

Friends of Caritas Cubana



2010 has been a very busy year for Friends of Caritas Cubana. And you, our committed and generous supporters, have much to be proud of for the humanitarian care and assistance that you have brought to people in great need.

Our fundraising efforts in Cambridge, New York, Miami and Puerto Rico, exceeded our expectations. We had four events with outstanding art auctions and delicious Cuban food. Our successes were thanks to the hard work of our Board and Committee members and the generosity of our friends.

We added two new Board members this year, Mariana Bullago Muros and Kerry Healey.

Mariana is the Human Resource Director of Partners Healthcare. Kerry is former Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts. She recently launched a new cable TV program, Shining City.

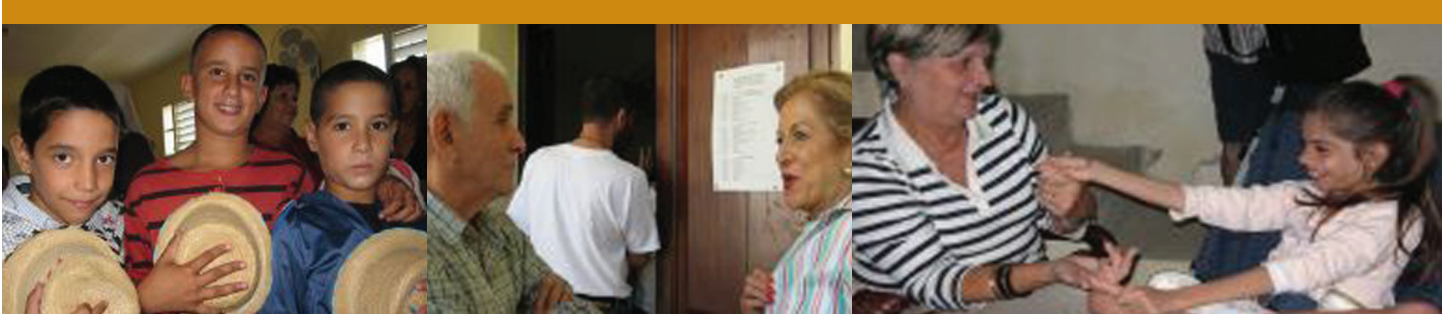
We visited Cuba twice this year. We wrote to you about the February trip in the Spring. We returned in November with a group of friends, Board and Committee members.

Our days in Cuba were packed. On Monday, in the province Havana, we visited the Church of Santa Barbara located in Parraga, a very poor area. We distributed toys to the children at the day care center, met the senior citizens that go to the church every day to pick up their lunches, and some of us went to deliver the lunches to a few bed-ridden senior citizens who live in very bad conditions.

That same day we visited a day program for senior citizens in Arroyo Naranjo, where we were entertained with songs and poetry. We had two surprises there. Two older ladies sang for us in perfect English and Angel Alamo, who was part of our group recited such beautiful poetry that it brought tears to everyone's eyes.

Later in the afternoon we visited the town of Managua where Caritas has an adult English-as-a-second-language class and computer classes for adults and children.

Tuesday we visited Caritas' national offices, where we reviewed financial statements and other records as part of our fiduciary role to ensure that Friends of Caritas' funding is being properly used and accounted for. We also discussed the challenges Caritas faces. We learned that as the economy worsens and prices go up, Caritas is called upon to serve many more vulnerable people. Others in our group went to Guanajay in Pinar del Rio to visit another senior citizen day program where they danced and sang with the program participants. As usual we brought them small gifts of toiletries.



That same day Sylvia Figueroa and her mother, Sylvia Cainas, spent a very moving morning with the parents of the children in Caritas' autistic program in Havana, sharing their experiences and providing insight and learning from their US perspective.

On Wednesday part of our group traveled to Trinidad and visited the program for young adults with Down Syndrome and the program where women make beautiful handmade tablecloths, both programs where we help provide the materials for their endeavors. They also had the opportunity to have lunch with Trinidad's parish priest, Father Cirilo and to discuss the hardships of all the citizens he serves.

Some of us visited Father Betancourt at the Our Lady of Charity Church in Centro Habana and had lunch at one of the old Chinese Societies. At night we went to an art show at the US Interests Section.

Thursday was another packed, but fascinating day. We traveled to Matanzas, where we joined a get-together of Caritas volunteers, senior citizens and children from three different provinces. The children performed a number of typical Cuban dances, some of the older folks sang, and everyone danced. This was followed by a celebration lunch where we were able to hear one-on-one about some of the daily challenges of the volunteers.

From Matanzas, we drove on two hours to Colon to see a lunch-program kitchen that had been repaired with our funds. Then we visited children at an after-school program we fund. These children who are from very dysfunctional family situations, come each day for time to play, do schoolwork, be fed and take showers before going home to their families at night. We also visited two disabled eight year-old girls in their homes. These girls are part of a new program we are funding for services to 45 severely disabled children in Colon.

When time permits we take the opportunities to stop and notice the little details of daily life in Cuba. Of course we come back tired, but feeling wonderful about the work Caritas does in Cuba.

We could go on and on, but John Hickey says it all:

"As I have observed after past trips, what has come to delight me the most are the surprises—the unscheduled encounters with people and activities that bring an unexpected joy to our hearts ... what I have called the "magical moments." Thank you all for recalling so many of them—and one I must add, being permitted to share in the life-altering experience of the Cuban Americans who are returning to their homeland and their homes after sometimes decades of absence. Those of us who are able to share our good fortune never expect that the sense of reward we receive by giving to others will match the good that we do by our generosity. But in the case of Cuba, the rewards are truly overwhelming - seemingly endless magical moments that fill our hearts and deepen our souls."

Best wishes from all of us at Friends of Caritas Cubana.

Consuelo Isaacson · Vicky Keiser · John Hickey

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