El Sol volunteers are honored at recognition luncheon

Nearly 60 volunteers, board members and staff attended El Sol’s third annual Volunteer Recognition Luncheon on February 28. El Sol’s Workers Council transformed the center’s main room with colorful balloons and a poster handmade by El Sol worker/artist Pedro Chavajay Toc.

Tamales, salad, beverages and cake were served by members of the Workers Council, who were smartly dressed in black pants, white shirts and red sashes.

Mike Richmond introduced the board and guests and board vice-president Ed Ricci delivered the opening prayer. Students of Sanjay Chakravorty serenaded the volunteers with recorder music while lunch was being served. Keynote speaker and former board member Regina Bedoya held the audience spellbound with her words of courage and inspiration. Ms. Bedoya, as member of the Million Dollar Round Table, presented El Sol with a check for $2,500 from that organization.

Staff members Jocelyn Sabbagh, Dora Valdivia, Wilberto Luna and Kathryn Klaas read handwritten thank you notes from El Sol workers to the volunteers.

Jill Hanson, board president, expressed her gratitude to the volunteers for their dedication to the mission of El Sol. Sally...

...continued on Page 6
Serving others is our highest calling

The following are excerpts from remarks by Regina Bedoya to El Sol volunteers at their appreciation luncheon last month.

I have to tell you that there is something very special about El Sol, I’m sure you all feel it. It is different from other places. The level of service that is given by the volunteers is, in my opinion, truly authentic, almost pure.

You are giving of yourselves in a way that will not result in much outside recognition – you might even be criticized for it. You are doing it because you heard a calling and you have chosen to respond to that calling.

I had the privilege of volunteering at El Sol for a couple of years and of serving on the board during that time and remember feeling a strong desire to stay and do more once my shift was over. Of course, I had to go to work . . . But the hours I spent serving breakfast to the workers made me feel on purpose, I was doing work that mattered.

I thought I would share with you a small piece of my story – we all have a story, we all have had experiences that have made us value certain things over others.

About six months ago I started feeling certain weakness in my left leg and my foot . . . After some tests, it was discovered that I had a brain tumor that had to be removed very quickly since it was risking my safety. I was taken by air ambulance to Duke Medical Center where I underwent brain surgery. Complications followed which led to yet another brain surgery to remove a hematoma that would have ended my life. Needless to say, my four children and my very large family . . . were extremely concerned. The good news is that I am now recovering very well.

The reason I am telling you this is to give some background to my real message. I would like to share with you what I thought about, and how I felt the nights preceding my surgeries. When my family had gone to their hotel and it was just me and God, what did I think about? What gave me peace? . . . What gave me the strength to look at my four children’s teary eyes the next day and tell them: “Everything will be okay.”

In those moments, what I realized was that the amount of money I had earned over my lifetime did not matter, the assets I had accumulated were not significant, the awards I had received were irrelevant, nothing that at some point might have been important made a difference. All I focused on was whether I had loved enough and given of myself for the well-being and happiness of others.

I believe that we have been designed by our Creator to be on purpose when we are serving others. It is our highest calling – it is what makes a life worth living. I congratulate you on your decision to be a part of this wonderful organization that chooses to make the City of Jupiter even better, rather than simply wishing it were something else. In doing so, I believe you are not only part of solving a problem – you are also creating personal memories that will strengthen you and give you joy in the future.

Albert Schweitzer won the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize for an essay he wrote titled “The Reverence of Life.” . . . One of his famous quotes in a way summarizes what I am trying to say today. He wrote, “I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.”

Thank you very much for listening – and know how much admiration I have for all of you.

Mission Statement of El Sol

El Sol’s vision is for a premier day-labor center providing skilled, dependable workers to employers. We are also committed to promoting strong economically and ethnically diverse communities in which all people can achieve their highest potential.

El Sol seeks to improve the quality of life for all residents of the Town of Jupiter through:

* Organizing and supervising Jupiter’s day-labor hiring in a controlled and sanitary atmosphere;

* Educating Jupiter’s day-laborers and contractors about their rights and responsibilities;

* Assisting Jupiter’s immigrant population to become an active and integrated part of the larger Jupiter community;

* Building bridges and communication among the different ethnic, cultural and religious groups in Jupiter;

* Providing occupational training, language and literacy instruction, counseling, health education, legal and other services to individuals in need.

