

Amigos de Casa Marianella



www.casamarianella.org

Fall / Winter 2002

From Piedras Negras to San Antonio... one step at a time

By Janine Luhtala

Inside This Issue of Amigos de Casa Marianella:

- ◇ **Meet our new staff!** 2
- ◇ **Processing Wage Claims** 3
- ◇ **New Shelter Opening**
- ◇ **Junta de conversación** 4
- ◇ **Spanish Literacy/ESL**
- ◇ **Heroic Efforts**
- ◇ **Words From the President** 5
- ◇ **Resident Success Story!**
- ◇ **English Teachers**

During his first day as a resident at Casa Marianella I met Roberto Vasques Ojeda and asked him about his journey to the United States. I was astounded by the hardships he had endured and I realized that I had absolutely no idea what our residents go through to get into the U.S.; many times leaving their friends, families, and their whole lives behind them

Roberto comes to us from Tapachula, a city in the Mexican state of Chiapas. He left his home because of the poor economic situation and the lack of jobs. He comes to the U.S. in order to find work and earn money, with which he plans to purchase building papers from the municipal government, and the materials to build a house in Tapachula.

Roberto's journey to the U.S. was dangerous and exhausting. The first leg of the trip took eight days of hitchhiking, from Tapachula to Mexico City, to Piedras Negras. He stayed in Piedras Negras for two months, working, sleeping in the streets, and begging for food. During these two months he was plagued with illness, and worked not only to earn more money to travel to the U.S., but also to buy medicine and a school uniform for his youngest daughter.

After two months, he was able to travel with a friend to the border, a trip that required four days of walking. At the border he met a boss with whom he stayed for another two months, working nonstop (even nights and Sundays) in order to earn money to pay for his room and the 200 pesos to cross the border. The next leg of

the journey was another three days of walking. Roberto faced many dangers during this trip, especially the lack of water (and the poor quality of the water he *could* find), deadly heat, and snakes.

After walking through small towns, sometimes stopping to work for a few days, Roberto finally arrived in San Antonio, where he met a friend who drove him to Austin. Roberto planned to stay with his friend in an apartment, but was disturbed by the rampant crime and drug and alcohol abuse in the area. He left and set out walking once again, towards the downtown area. It was downtown where Roberto, exhausted and desperate to find a place to stay, met two men who drove him to Casa Marianella, where he has stayed since September 17. While living at Casa, Roberto has been an

exceptional help to both residents and staff.

When asked if he had anything else to say about his journey, Roberto mentioned that of all the hardships he has endured, the most difficult was leaving his family behind. His eyes misted at the mention of his 5 year old daughter, his 10 and 11 year old sons, and his wife, who anxiously await him in Mexico. Roberto often does not sleep out of worry for their safety and well being. He described them as being his reason for living, and sums up his feelings on his separation from them by stating that he can easily live without eating or without sleeping, but he cannot live without his family. Roberto hopes to return home to them in a year.

Alternative Gift Idea!

Send a card to your friends and family this holiday season from Casa Marianella. A donation made in the name of a loved one will help to finance and maintain the new Posada Esperanza and your old friends here at Casa. Call 385-5571 for more info!

Casa staff (clockwise from top left):
Karen Lyons, Amanda Jack, Kari Cain, Janine Luhtala, Jennifer Long,
Julien Ross, Leanne Kearns, Paula Sperry, and Patti McCabe

Meet our new staff!

by Leanne Kearns

Kari Cain, an Austin native, graduated from Kalamazoo College with an International Studies major and Spanish minor. Kari feels proud to join Casa Marianella in its mission to serve the Hispanic immigrant community, which she feels is one of the most vulnerable in Austin.

Amanda Jack is from Somerset, Pennsylvania and is a recent graduate of Boston College where she majored in English and minored in American Studies. She comes to Casa Marianella with a strong interest in working with the migrant community and delving into border issues, sparked by her participation in the BorderLinks program a few years ago.

Leanne Kearns came to Casa Marianella from Columbia, Maryland with a Communication Management major and Sociology minor from the University of Dayton. Leanne's favorite aspect of working at Casa is being able to help people most in need and hearing all the success stories of former residents.

