



Casita Linda a.c.

**POR UNA VIDA MAS DIGNA
FOR A MORE DIGNIFIED LIFE**



With A Little Help From Friends

Casita Linda has had a fantastic summer – in part due to the success of the Doug Robinson - Plays Well With Others benefit held this past July. Casita Linda is an organization that builds homes in the campo for extremely poor families. These families are often living in huts that are no more than bamboo walls, dirt floors, and anything they can find for a roof. Doors and windows are nothing more than towels or blankets.

We are completing construction of the 4th house in the village of Guerrero, on the far side of the Presa Allende. This area has a water supply of very poor quality - the fluoride level is one of the highest in San Miguel. Excess fluoride rots teeth, stalls bone development in children and in adults can cause brittleness. Fluoride also can decrease brain function. All the water is recovered by lowering buckets into the well and carrying them back to their homes.

The volunteers got together and unanimously agreed that in addition to building the casitas, we needed to try to do something about this water to really make a difference in the lives of these people. First, we constructed a 30 foot high water tower over the well so that water can be piped directly to the houses. The pump bringing up the water from the well runs on solar power, so there will be no electrical costs for the families. Now we are conducting extensive research and hope to find an efficient, cost effective filter that will reduce the fluoride from their drinking water.



Working, working, working



We're next!

The houses we build are 12 foot by 14 foot, poured concrete floors, walls and roof. Each house has a metal door, a glass window, a sink, electricity and a shower with hot water. The design of the house continues to evolve. We will soon be increasing the size of the house by about 30 square feet. We are now building bunk beds as many of the families have 6-to 8 children. We will also be testing a "Dry Toilet" in one of the next houses.

The houses are built almost entirely by volunteers working on Wednesdays and Saturdays for 5 to 7 hours per day. Our goal is to be able to build a house in 9 work sessions. We haven't gotten there yet, but we are working on it. We provide all this for a cost of \$1500 per house.

The work sessions are quite enjoyable. Physical demands vary widely from strenuous when we are mixing concrete, to easy when we are painting. In addition to our fellow volunteers, there is a lot of interaction with the

In Memorium Estefania

Estefania, the first person to receive a house built by the volunteers of Casita Linda, passed away on September 5th at 106 years of age. Estefania's descendents will be using the house. Jeffrey Brown, President and founder of Casita Linda, said, "When we were building the house, she would have a Pepsi to cure her low blood pressure, but generally took no medications". She was husking corn for a living up until three months ago. Her family says "she appears to have just gotten tired."

families in the community. For more information or to volunteer, please contact jean@casitalinda.org or marthacastriotta@yahoo.com.

THE LATEST CASITA LINDA FAMILIES

By Jean Gerber and Holly Wilmeth

Julieta and family



Julieta and her husband, Zeferino, along with their nine children have been living in Guerrero for four years (the age of her youngest child.) An uncle from her husband's family gave them this small piece of land and it is here where their tiny, one-room shack stands. It is made of bamboo walls and a tin roof that provides neither warmth nor protection from the rain.

All eleven people sleep here and in the center is the fire where their food is cooked. For water to wash, drink, cook and garden, they haul buckets from the well – more than a mile walk round-trip. While they don't have a toilet, much less a shower or sink, they are very clean and their home and premises are neat and tidy.

When they first learned that Casita Linda was to build them a house – an actual cement house with a shower, sink, bunk beds and lights – they thought it was a joke. The neighbors laughed and no one would believe it until the Casita Linda volunteers arrived to pour the slab of cement for the foundation. "This means so much," Julieta says, "it means I will get a full nights sleep. I won't have to stay awake making sure my children keep dry and all the water holes in the roof are sealed in the rainy season".

Zeferino dreams of having all his children finish school, but feeding his children alone takes every dime he makes.

Julieta tells us that her mother is in the same situation living next door in a bamboo shack, and her husband is an orphan, so they have never gotten any help until now. "This house will make the lives of our children better. We are simple people, but our children are very well behaved and *educados*."