El Sol Shines March 2010
El Sol's partnership with Habitat for Humanity is off to a good start this year, thanks to 13 El Sol workers who helped with roofing Friday, February 26, of a Habitat home being built in West Jupiter.

El Sol Associate Director Dora Valdivia said it was very rewarding to see that the workers were looking forward to helping with the construction as a community service. Habitat for Humanity provided sandwiches for lunch and the work went smoothly.

"It was excellent as usual," said Habitat site manager Roland Bushe.

El Sol volunteers Sally Isham, Michelle Conroy, Diane Williams and Barbara Winterton drove the workers to the job site in Kennedy Estates in West Jupiter. It was the third community service project this year by El Sol workers.

As volunteers they receive no pay but those who are eligible can earn sweat equity credit towards purchase of a new Habitat for Humanity house in their homeland.

Through the Habitat for Humanity partnership program, three El Sol workers' families have already received homes in Guatemala and more workers are eligible for homes in Guatemala and Mexico.
El Sol goes green

El Sol staff began its commitment to reducing its impact on the environment by giving a presentation to over 100 workers about global warming, the importance of protecting our environment, and the steps we can take to protect it.

To further encourage workers to ‘go green,’ the presentation also included YouTube clips that show the negative impact that this phenomenon is having locally and in Central America.

Signs of El Sol’s ‘go green’ campaign can be seen all over the center.

El Sol is committed to: reducing consumption of paper and Styrofoam by re-using these products when possible, saving electricity by using the stairs and turning off computers and lights, and striving to recycle, recycle, recycle.

El Sol will recognize workers who go above and beyond in this green initiative with a “Green Worker” Program. El Sol is seeking donations of Walmart or Publix gift cards that will be given out once per month to the person who has done the most towards greening our center.

If you would like to make a donation towards this initiative please contact Jocelyn Sabbagh at jocelynelsol@yahoo.com.

Brother Towns screening planned to honor donors, supporters

El Sol will sponsor a special screening of Brother Towns/Pueblos Hermanos, the new immigration documentary, for donors and supporters later this year.

Charles Thompson, producer and director of Brother Towns, will attend the screening and hold a question and answer session following the show. The date and location of the screening has yet to be determined.

El Sol President Jill Hanson, said, “El Sol would not exist without the strong support it receives in the community and showing Brother Towns is a way for us to say thank you to the many donors and supporters who have helped make El Sol the success that it is.”

Brother Towns played to capacity crowds and was lauded by viewers when it premiered in Jupiter in January. The documentary chronicles a poignant story of why immigrants from Jupiter’s sister-city, Jacaltenango, Guatemala, leave their homes to come to the United States. It also portrays how the Town of Jupiter and concerned residents collaborated to establish the El Sol Neighborhood Resource Center to provide a safe, supervised location for day laborers to be matched with employers to fill jobs.

Brother Towns will be shown several times in the next few months. The film will be shown March 20 at a conference on Latino immigration, at which El Sol Board member Tim Steigenga will make a presentation about El Sol.

The film also will be screened April 1 at Cornell University as a result of efforts by Stephanie Ponce, a Cornell student who interned at El Sol during her winter break. She was so impressed by the film when it was screened here that she made it her mission to have the movie shown at Cornell.

For more information about the film call El Sol at (561) 745-9860.
Volunteer of the Month for February: John Sheetz

Q: If you knew someone who had a double major in college in hospitality management and international affairs, with a minor in Italian Studies, what do you think that person could do, with that degree?

A: If you are John Sheetz, who graduated from Florida State University with just such a degree, you would work in the Peace Corps for two years, in the Ukraine, then continue work in Ukraine, but also develop and run bicycle tours in Italy during the summer season.

Few people get such immediate gratification from their undergraduate work, but John is an extraordinary young man. John came to volunteer at El Sol after his summer job running bike tours ended. Since that day, we have taken up a lot of John’s time. He started as an early morning kitchen volunteer and at the employer desk. But when he could, he would open up the computer lab for waiting workers. While in Ukraine, John had worked with families that were “left behind, when a dad or mom or both had to go overseas to another country, to help support their families.

While monitoring our computer lab, he found that although many El Sol workers had mastered basic computer skills, email and YouTube, they had not been taught how to make best use of the computer.

