



A Promise of Health

HEALTHCARE SOLUTIONS FOR RURAL MEXICO

419 East Fraser Drive, Pueblo West, CO 81007

CHRISTMAS 2009

www.promiseofhealth.org

Peace on earth, goodwill toward men

Dec. 8, 2009...From my window today I look in awe at 6 inches of pure fallen snow topped off by Colorado's Kodachrome blue sky, making it all sparkle like diamonds. My health is good and my family's blessings are many. Bill and I are grateful to be alive and well in this season of hope with Christ's simple yet powerful message of love, peace and goodwill.

Maybe because of this extra special day my thoughts turn all the more to my close neighbors in Oaxaca, who are also preparing for Christmas in this season of hope. What are their family traditions and rituals? What's the weather like? How are they feeling? Are they well? Are they hopeful? Who among them is sick without doctor or medicine, perhaps hungry and cold, without recourse?

Like myself, the people of Oaxaca seek and need goodness in their lives too. ***As of today, A Promise of Health needs to raise \$33,000 more for our first Medicine Wheel*** to begin in

the targeted rural communities 1 1/2 hours south of the capital city of Oaxaca.

With your help, I believe it's possible!



I am very anxious to get to Oaxaca. I know that you, our faithful and generous donors, are anxious too. ***As I thank you for your kindness and your continued support to A Promise of Health***, I also know it has not been an easy year for folks here in the United States. So many have lost their livelihoods, homes or both, experienced setbacks and are struggling to keep up. Thousands of Mexi-

can immigrants here in the US have lost their ability to continue to send money back home to their families as they once faithfully did. Many have returned to Mexico penniless.

A Promise of Health has also endured a tough year as have so many worthy small non profits across the country. ***And still, hanging by thin threads, we all struggle to prevail. Somebody once said, if you find yourself at the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on! Some days it sure feels like that to me.***

We need each other, ***now more than ever***. We are one on this good earth.

If you find you can make an additional donation to A Promise of Health's first Oaxaca Medicine Wheel this holiday season, please know it will be greatly appreciated and wisely used.

Wishing you peace, now and in the New Year, that passes all understanding,
Barbara Grannell

A dream for Rural Oaxaca gathers strength

*By William Grannell
APOH co-founder
and president*

What is a better Christmas story than the struggle of making a dream come true through faith?

That is the story of the villages of *Ayoquezco* in southern Oaxaca and two people who were born there.

Our organization, *Promise of Health*, became a part of this story when last year we partnered with a Oaxaca migrant coalition in Escondido, California to begin to raise funds to initiate a basic health care project there. Since that time, APOH has become partners with all the players in this great endeavor.

First let me tell you about Ayoquezco. It is a community of more than 10 villages located about 1 and 1/2 hours by car from Oaxaca City. For years the people who lived there grew and processed tobacco. But after the local factory closed down and the agrochemicals used to grow tobacco had ru-

ined the land for other crops, most of the male population was forced to look for work outside the community. As a result, around 65 percent of the population of Ayoquezco

worked, sent money home to their families. Today, with a crumbling economy, most of this money has dried up and without the men to work the fields the people of the pueblos are even poorer.

But for Felix Cruz and Francisca Cruz Sanchez, the dream of bringing jobs, health-care and a better life to Ayoquezco has never dimmed.

How strange are the paths of destiny. Felix now lives in the United States. Francisca Sanchez left home and then she returned. However both shared this dream for Ayoquezco and then went about making it a reality independently.

"When we left Oaxaca, we migrants said we're going to come back one day. Every time we call home, it is with that hope, and we reaffirm that moral commitment we made to our land. With God's help we will transform our town into a better place to live," says Cruz.

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Jobs created by MENA, the women's cooperative, and U.S. migrant investment bring work to the people of Ayoquezco.

migrated to northern Mexico and the U.S. Left behind were the women, their children, and the families who were too timid to leave their homes.

The migrants, when they

bringing hope to a community

A small and driven man, Cruz, 45, was 12 when he went to work at a butcher shop in the city of Oaxaca. His father had sent him to study at a middle school, but Cruz quit when he saw the financial burden his father was taking on.

"I felt sorry that he was sending me the small amount of money he earned for our family and gave it to me for bus fare and my lunch," says Cruz. "That's why I dropped out of school."