Janine Luhtala is from Duluth, Minnesota and recently graduated from the College of St. Benedict with a Political Science major and Spanish minor. She came to Casa Marianella because of her interest in immigration, and plans on going back to school for Immigration Law after completing her year here.

Paula Sperry has recently returned to Casa Marianella as an Assistant Director after volunteering here from January to August of 2000. She graduated in May from Marlboro College as an Anthropology and Sociology major. In the future, Paula hopes to either work at the Women's and Children's shelter or move to Denmark as she has a special interest in their progressive politics.

Casa Marianella welcomes these new staff members with their unique talents, interests and backgrounds, and is grateful for the continued presence of the following returning staff members:

Karen Lyons, also in her fourth year at Casa, has continued to maintain and improve our ESL program. Her most recent endeavor includes developing a new Spanish Literacy program for residents.

Patti McCabe is now at her fourth year at Casa. She is preparing to direct the new women and children's shelter starting this January.

Julien Ross, in his second year at Casa, is a graduate student at the LBJ School. Julien is a member of the Austin Commission on Immigrant Affairs and has been instrumental in developing the wage claim process here at Casa.

And our director, **Jennifer Long**, continues to use her guiding presence to channel the energies of an ever-changing staff, and to ensure that the services offered at Casa continue to expand with the growing needs of the migrant community.

Our Thanks to the Following!!

Dazel Donates
The Border Fund
The Runner's Club
Crop Walk
Another Way Texas Shares
The City of Austin
El Lago Tortilla Factory
Allan Elementary
Custom Framing
Austin Free Net
Seton Hospital
Kentucky Fried Chicken
The Gift Society
Mayor Gus Garcia
The Mexican Consulate
Miller Blueprint Company
First Workers Day Labor Center
BMC Software
Austin Entrepreneurs Foundation
Austin Police Department
Manuel Renteria & Rudy Landeros
Mapsco
Kinkos
Austin Flag and Flagpole
and
Francisco Lucas Flores of the Mexican Consulate for his monthly visits and informational "charlas."

Maggie Trejo and her daughter Katya (2 yrs.) have been Casa residents since March, 2002. Maggie is a soon-to-be graduate of the Austin Academy. She puts in many hours of volunteer work in the Casa office, answering phones and helping distribute the women's worklist. As our youngest resident, Katya keeps us on our toes and provides constant entertainment in her ever-expanding bilingual vocabulary!
Thanks Maggie and Katya!

¡Si Se Puede!

Wage Claims at Casa

By Kari Cain

Residents at Casa Marianella have the right to be paid for their labor. However, as a part of a vulnerable population of day laborers, many residents have been exploited. They tell stories about not receiving their full wages, not getting paid on time, or not receiving compensation for their work at all. Along with the Day Labor Center and the Mexican Consulate, Casa has been taking unpaid labor cases for years, acting as an advocate for those workers who know they have been treated unfairly.

The good news for day laborers and advocates is that they now have a new ally fighting to protect workers' rights: the Austin Police Department. Casa Marianella has jumped on the opportunity to formalize its wage claim procedure, taking advantage of the APD's participation.

Julien Ross, operations coordinator at Casa, has directed his energy towards the development of an effective wage claims system that empowers the residents. The first piece of the system involves the use of *libretas*, pocket-sized booklets in which residents can note information about their *patrón*, and document their work hours. In addition to hard evidence, the *libreta* is a symbol of pride for workers.

"It puts responsibility in their hands," says Ross. "Rather than be the voiceless victim, they have power. (The *libreta*) could be used as a legal document in court, but even if it doesn't get the money, it lets the workers know they have rights."

If a worker does not get paid, he can contact a Casa volunteer. Together they take down all the information about an employer and record the workers' exact hours on a time sheet. The Casa volunteer can advocate directly for the resident by calling his *patrón* and informing him of the claim. If needed, extra pressure can be added by having the victim file a claim with the Texas Workforce Commission. An additional step is contacting the APD and having a detective take on the case.

Since the creation of the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), dedicated to enforcing the Texas Payday Law, there has been a branch of government responsible for wage claims. Unfortunately, because of its low funds, the Commission has been unable to reach out to everyone. A large gap in services still exists for immigrant day labor.