Filomena and Jose Luis



Senior Jose Luis has no words to describe just how grateful he and his wife, Filomena, are. They have never had a home of their own, moving from place to place with their four children. Currently they are staying in a brother's house but he is due to return from working in the US at any time and they will have no place to go when he does.

At least they thought they had no place to go – until Casita Linda selected them to receive a home.

Initially, the family simply could not believe it was true "How could it be true?" Jose Luis asks. But when all the volunteers came they got so excited they could hardly contain their enthusiasm. Jose Luis insists on helping the Casita Linda volunteers as much as possible – even taking off work so he can be on hand for the construction. For Jose Luis, an impoverished field worker, he could never have even dared to wish for a house for himself and his family, just making ends meet is hard enough under his circumstances. "This home means everything", he gushes, "It means stability, and protection for me and my family". Now, thanks to Casita Linda, its supporters and volunteers, the wish he was too scared to dream has come true.

If you have pictures or stories regarding Casita Linda that you would like to share with us, please submit to Jean Gerber at jean@casitalinda.org.

Luisa adds a new dimension to the work site

Luisa Field has been a teacher for 41 years - her specialty is early childhood development. She has worked in many areas, from the progressive private schools of New York , to working with Head Start in California with the Pit River Indians. She brings her enormous talents to Casita Linda every Wednesday, working with the children at the construction sites. Luisa is teaching these children some basic elements: to work within a structural environment, respecting their property, and organizing them to help where possible with the building of their houses. She is reading to them in Spanish and English.

This has become a crucial element - helping to keep the children away from the construction site, which can be hazardous, and giving them a much needed opportunity to learn. Luisa urgently needs "a couple of warm bodies", as she states, to help her with the children (ages to 1 to 14). They don't need experience, just a little patience and caring. Some Spanish would be helpful. Please contact Luisa at 152-2919 if you have an interest in this.



FEATURED DONOR – DONNA ELROD

Donna was one of the very first donors of Casita Linda. She has been giving 100 pesos monthly since she moved to San Miguel two years ago, on New Years Eve, to retire. She has 2 sons and one daughter, 2 grandchildren and “2 of the greatest daughters-in-law that keep the rest of them in line”.

We hooked up with Donna at the park to chat with her.

CL: How did you hear about Casita Linda?

DE: I read an article about a family living in a twig house and it upset me to no end.

CL: Why did you choose Casita Linda?

DE: In the States when you give money to a charity you wonder where your money goes, but with Casita

Linda, you can see exactly where it goes.

CL: What would you tell other people who are thinking about donating to Casita Linda?

DE: I can't afford to go to the benefits, but when I get my SS check, each month I give \$10 dollars to Casita Linda and \$10 to Feed the Hungry. It's basically the cost of one meal each. It's ok to write this because I want to show how anybody can do this if they want to. I send my grandson articles about the organizations. He is in the 7th grade and his class is looking for a project. I will send him the video of Casita Linda as well. They can do a car wash or something to raise some money.

CL: How do you see the organization in the future? What would you like to see happen?

DE: Just that everybody who needs a house gets one! I am part Chicchansi Indian and when I was a child, for a few years we lived in tents high up in the Sierra Mountains of California with our community. I know what it is like to be poor.

Oh, and if you haven't received my money by the 10th of the month, please let me know...it just means that I forgot!

Job Listings

Newsletter: We are looking for someone to input the information on a template and then mail it to our database. Needs experience in Microsoft Word. We will train you.

Database Management: We need a person to input new names, and keep the database and to do occasional mass mailings. Needs experience in Excel.



Charles Cunliffe

The board members of Casita Linda are delighted to announce that Charles Cunliffe has been elected to the Board and will be Head of Construction. We asked him for a short bio which is as follows:

I was born in a shack by the railroad tracks (just kidding). I was born many moons ago in Montreal Canada. While traveling through Denver, CO., I was blessed to meet my wife of 30 years. We have two boys 26 and 28. While in Denver I started a mortgage company that over 20 years became the largest FHA lender (government guaranteed loans) in Colorado, with a focus on first time home buying Latinos. After selling my company 5 years ago we set out to find home. We have found that home here in San Miguel.



Just For Fun!