Working with Education Coordinator Kathryn Klaas, John developed a manual, to guide the workers in navigating through the many potential uses of the Internet. For example, John’s guide shows the workers how to find reference guides on the Internet. He shows how to locate Web sites where there are free English language lessons.

John grew up in Palm Beach Gardens and graduated from Gardens High School. At his graduation, he received the Palm Beach Post Pathfinder Award for community service.

Even though he plans on returning soon to his “bike job,” we have been very lucky to have had him here with us, as he truly shared his time and talents for the betterment of El Sol and all the workers here.

Worker of the Month for February: Domingo Perez

Domingo Perez, who was January’s Worker of the Month, earned the honor again for February when he scored the highest on a test to break a tie in with Alex Perez. Domingo scored 100 percent on the El Sol rules test.

A native of Guatemala, Domingo’s dedication and initiative that earned him Worker of the Month in January also were responsible for his earning the honor in February.

Since coming to Jupiter more than three years ago, Domingo has taken advantage of every opportunity that El Sol offers for service and self-improvement. He has attended English classes, computer seminars and worked on numerous community service projects. He often can also be found in the kitchen helping with meals, washing pans and lending a hand with whatever else needs doing, said El Sol Labor Coordinator Wilberto Luna.

Domingo, 29, said he came to the United States to work and help his family. His mother and sister live in Guatemala and his father is in Mexico. As Worker of the Month he received preference for jobs three consecutive days.

Congratulations to Domingo Perez for another well-deserved honor as Worker of the Month.

Upcoming Events

March 19 – Community service project 7:30 a.m.
March 19 - Town presentation, 9 a.m.
March 23 – ID registration 3:30 – 5 p.m.
March 27 – Legal clinic 10 a.m.
March 28 – Know Your Rights workshop 11 a.m.
March 31 – Legal clinic 9:30 a.m.
April 2 – Town presentation 9 a.m.
April 7 – Art class 9 a.m.
April 9 – Movie Night 7 p.m.
April 12 – ESL/Plazas Comunitarias graduation 7 p.m.
Donations, grants at a record high

El Sol's fundraising efforts in 2009 resulted in the award of 12 grants and a major donation from a charitable foundation totaling $194,080.

Grant amounts ranged from $1,000 to $30,000. A family charitable foundation donated $100,000. The funds are supporting a variety of programs including education, computer literacy, community outreach, capital improvements, food, and costs of health insurance for staff. The dozen grant awards are the most received since El Sol opened in 2006.

El Sol also was the beneficiary of $5,500 in donations last year from a Thanksgiving ecumenical service sponsored by Jupiter First Church, Temple Beth Am and St. Peter Catholic Church.

El Sol President Jill Hanson, said, “We are especially honored and grateful for the generous support El Sol has received from foundations, local residential communities, churches and the public. Their support and the dedicated efforts of our many volunteers and staff enabled us to provide a record $1.2 million in services to people in need in the Jupiter community last year.”

El Sol is an independent 501(c) 3 not-for-profit organization. For more information go to www.friendsofelsol.org.

Volunteer luncheon

Isham, volunteer coordinator, presented the Jerry Licklider Early Bird of the Year award to Sharon Burns-Tipping, who has been a loyal volunteer at El Sol since June 2006. Kathryn Klaas presented the Eileen Harden ESL Volunteer of the Year award to Eduardo Lopez, a dedicated ESL teacher and mentor to many of El Sol’s workers. Andi Cleveland and Betzy Rega, our kitchen divas and Sunshine (Artworks) twins, were given the Hints from Heloise Kitchen Award. Wearing a pair of fancy eyeglasses, Jocelyn presented the “I Can See Clearly Now” award to Diane Williams for her tireless efforts to keep El Sol’s population in good health. Jill then presented the Milagro de El Sol award to a grateful Sally Isham.

Each Volunteer of the Month was recognized all volunteers who were in attendance were presented with a certificate of appreciation. Diego Rojas delivered words of appreciation on behalf of all the workers. Sr. Marta ended the program with a prayer of thanks.

It was a fun and festive celebration honoring El Sol’s many volunteers. To the Workers Council we say, Gracias for a job well done.

Volunteers enjoy a luncheon served by the workers.