That need has been partially met because of the participation of the Austin Police Department. Potentially, the APD can take wage claims against a *patrón* (boss) to the next level. Whereas, the TWC considers non-payment of wages as a *civil* crime, the APD helps enforce the Theft of Services under the Texas *criminal* code. Although the criminal code isn't new, it is only recently that sufficient pressure was placed on the police chief to accept such cases. This means that in addition to having to pay a fine, *patrones* who do not pay their workers could be subject to a jail sentence. Ross said this has yet to happen.

"The goal is to get a couple of big cases on the front page of the paper to put the pressure on (the *patrones*)."

Libreta de Datos del Trabajador

**¡Conozca sus derechos!
¡No Regale su Trabajo!**

Casa Marianella

CASA MARIANELLA WISH LIST

- Men's Clothing
Work pants and jeans (waist sizes 28 - 36)
Socks
Tennis shoes/work boots (Sizes 7 - 10)
Sweatshirts/jackets
- Bedding
Twin sheets/Pillows/Blankets
- Toiletries
Bath towels!!!
New toothbrushes!!
Toothpaste/Shampoo/Razors
Cold/Headache medicines
- Food
Fresh fruit/vegetables
Milk/Eggs
- ESL Class
Lined loose leaf paper
Dry Erase Markers/Pencils/Pens
Spanish Language:
Books/Magazines/Newspapers
- Gifts to help finance Posada Esperanza



Thank You!

International Cooperatives, Inc. for the purchase of the new house to serve women and children.

Women and Children's House to open in January

by Jennifer Long and Karen Lyons

Casa Marianella is delighted to announce the opening of our new women and children's shelter in January. This project will enable us to serve our most needy clients; homeless, immigrant children and their moms. We would like to express tremendous appreciation to International Cooperatives, Inc., a housing foundation, for purchasing a five-bedroom house for our use.

Under the leadership of Patti McCabe, Posada Esperanza will serve 3-4 immigrant women and their children at a time, allowing the families to stay for up to three months. The goal of the new program is to work closely with the moms to create a nurturing, structured, and peaceful environment for the children.

Through a partnership with the Catholic Charities Office of Immigrant Concerns, the women will be provided with services including legal aid and counseling. Other services provided by the new shelter include parenting classes, English classes and Spanish Literacy classes.

(Continued on p. 5)

Spanish Conversation Circle

by Kari Cain

Dying to learn the latest Spanish slang? ¿Quieres perfeccionar tu acento mexicano? Interested in popular education and language instruction? Casa Marianella welcomes you to come hang out at the next Spanish Conversation Circle.

During the first weekly Circle, or *Junta*, residents and community volunteers shared personal experiences about traveling away from home and back again. The *Junta* on September 19 marked the beginning of a new learning opportunity at Casa. Every Thursday, from 6:15-7:15 p.m. members of the community will be invited to come eat dinner and participate in a group discussion with Casa staff and residents.

The goal of the *Junta* is three-fold: to provide a comfortable forum for volunteers to sharpen their Spanish skills, to promote leadership and teaching skills among the residents, and to facilitate an intercultural exchange. In addition, Casa hopes that the *Junta* will help volunteers and residents to establish relationships that extend beyond the discussion group.

Please come join us next Thursday for this exciting educational opportunity! All levels are welcome.

ESL and Spanish Literacy Classes

by Janine Luhtala

In the interest of furthering education for our staff, residents, and other members of the community, Casa Marianella has offered ESL classes for the past several years. This year we have an exciting addition to our education program: Spanish literacy classes! Both programs run Monday through Thursday nights, from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m., over at the Allen Elementary School.

Karen Lyons, who directs the new program, is joined by new Casa Marianella staff members Kari Cain and Janine Luhtala. Neither the ESL nor the Spanish literacy classes could exist without the help of our incredible teachers, who come from all over the city to volunteer their time!

Thanks for all the hard work!

ESL Level 1 Teachers: Angelica Becerra, Valerie Brown, Tim Gaertner, Kevin Jewel, Karien Metz, Tony Perello, Joy Stephens, Lindsey Stuart, and Jayna Turchek,

Level 2 Teachers: Emily Carpenter, Carmel Drewes, Nicole Elmer, Adrian Howkins, Amanda Jack, Janine Luhtala, and Sheila Moriarty.

