

# ROCLA UPDATE ON THE AMERICAS

A PUBLICATION OF THE ROCHESTER COMMITTEE ON LATIN AMERICA

## ROCLA

### MISSION STATEMENT

Founded in 1973, the Rochester Committee on Latin America (ROCLA) seeks to build bridges between the Rochester, NY, community and the people of Latin America. Through its monthly presentations, speakers, films, and quarterly newsletters, ROCLA educates local residents about the culture, economics and politics of the countries of Central and South America, Mexico and the Caribbean and the ways globalization, US trade and drug-war policies impact the lives of their people. ROCLA also supports the work of frontline organizations involved in working for justice and democracy in the global south, including the Latin America Solidarity Committee (LASC), Nicanet, Committee in Solidarity with the people of El Salvador (CISPES), Network In Solidarity with the people of Guatemala (NISGUA), Rights Action and the Pastors for Peace Cuba Friendshipment. We also encourage our members and others to advocate for US policies that support human rights and reverse the often oppressive history of US involvement in Latin America. Annually, ROCLA presents its international and local White Dove Awards for outstanding leadership and service in the cause of human rights in Latin America.

### Steering Committee

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Editor: Grania Marcus  
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## Updates from Honduras and the U.S. Border



Honoring those killed in Honduras.

ROCLA's very well-attended September and October presentations by Professors Dan Reichman and Curt Cadorette of the University of Rochester focused on the causes of the increase in Central American migration from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala to the U.S., especially of mothers and children, and the response of the U.S. government to quickly deport rather than grant asylum to these refugees.

ROCLA has just received three reports that detail the kidnappings, killings and rapes that continue in Honduras and an ongoing misguided U.S. response that has resulted in deporting a majority of Central American women and child refugees attempting to gain asylum in the United States. Excerpts from these reports are reprinted below.

The first report is a letter from Jenny Atlee and Tom Loudon, co-directors of the

Nicaragua-U.S. Friendship Office of the Americas and the Honduras Accompaniment Project, and ROCLA's 2015 White Dove nominees [see Rice & Beans on page 7]. The second is from David L. Wilson, compiler of the Weekly News Update on the Americas and the third is from a blog by immigration attorney Joan Friedland who is one of the attorneys representing the Central American mothers and children in the Artesia, NM, detention center. [Ed. Note]



ROCLA wants to encourage our members to increase their use of ROCLA's Facebook page, which will help us reach new members. Here, ROCLA's Webmaster Jim Bearden, offers our members some suggestions for using Facebook. [Ed. Note]

## ROCLA and Social Media

By Jim Bearden

There are three kinds of people reading this: 1) people who do not use social media, 2) people who have created social media accounts on Facebook and/or Twitter but don't use them very often, and 3) people who are active users of social media. I want to address each group separately.

If you are active on social media I strongly encourage you to "Like" ROCLA's Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/RochesterCommitteeonLatinAmerica>.

(Social continues page 6)

## Letter from Honduras

In recent months, the nightmare of violence that engulfed Honduras following the 2009 military coup broke through a media blackout in the United States. It did so, because it was the children who came. Tens of thousands arrived at the U.S. - Mexico border, many of them alone, with the address of a relative or friend safety pinned

to the inside of their shirts.

The U.S. quickly attributed the "surge" of children to gang and drug violence, announcing plans to strengthen U.S. border patrols and state security forces in Central America's northern triangle. Deportations of children to the Palmerola military base in Honduras continue

(Updates continues page 2)



**Family members hold vigil for the three men killed in Locomapa, Honduras.**

**(Continued from Page 1)**

despite the murders of at least five children in San Pedro Sula after they were returned.

Since the 2009 coup, the U.S. has poured hundreds of millions of dollars into “security assistance” and “drug war” efforts, yet the flow of drugs goes unchecked and no one is safe. Honduran security forces, with extensive linkages to the gangs, organized crime and drug networks that the U.S. says are driving the flows of unaccompanied children, are bolstered. We witness a U.S. funded vortex of militarization, killing and impunity that pushes refugees across borders, and murders those who stay, as it did during the wars of the 1980’s.

In this context, it is our challenge and privilege to accompany those who stay – daring to stand up for human rights, truth, and justice in the bowels of this furnace of violence.

Fathers César Espinoza and Abel Carbajal, as well as 16 members of the Nueva Esperanza community in the Arizona parish and human rights defenders supporting them, are beneficiaries of protective measures issued by the Inter American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). For two years, communities have been terrorized by mining companies and state agents in response to peaceful and legitimate opposition to mining.

