupiter home with other El Sol volunteer workers as part of a community service program with the Solid Waste Authority.

Guatemala's eligibility criteria include a minimum of \$200 monthly income for a family in order to qualify for a loan. The homes will be of brick or cement block construction and financed through no-interest loans to be repaid over eight years.

"This is their dream coming true," said Ms. Valdivia, who arranged last year for El Sol workers to volunteer at Habitat for Humanity's West Jupiter development, where several dozen affordable homes are being built. She noted that the primary motivation of immigrants is to provide a better life for their families with a decent, livable home, their greatest desire.

She said several of the workers who volunteered on Habitat for Humanity homes in Jupiter spoke to her of their desire to some day have a new home for their families that they could return to. As a result, she contacted the Habitat for Humanity director for Guatemala who was receptive about finding ways to assist. She then submitted names and addresses of a number of workers and their families who were screened for eligibility under Guatemala's criteria.

She has a list of more than 100 other El Sol workers from Guatemala and Mexico who are also interested in participating and said Mexico's Habitat for Humanity organization is also cooperating and will begin screening a group of 13 applicants for eligibility.

Ms. Valdivia believes the ability of immigrants to earn credits in the U.S. towards a new home in their own country will have a positive impact on immigration because there will be no point in their remaining in the U.S. "for years and years without their families if they are working towards the time when they will be able to go home to their own new house in Guatemala or Mexico."

Bernard Godek, executive director of Habitat for Humanity of Palm Beach County, said his agency is supportive of the new program. His agency will track the volunteer hours worked by the workers on the Jupiter Habitat for Humanity homes and submit them to their Guatemala affiliate, as well as work out the financial and educational parts of the program. The workers will learn budgeting and other economic and financial aspects of the program.

Sunshine Artworks organizes to spotlight painters and crafters



A painting by Jose Antonio, depicting the immigration experience from Lake Atitlan to Jupiter, one of the pieces featured at last year's Art Fest.

El Sol 'by the numbers':

In the 1st Quarter of 2009 there were . . .

- 1,414 jobs filled
- 16,316 workers in attendance
- \$252,703 value of free services to community
- 2,730 employers registered
- 1,469 workers registered
- 181 workers served daily
- \$33,150 in legal services to workers
- 481 participants in health events
- 190 enrolled in Town of Jupiter workshops
- 132 students in night ESL classes
- 1,522 in daytime ESL classes
- 262 students in vocabulary workshops
- 4,591 participants in computer literacy
- 13,091 meals served
- 6 grants received, 3 pledged for 2009

El Sol artists and craftspersons who learned from last year's successful Art Fest that there is a local market for their paintings and crafts have a new organization, Sunshine Artworks. The organization will focus on helping them promote their paintings and crafts and manage such matters as consignments and finances.

The El Sol Board of Directors approved establishment of the new organization as a separate not-for-profit organization under the umbrella of El Sol and appointed initial board members Lee McCarthy, Betzy Rega and Andrea Cleveland. They will name two additional members, one from among the artist or craftspersons and the other to be a local artist or art-connected person in the community. The need for a separate organization evolved during last year's Art Fest when El Sol served as an agent for the artists by collecting sales tax on sales of artwork and was required to handle other accounting and financial reporting details, said El Sol President Jill Hanson.

She said Sunshine Artworks will enable artists and craftspersons "to be more entrepreneurial, and to focus more on marketing their art work and establish a relationship with an organization devoted entirely to promoting them." El Sol was also fortunate to receive free legal services for the project from Florida International University's Law School Community Development Clinic.

Two law students, Christian Rodriguez and Ricardo Rodriguez, drafted the Sunshine Artworks documents under the supervision of Attorney John Lewis and clinic supervisor Peggy Maisel.

"We are very grateful for the assistance of FIU," Hanson said. They are one of our great academic partners at El Sol. Other academic partners include Florida Atlantic University and its Honors College at Jupiter and Palm Beach Community College.

El Sol opens doors to new visitor program

El Sol has launched a new visitor program that is intended to give the public an inside look at El Sol's operation and services and provide information on volunteer opportunities and the Center's needs.