He came to the United States when he was 19. By 1987, he'd made his way to California's Central Coast, where he worked as a blackberry harvester for eight years. All that time, he and dozens of his compatriots dreamed about ways they could help their hometown.

"Maybe we could plant orchards, build a sports complex or even a dance hall. But, nobody ever really did anything because we never had enough money. Always I carried the dream with me."

In Ayoquezco, it wasn't much different for Francisca Cruz Sanchez. She and her husband had tried working as farm laborers in the U.S. and had returned home disillusioned.

Now she had to struggle to feed her family.

In Ayoquezco there were few jobs and those were taken. Left on their own, the women had to look for alternative livelihoods. All they had were their small backyard gardens where they grew nopales or prickly

"When we left Oaxaca, we migrants said we're going to come back one day. Every time we call home, it is with that hope, and we reaffirm that moral commitment we made to our land."

pear cactus pads for their own consumption which they started to sell on the local market. But they received very little money.

One day, taking matters into her own hands, she inspired two friends to meet with her and she convinced them to look for ways to create jobs.

"There were very few jobs available so a person had to find a way to make a living off the land. That was how we came up with this idea to market nopal and we formed a group," says Cruz Sanchez.

From this idea blossomed *Mujeres Evasadoras de Nopal de Ayoquezco (MENA)*, a women-run food cooperative by 120 nopal farmers who were the single mothers, widows and women left behind. Founded in 2001 (ironically the same year APOH was founded) their original plan was to grow,

Quetzalguela Oaxaca Festival Raises funds for Oaxaca healthcare

The annual Guelaguetza Festival, sponsored by the *Coalición de Comunidades Indígenas de Oaxaca (COCIO)*, a coalition of Oaxaca hometown clubs in the San Diego, California area raised \$2000 for the Oaxaca Medicine Wheel.

These funds will be matched by a private family foundation that has been supporting the healthcare mission work of *A Promise of Health*.

COCIO is a partner in the projects with *A Promise of Health*. It is the goal of the two organizations to establish much needed basic medical service to rural communities in Oaxaca.

The fundraising goal for the project is \$74,000. This will establish two basic health care projects in rural indigenous communities in Oaxaca.

The first will be in Ayoquezco's pueblos in the south of the state. The other is slated for a group of poor communities in the Mixteca region in northern Oaxaca.

The Guelaguetza Festival is an annual event in southern California, patterned after national festivals in Oaxaca. It features authentic folk dancing from the regions of Oaxaca and typical foods.

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With your help, healthcare will come

package and sell their nopal in other parts of Mexico.

They discovered a Mexican foundation that would listen to their plans and agreed to help. In the beginning the MENA women received training and technical assistance. Then an agricultural engineer was hired to help them with the crops.

At the same time, back in California, Felix Cruz had founded *Migrantes por Ayoquezco Oaxaca (MIGPAO)* to explore ways to help his hometown. When the Mexican foundation learned of this new group of migrants, it put

its members in touch with Ayoquezco's women farmers.

The association with MIGPAO gave the project an added dimension. Besides being a business run by women, it forged strong links with the migrant community in the U.S. 82 migrants from Ayoquezco have contributed their savings to finance the construction of a processing plant in Ayoquezco. The outgrowth has been the

creation in 2004, of a new company, *Procesadora de Alimentos Nostálgicos de Oaxaca (PANO)* owned by the members of MENA and the migrant investors of MIGPAO.

In the U.S. the MIGPAO investors formed *Chapulín Distribu-*

The good news of this story is that there is now a small plant in Ayoquezco that is processing nopal, mole and chocolate. Today some 160 women farmers cultivate about 16 hectares. Fresh nopales are sold on the local market while the industrial plant processes and pack-



Making traditional Oaxaca tortillas on a wood fire spells comfort food in Ayoquezco.

tors to market food products made by PANO including preserved organic nopales, and an expanded product line including mole (a traditional Mexican sauce) and chocolate candy.

It is in Ayoquezco that APOH and our partners want to build our first rural medical program for Oaxaca.

This is still a very poor community where many cannot afford medical service.

ages some two tons of the product each month that is sold in Mexico. A small market has been developed in Mexico for the mole and chocolate. Through MENA, the women growers earn on average \$400 a month from the sale of their products. It is more than five times

what they were paid (\$75) before they formed the cooperative.