On July 3, 2014, armed men intercepted the parish truck in which Father

César, Father Abel and three members of the PROAH [Honduras Accompaniment Project] team were traveling. Three armed men forced the priests and PROAH team members into the back seat of their vehicle while a fourth drove away in the parish truck. The assailants abducted the priests and PROAH team members for nearly one hour, threatening to kill them and then leaving them on the road.

On August 30th, despite an escalation

of threats and violence leading up to a public *Cabildo* [Town Council Meeting] to determine the will of the communities regarding mining, **16 communities voted by overwhelming majority to declare the municipality of Tela mining free!**

[Father Cesar declared,] “This is a historic day. The vote was overwhelming. Almost every hand was raised in strong repudiation of exploration and open pit mining in the region. We thank everyone who in so many ways has been in solidarity with us and the threatened communities.”

On August 25th PROAH accompanied the Tolupan tribe of San Francisco Locomapa and *Movimiento Amplio por la Dignidad y la Justicia* (MADJ), in commemorating the one-year anniversary of the murders of three tribal leaders. The tribe had initiated a roadblock to prevent illegal mining and logging of communal lands. Two men working for the mine opened fire on the group, killing three.

In Locomapa, 38 people have been issued protective measures by the IAHCR, yet one year later police have not arrested the assassins who remain at large in the area, and threats continue.

PROAH accompanies human rights attorneys at COFADEH (Committee of the Families of the Detained and Disappeared of Honduras) who diligently represent a mounting number of cases involving

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**March honoring the dead with crosses in Honduras.**



**Cabildo in the municipality of Tela, Honduras, voting to reject mining in 16 communities.**

human rights abuses on the part of state security forces, including units trained, equipped and vetted by the U.S. such as the killing of 15-year-old Eben Yanes in May, 2012. COFADEH itself continues to experience intimidation and threats including the recent temporary abduction and beating of a COFADEH team member . . .

**Thank you for supporting this work. Your generosity is a way to say “You matter to me” – to accompany from the heart.**

In hope and peace,  
Rita Clark, Jenny Atlee, Tom Loudon,  
Marine Pezet

*Reprinted with permission of Jenny Atlee.*

## Central America: US Returns Migrants to Danger

By David L. Wilson

U.S. government policies for dealing with unauthorized migrants at the Mexico-U.S. border are endangering Hondurans and other Central Americans by sending them back to their home countries without adequate consideration of their asylum claims, according to a 44-page report that the New York-based Human Rights Watch

(HRW) . . . released on October 16, 2014. “In its frenzy to stem the tide of migrants from Central America, the U.S. is sending asylum seekers back to the threat of murder, rape and other violence,” said Clara Long, the HRW researcher who wrote the report, “‘You Don’t Have Rights Here’: US Border Screening and Returns of Central Americans to Risk of Serious Harm.”

Based on interviews with 25 recent deportees in Honduras and 10 Central Americans in detention centers in Artesia, New Mexico, and Karnes, Texas, the report describes cursory screening by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents who regularly ignore migrants’ credible claims of danger from criminal gangs in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. Data that HRW obtained from the CBP

for 2011 and 2012 tells the same story. At least 80% of the Hondurans apprehended at the border were placed in summary removal proceedings, according to the CBP, and only 1.9% were flagged as possible asylum seekers, despite the fact that Honduras currently has the world’s highest murder rate. By comparison, CBP agents flagged 21% of migrants from other countries for secondary, in-depth screening. (Human Rights Watch, 10/16/14).

*Excerpt reprinted with permission from “Weekly New Update on the Americas, #1238,” October 19, 2014, <http://weeklynewsupdate.blogspot.com>*

## Babies in Jail

By Joan Friedland

Children are everywhere in the federal government’s improvised immigration jail in Artesia. The kids play in the attorney visitation area, they sit on their mothers’ laps during interviews with asylum officers, and in court. The little ones hear their mother’s reports of the extreme violence that forced them to flee their home countries – Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras – as well as the mortal dangers they faced on their treacherous journey through Mexico.

Not surprisingly, the jailed mothers report that the children have lost weight and suffer from depression.

Incredibly, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security [DHS] claims that these women and children are a threat to national security. DHS categorically refuses to set bonds for the families once they pass a preliminary asylum screening. When the families then ask an immigration judge to set a bond, DHS argues for a very high bond that the refugees can’t pay.