Visitors will be given a guided tour of the Center that will include stops at the employer and job desks to learn about the day labor service. They will also meet staff and volunteers and observe classes. At the conclusion of the tour the documentary film "Jupiter or Bust: The El Sol Solution" will be shown. In announcing the visitor program, El Sol President Jill Hanson said that although the Center is in its third year, there are many in the community who still do not know about it and the positive impact it is having in the area.

"We invite the public to visit see what a wonderful resource El Sol is for the community and how they can utilize its free services and programs and, if interested, serve as volunteers," Jill said. Visits can be scheduled by contacting Lee McCarthy, Visitor Program coordinator, at (561) 625-1862.

Worker of the Month for May

Jeronimo Ramos

Jeronimo Ramos, formerly of Malacatan, Guatemala, earned Worker of the Month honors for May. His involvement in English classes, job training, workshops and community service projects won him top honors among all El Sol workers.

Jeronimo, 30, came to Jupiter four years ago in order to work and better provide for his wife and three children in Guatemala. He has done a variety of work including roofing and painting, and he volunteered at the Habitat for Humanity home construction project in Jupiter.

Most recently he was among more than two dozen workers who pitched in to help paint and landscape a Jupiter home in another community service project coordinated by the Solid Waste Authority.

El Sol Labor Coordinator Wilberto Luna commended Jeronimo for his dedication and for his positive attitude. Jeronimo said learning English is something that he has been committed to since coming to the United States.

"When you speak English you have more opportunities," he said.

Those honored as Worker of the Month are given first preference for jobs for three days.



Grants, donations benefit programs at El Sol

El Sol's fundraising efforts thus far in 2009 have resulted in awards of seven grants from various charitable foundations plus donations by two churches and several individuals.

"The grants are a testament to the hard work of El Sol's staff and grant-writing team who have worked tirelessly to identify potential donors and then submit detailed funding proposals with supporting data that resulted in approval of the applications," said El Sol President Jill Hanson. The grants were from the following:

- **The Samuel J. and Connie M. Frankino Charitable Foundation**
- **Lost Tree Village Foundation**
- **Admirals Cove Cares Charitable Foundation**
- **JL Cares**
- **Dollar General Literacy Foundation**
- **The Community Foundation of Palm Beach and Martin Counties**
- **Mariners Sands Foundation**

Other donations were received from:

- **Jupiter First Church**
- **The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd of Tequesta**
- **The Chapin Foundation**

In addition, donations also included a generous check from the **Titus Schmid Family Foundation**, which was designated for the purchase of food. The donor learned of El Sol from one of our great kitchen volunteers who informed her of our great needs.

"We are grateful for the confidence donors have shown El Sol with their contributions and are committed to doing everything we can to earn their continued support," Ms. Hanson said.

El Sol is an independent 501 (c) 3 not-for-profit organization.

For more information go to www.friendsofelsol.org.

Tom Choate is one of the miracles – milagros – that we come almost to expect at El Sol. One day over a year ago, we were working our table at the Palm Beach Gardens Green Market, marketing El Sol, when a woman came over to see who we were and what we were doing. It turned out she and her husband had just moved here from Maryland, and knew a little bit about day labor centers, because Casa Maryland was not far from where they lived. She explained that she was still working, but her husband was retired, and maybe would be interested in volunteering. She said that he used to work in information technology for the Montgomery County, Md., School System.



“I like the company and enthusiasm of the staff and other volunteers, while doing the same job I liked so much when working as a high school computer support person in the local Maryland school district.”

Tom did come in and sign up to be a volunteer, and within a short time he became our volunteer Information Technology Coordinator. This was

almost too good to be true; we had recently received about two dozen computers through the Digital Divide program, but we lacked the expertise to hook them up and make the best use of them. It was frustrating to have this great potential, yet not be able to make full use of it, because we just did not have the necessary expertise. Tom brought us that expertise. He set up the computers, installed programs and hooked us up to the Internet.

But that was not all. In January 2008, El Sol began running our core program, the day labor center operation, from Catholic Charities, which had run it from September 2006 up until then. We wanted to computerize our day labor operation.