Spanish Literacy Teachers: Claire Campbell, Michelle Dominguez, Kristin Lion, Monica Martinez, Elise Meador, Clare Ribando, Eduardo Santana, Erin Turner, and Sarah Warren.

Casa residents José Silván, Javier Pavón, Esteban Marroquin and Demetrio Lozano listen intently during the first Thursday junta de conversación. (Photo by Hari Krishna)

A Difficult Crossing

attempted by many, survived by few

by Julien Ross

Most of the six hundred annual residents at Casa Marianella are migrant workers from Mexico and Central America who—because of tremendous wage and labor disparities—have journeyed to the United States to support families back home and build a prosperous future. Casa's residents are engineers, teachers, restaurant chefs, food servers, fishermen, farmers, mechanics, plumbers, vendors, bricklayers, business owners, construction workers, carpenters, doctors or students by trade. The majority are also fathers or mothers, grandparents or grandchildren; they are devoted to family, committed to hard work.

At Casa Marianella, we would like to recognize the heroic efforts of our residents and the thousands of migrants across the United States. We are honored to cross paths with our residents, and provide them with safe shelter, food, clothing, education, outreach, health care referrals, and English classes. Casa Marianella provides basic services that might help our residents succeed in their endeavor; but it is the residents who do the real work, who make the real sacrifices necessary to find success.

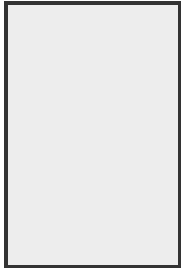
We would also like to honor the families of Casa residents and migrant workers across the United States, especially the thousands of mothers and wives who remain behind to care for and anchor the family. They are true heroes.

Unfortunately, migrants who make it without problems to Casa or other U.S. destinations represent the lucky few. Over two hundred migrants have died in 2002 while attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexico border—mainly from exposure and dehydration in the deserts or drowning in the Rio Grande. Many others have died this year along the railroad tracks of Mexico and the U.S. while hopping trains to their final destinations, or been victims of ruthless people smugglers known as “coyotes.” Many migrants who survive the journey are victims of robbery and physical abuse along the way, or end up in exploitive and abusive employment situations in the U.S. Casa Marianella would like to pay tribute to those migrants who have lost their lives or suffered on their journey or in the workplace...and to the families left behind.

We hope a day will exist when the safe and welcome doors of Casa Marianella will not be needed.

A Word from the Board President

Casa Marianella expands its services



From the Board Chairperson of Casa Marianella, Stan Main

Many new developments are underway here at Casa Marianella. I'm thrilled at the news about the tremendous progress we have made on a second house, tentatively named Posada Esperanza, to better serve refugee women and children.

Stan Main

I never ceases to amaze me how often at Casa Marianella I witness miracles. There have been several involved in this project, not the least of which is the miraculous appearance of a brand new 5 bedroom low income house. The home easily fits in the building appropriation budget that International Cooperatives Inc. donated for Casa Marianella to buy the building.

If we designed the house ourselves, it wouldn't be much different. It's not far from Casa Marianella, in a wonderful woodsy neighborhood, on an un-traveled cul-de-sac. It is open with a large enough fenced in backyard for a small playground. In short, it will be a place where refugee children and their mother's can feel safe and at home.

This is a big step for Casa Marianella. Posada Esperanza will challenge us in a number of areas. But the Board and Staff of Casa Marianella feel confident the miracles will come, when they are needed.

I am also excited to welcome our newest board member, Pete Inman. Pete is a full time fund raiser with CASA (Court Appointed Special Assistance for Abused Children) and brings a bunch of new energy to the board of Casa Marianella along with some much needed fundraising ideas.

We are grateful for the continued support of all the friends of Casa Marianella and look forward to a future filled with possibilities.

(Wage Claims cont. from p. 3)

Ideally, Ross would like to see the creation of a wage claim office that would handle only these cases. Working closely with the TWC and the Day Labor Center, such an office would create a network of pro-bono lawyers who would advocate for workers.