The bad news is the economy. MENA, Chapulín and PANO are all struggling to survive. Under capitalized, there is no money and no real expertise to expand their markets. Working with the Mexican foundation that has limited funds and with a little help from the Mexican

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to the people of Ayoquezco in 2010

government, the processing plant was completed in 2007. Capable of running 3 shifts a day, employing up to 105 workers, it falls far short of that. Fighting to hold onto current markets, it can barely maintain one shift.

Though their products have been certified "organic" by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Mexican authorities, no U.S. market has been established. Now they are working to get an official "fair trade" designation which will help market their product.

"This is all very complicated for us," says Cruz. "First we must put food on our tables and pay our bills. Then we must find money to develop our markets and for each new product there is a new requirement we must

meet. This means new investment for packaging and storage equipment and money for transport and marketing."

cation and fewer resources. But they will not give up.

"What we dream of is our community of Ayoquezco, where we can offer jobs that pay a fair wage, a doctor and medicine for *all* who are sick and suffering, and where the workers and farmers can adequately provide for their families. We share the dreams of many people who want only this for their families," says Cruz.

In July of 2009, Felix Cruz also became A Promise of Health director. He sees health care as a vital, but missing component, of PANO's development. Working with a broad coalition of Oaxaca migrants in the U.S. Felix is helping APOH to raise funds to begin a basic health care program to serve all of Ayoquezco's small villages and PANO's workers.

"In our community are many small pueblos in desperate need of medical service.

The APOH Medicine Wheel program will not only bring a doctor and medicine to these suffering people, it will also provide health education to help the people to begin to live a healthier and better life. In this endeavor, PANO, MENA, Chapulin and A Promise of Health are all partners. We must deliver on our promise for health care to the pueblos of Ayoquesco early in 2010."

Felix Cruz

This entire burden falls upon the few Chapulin investors and the women of MENA. They are ordinary people with little edu-

Gifts Given in the Name of Others

A Promise of Health will help you honor a special person, a special day or a memoriam. We will not only publish it in our newsletter, but we will send an appropriate card and latest APOH newsletter to the individual or family.

The following special gifts were recently received by *A Promise of Health* in honor of a special person:

In honor of Antoinette Burnham given monthly by Sam Visner.

In honor and gratitude of Lorraine Guptill's life given monthly by an anonymous donor.

Enjoy limited edition print with each \$100 donation



Carrying the Nixtamal

The exclusive works of Yucatán artist **Julio Castillo** are now available in limited edition prints, signed and numbered by the artist.

Each print measures 11 inches by 14 inches. Please specify, on your donation coupon which

print you wish to receive. Since there are only a limited number of prints available APOH may substitute if necessary.

For each \$100 donation or more to A Promise of Health, the donor will receive a Giclee print of Julio Castillo's original pastels reproduced in true colors.

These works were done just for **A Promise of Health** by Julio Castillo and portray the native Maya people of Yucatán that were served by **A Promise of Health**. These are truly collector's items that will please any family and are not available in stores.

If you want to see these prints in color or for more information about Julio Castillo and the original works he has available for sale in the U.S.,



The Offering



The Doctor Approaches

through **A Promise of Health**, please visit his official website: www.jcastilloart.com

E-Mail newsletter a success! Sign up for yours!

Response to APOH's new Email Newsletter has been great!

More than 100 donors and supporters have signed up and more are expected. If you are not on our email list and receiving the Email Newsletter, we hope you will sign up this time!

The Email Newsletter helps our organization cut postage costs. Also, we can communicate with you more often. That way, you can keep up to date, receiving news of our Medicine Wheel program as it happens. Currently it is sent out every 4 to 6 weeks.

Enclosed in this newsletter is a coupon that you can mail back to APOH. All you have to do is pro-

vide us with your name and email address, then mail it back to APOH in Pueblo West, Colorado.

If you would prefer, you also can email us your email address. Just send it to:

barb.grannell@promiseofhealth.org
If this is your choice, please be

sure to write: *RE: A Promise of Health* so it doesn't get lost in our SPAM file. *Please let us know if your email address changes.*

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www.promiseofhealth.org

419 East Fraser Drive, Pueblo West, CO 81007

Telephone: 719-547-1995

Executive Director — Barbara Grannell

Newsletter Publisher — William Grannell

A Promise of Health is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization comprised of people from many walks of life and spiritual beliefs. Our common goal is to manifest the love of Christ by providing safe, effective, low cost basic healthcare to our neighbors, the poor of rural Mexico.