

REPORT BY JOHN SCHOCH

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My intent here is to cover a broad swath of the landscape in one single report. While looking both back to the past year and forward into the near future, I fervently hope that our Chapter will accomplish important work during 2015, but we must recognize that doing so will require a concerted effort on the part of our members.

Looking back upon 2014, certain activities stand out in my mind: our sponsorship of the Climate Change Conference (with the attendance of Partners CEO Steve Vetter); Sue Mahan's participation in the Partners Convention in Brazil; hosting of the Youth Ambassadors; and the 50th anniversary milestones for the Chapter, the Partners organization, and for Marylu and me (our Bodas de Oro). Marylu and I have also made two memorable visits to Colombia in the past 7 months (the first was in the Bogota area for our Golden Wedding celebration and the 2nd was in Cartagena and La Guajira), where we also were able to touch base with some Colombian Partners members. For me personally, the hosting of the 13 Youth Ambassadors in October was a really big deal because of all the intensive work that had to be done to make it happen (My separate report on that experience can be made available to anyone interested.). The team of Patricia Galbreath, Sue Mahan, Tony Abbott, Magaly Aleman, Marcel Carroll, me and others made this possible, including the important role played by all of the host families.

Partners is all about "connecting, serving, and changing lives", and POA leadership is emphasizing the importance of growing the resource network and working across traditional chapter "lines" to bring to bear the resources required to meet the needs of any specific situation. This can sometimes mean our Florida Chapter participating in projects that involve more than just our relationships with the Chapters in Bogota and Barranquilla—e.g. hosting youth from Mexico). This does not mean that we abandon working with our traditional counterpart chapters on activities of mutual interest, but it does mean that we should be open to participating in projects not only with other Colombian chapters but with chapters and resources in other Latin American countries as well as with U.S. Chapters that have not had an historic relationship with Colombia.

In Florida, our Chapter has had some success in developing contacts and partners outside of our customary central Florida area, particularly with our outreach to

the Miami area (thank you Harold Silva of Miami-Dade College for your leadership in that regard). However, much more needs to be done with that outreach effort---e.g. we should be holding at least one quarterly meeting per year in south Florida, and we need to work on getting new members from that area.

Speaking of recruiting new members, that should be an important priority because additional members mean an expanded base of human resources in our network, a greater variety of skills and interests that can be called upon as the need arises. We could designate a membership committee to concentrate on this recruitment issue.

We have talked about the need to do fundraising for our Chapter, but we have done precious little toward that end. We should identify and pursue significant methods of raising funds for our project activities. One deficiency that we suffer from is not being an IRS-certified 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization (even though we are current as to our annual corporate filing with the Florida Dept. of State), so it is my intention to try to apply for and obtain that certification during 2015 (any costs involved I will pay out of my own pocket). In conjunction with that certification, I suggest that we update our Chapter's web presence to include a feature which enables online donations via credit card.

Let me address some matters concerning our "pet projects" and our counterpart chapters in Colombia. The "Our Birds Are Your Birds Too" project has been active through teacher Nury Penagos at the Eduardo Umana Mendoza megaschool in Usme-Bogota (when in Bogota I usually make a visit with Nury to that school). However, corresponding activity in Florida has been somewhat "on hold" because there is no longer a teacher responsible for the project at Blue Lake Elementary in DeLand. Fortunately, efforts are continuing to find teachers interested in conducting the project in more than one area school. We also need to pursue possibilities in Miami.

As for artist exchanges, like Hip-Hop, there has been no activity recently. Getting fire equipment for Colombia has become pretty dormant; those possibilities are extremely limited, a main reason being the severe and unrealistic age-of-equipment limitations imposed by Colombian regulations.

The operation of our counterpart Chapter in Bogota is complicated. During the last few years, that chapter has depended primarily upon two persons for its viability and effectiveness---i.e. Juan Camilo Benavides, the president, and Fabian Gonzalez, the VP. They have been a dynamic duo, especially focusing on promoting the Learn English In Colombia program which was initiated by Kevin Hanson but a few years ago taken

over and restructured by Fabian, who has had some success in promoting and implementing their English as a second language model in partnership with institutions in Bogota, Cali, Buenaventura, Formemos, etc. In addition, the program has possibilities with other educational institutions such as the Universidad del Atlantico in Barranquilla (which has officially affiliated with Partners as a dues-paying institution). Unfortunately, however, apparently the Barranquilla and Bogota Chapters do not see eye-to-eye on this relationship, which is an impediment begging resolution.

The Bogota Chapter is about to face a new reality: In March they will have to select new officers, and Juan Camilo has decided that he is not in a position to continue as president. So at this point, it is not clear who the new leaders will be, although Fabian will certainly continue on in some capacity. Fabian has also worked under contract with POA on certain projects such as the recent Youth Ambassadors exchange. However, I am on pins and needles as to the outcome of the Bogota Chapter's March meeting---Juan Camilo has been a driving force; it will not be easy to replace him.

Turning to the needs and challenges of our own Florida Chapter, there are other matters that we should address. For one thing, the Annual Plan for 2015 should be developed. What do we want to do during this year? What are our priorities? We also need to look at our financial condition, which raises various questions: e.g. Should we change banks? Do we provide guidance for how our funds are to be spent? What about dues payments? We have talked about doing a budget, but nothing has been done on that. Another issue is our Bylaws: We probably should have a committee review them for possible update.

One other thing: I have served as co-president with a primary responsibility for relating to the counterpart Chapter in Bogota---I think that my service as such started in 2010. Keeping that in mind, Section 2 of Article IV of the Bylaws states: "The President will be expected to serve a term of two years and may be re-elected to serve one additional term." Therefore, it appears that my second term as co-president is expiring. I am willing to continue, but I am also willing to relinquish the position to someone else (Marylu would probably be happy about that). If I am to continue, a change in the Bylaws would seem to be in order. Also, the Board should present a slate of officers at an Annual Meeting, but that has not been done---i.e. the protocol has not been implemented, so maybe we should postpone the Annual Meeting until the next quarterly meeting.

Our group has the potential for accomplishing much as this year unfolds. So let us realize that potential by moving forward optimistically with renewed vigor and determination.