Our Center director, Jocelyn Sabbagh, searched for a computer program that could do what needed to be done. The costs ranged from \$25,000 to \$40,000 – absolutely cost prohibitive for us. Jocelyn took the problem to Tom. It turns out that in addition to working for the Montgomery County School system, Tom also previously worked in Information Systems for General Electric for 29 years, designing, developing and testing computer program products.

He devised "InfoDesk," the program that we now use at both the Employer Desk and at the Worker Desk. Those who have used it know it to be wonderfully easy to use. It is really one program, that enables us to register workers and employers, and best of all, to select workers randomly to be sent out on jobs, so that everyone has a fair chance to

go out. The program provides our statistical analysis at the end of each day, to show us how many workers went out, for what types of jobs, how many English speaking workers were needed, and so on. Because we are lucky enough to have Tom on site, if we want to tweak it a little bit, he does that.

Recently, we got upgraded computers through Digital Divide, and Tom installed all the new computers in our computer lab, as well as upgrading some of the computers around the Center. He also answers "trouble" calls from the very simple to the complex.

What does Tom like about volunteering at El Sol? "I like the company and enthusiasm of the staff and other volunteers, while doing the same job I liked so much when working as a high school computer support person in the local Maryland school district," he said.

Tom is married to Jane, who volunteers with the Susan G. Komen Foundation, and assisted us at El Sol recently to put on a health program for women about breast cancer. They have four children: Becky, 22, is working for Emory University, where she graduated last year. Seth, 27, is a lawyer in San Francisco. Cathy, 36, lives in Palm Beach Gardens, where she is a recruiter for a real estate firm. Beth, 41, lives on St. Simons Island, Georgia, with her husband and three boys.

Tom has now gotten a paying job, teaching computer courses at Jupiter High School's night program, but continues his work for El Sol. In whatever time we give him off from El Sol, he says he "struggle[s] to learn the fiendish game of golf."

We are very grateful to Jane for lending us her husband, Tom, who is truly a Milagro of El Sol, a gift whose value we can't even estimate.

Looking for a few good volunteers



El Sol needs a few good volunteers to fill the gaps left as our seasonal volunteers return to their northern homes.

If you have a couple of hours to spare during the week, think about joining our fabulous kitchen crews and help prepare nutritious lunches for 70-125 hungry workers . . . or learn some Spanish words as you teach English in the classrooms . . . or welcome our employers as they come in to hire some workers for the day . . . or monitor the computer room and assist anyone who needs help navigating the Internet.

Are you an arts & crafts person? We are beginning to plan our 2nd Annual Artfest and need volunteers to teach and support the workers as they produce their art to sell in the marketplace.

We need bilingual volunteers to help register new workers on Tuesday afternoons. There's always a place for anyone who has the time and energy to devote to the mission of El Sol.

Please contact Sally Isham at (561) 445-1229 or sallyisham@comcast.net if you can help.

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If you would like to sponsor a future newsletter, please contact El Sol at (561) 745-9860 or email Diane Laney Fitzpatrick at diane.fitzpatrick@mac.com.

Upcoming Events



June 12 – Movie Night is Lou Diamond Phillips as Ritchie Valens in *La Bamba*. Valens (Ricardo Valenzuela) was the first Mexican-American to become a crossover star, with such hit songs as "La Bamba" and "Donna." The film shows his struggle from being a poor farm worker in California in the 1950s to becoming a national rock-and-roll star, to the plane crash that took his life. The movie will begin at 7:30 p.m., with food and snacks to be served beginning at 7:00 p.m.

June 19 – Habitat for Humanity Community Service Event. 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. El Sol workers will help to roof a house under the Annual Community Service Program

June 19 – Town of Jupiter presentation

July 4 – Independence Day. El Sol will be open from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Contributors

Contributors to *El Sol Shines* include Mike Richmond, Jill Hanson, Mary Pat Webster, Wilberto Luna, Dora Ramirez, Jocelyn Sabbagh, Sally Isham and Diane Laney Fitzpatrick.