When asked what motivated his involvement in the wage issue, Ross responded, "My passion always focused on human rights violations during migrant's journeys here, but really there is a human rights crisis right here in Austin. Working and not getting paid is at the heart of the issue."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
★
★ **SPECIAL THANKS :** ★
★ **Mitzvah Day** ★
★ **Volunteers &** ★
★ **Thomas** ★
★ **Heikkela** ★
★ *For house repairs* ★
★ *And maintenance!* ★
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Maria Isabelle and Camila: Resident Success Story!

By: Julien Ross

One year ago, in Casa's newsletter article we introduced to you residents Maria Isabelle and Camila. Today, we are very pleased to relay the story of their success! After six months living at Casa Marianella—with Maria Isabelle battling odd jobs, illness, and the prospect of economic crisis back home, and Camila starting 1st grade in a new school and foreign country—the resilient and determined duo have found permanent housing and established an independent, healthy, happy life in Austin.

Camila received a student award last year for "Outstanding Reader," and recently started 2nd grade, continuing to excel in reading, art, and of course, playing! She is in a bilingual education program and learning English very rapidly. Camila continues to love animals, especially kittens, and spent much of the summer swimming at the apartment complex pool.

Maria Isabelle has found stable work during the week with a cleaning company, which enables her to pursue her true passion as an entrepreneurial artist/carpenter on the weekends.



She continues to perfect her elegant hand-carved wooden creations—name plates, home address plaques, business signs, and

commissioned pieces—and sells them at the Austin flea market every weekend. Although they miss their family and native country dearly, Maria Isabelle says she is grateful to be in Austin and hopes that Camila can continue with school and attend the university some day. "With the economic crisis in Argentina, it is simply not an option for us to return home right now," says Maria Isabelle, "It will be many years before there

difficult. There are so many opportunities here in the United States; I want to guarantee the very best for Camila's future! As for me, my dream is to sell my hand-carved art crafts...I truly believe I am only a break or two away from having my own self-sustaining business."

In saluting Maria Isabelle and Camila, Casa Marianella would also like to acknowledge Gia Gulino. Gia, an active member of the Austin community who met Maria Isabelle and Camila as a Casa volunteer, has been their most dear and committed friend in Austin and has provided them with great companionship and happiness.

GIFT IDEA! MARIA ISABELLE'S HAND-CARVED NAME PLATES OR ADDRESS SIGNS! CALL CASA (512)-385-5571 FOR INFO!

<u>Staff</u>
Jennifer Long
Patricia McCabe
Karen Lyons
Julien Ross
Amanda Jack
Janine Luhtala
Leanne Kearns
Kari Cain
Paula Sperry

<u>Board of Directors</u>
Stan Main
Heather Kohout
Sr. Nannette Gentile
Sr. Sharon Groetsch
Cleotilde Puente
Terri Le Clercq
Judy Richardson
Vera Janes
Wilson Wade
Veronica Lopez
Pete Inman

AITF for Central America

**Casa Marianella
821 Gunter Street
Austin, TX 78702
(512)385-5571
(512)-385-5575 fax
info@casamarianella.org**

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 993
Austin, TX

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Mailing Label

MUCHAS GRACIAS!

We are grateful for the substantial support to Casa Marianella
given by the following religious organizations:

**Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church
Poiema
Prince of Peace Lutheran
San Francisco Catholic Church
St. Austin Catholic Church
St. Martin's Catholic Church
St. Matthew's Episcopal Church
St. Paul's Catholic Church
St. Teresa's Catholic Church
San Jose Catholic Church
Cristo Rey Catholic Church
St. Hildegards
Faith Presbyterian Church
St. David's Episcopal Church
Good Shepard Episcopal Church
St. Luke's on the Lake Episcopal Church**

**Abiding Love Lutheran Church
Brothers of the Holy Cross
St. John Vianny Catholic Church
Diocese of Austin
Dolores Catholic Church
Koinonia
Northwest Hills United Methodist
Oak Hill United Methodist
St. Catherine of Sienna Catholic Church
St. Thomas More Catholic Church
St. Julia Catholic Church
Highland Park Baptist Church
Memorial Methodist Church
Daughters of Charity Fairlane Residence
Unitarian Universalist Church**