And they are refugees. Women and

*(Continues page 4)*



children in Artesia [New Mexico] who have received full asylum hearings since the jail opened in June have been granted asylum, belying DHS's claim that they should be summarily deported . . .

After surrendering to Border Patrol agents at the border, these refugees were sent to Artesia starting in late June, when DHS converted a portion of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Artesia into an immigration jail euphemistically called the Artesia Family Residential Center. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) operates the jail, which now houses about 500 mothers and children and can hold as many as 650.

The jail's misnaming is more than a mere inaccuracy. Because ICE calls the detainees "residents," they can't be located through the national Detainee Locator System through which lawyers and families find the whereabouts of people taken into custody by ICE.

The decision to put the jail in Artesia was no accident. The biggest cities, Albuquerque and El Paso, are hundreds of miles away. So there are no immigration lawyers anywhere nearby, and DHS made no arrangements for outside groups to do know-your-rights presentations. Consequently, in the period immediately following the jail's opening, DHS deported several hundred of the first arrivals. All told, 374 mothers and children so far have been sent back to their violence-plagued countries.

DHS didn't try to hide the fact that the early, assembly-line deportations were intended to send a message to other Central Americans contemplating flight. "We will send you back," DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson said in July . . .

The government can quickly deport people who cross the border, unless they tell a Border Patrol agent they are afraid to return to their home countries. The agents are then supposed to refer those people for a "credible fear" screening interview with an asylum officer. And if the officer makes a positive finding, then the asylum seekers are referred to immigration court for a full asylum hearing. Unless ICE or an immigration judge sets a bond, the asylum seekers can be jailed by ICE through the whole process.

Border Patrol agents are required to officially note the applicant's fear. But asylum seekers regularly say that agents routinely fail to do so. In the next step of the process, asylum officers are supposed

to give applicants a fair chance to explain why they are afraid. But in Artesia, the first arrivals reported that officers acted as adversaries and ruled against them. Those denials came at a rate that was far higher than the national average. Now, a federal district judge in Albuquerque has ruled that applicants can't appeal these denials in federal court.

In addition, ICE officers also discouraged asylum applicants from pursuing their cases. With no lawyers on hand and little media attention, this short-circuiting of the asylum process took place with no public accountability.

More recently, the American Immigration Lawyers Association has organized teams of volunteer lawyers who have come to Artesia from all over the country at great personal expense to represent the women and children. Many have continued to work on cases after their stints in Artesia.

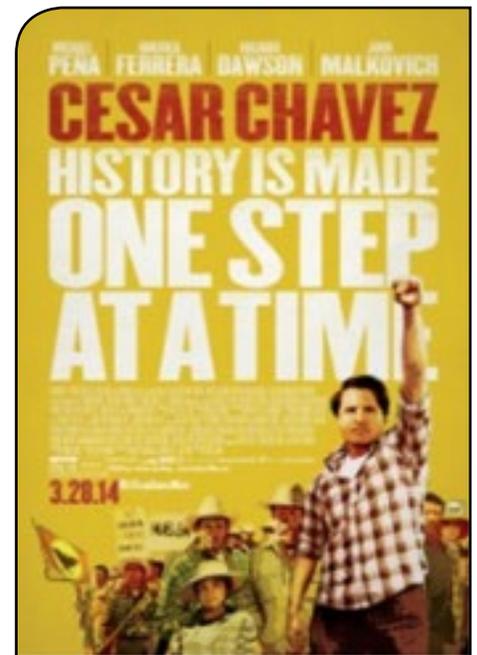
But this valiant legal representation project is only a stop-gap measure. The Obama administration plans a massive expansion of family detention. Already, DHS has opened a jail in Karnes, TX that can hold 500. And there are plans to open a huge, 2,400-bed family jail in Dilley, TX. Both of the new jails will be operated by for-profit corporations, including Corrections Corporation of America, which operated a notorious jail in Hutto, TX that was closed in 2007 after its conditions – including dressing small children in jail uniforms – were made public.

All hearings in Artesia are by video conference, with a judge appearing on a tiny TV screen. For the first few months, immigration judges in Arlington, Virginia, were assigned to the cases. These judges – reportedly appointed by immigration court headquarters – went along with the government's national security arguments and set high bonds, often as high as \$30,000.

Beginning Sept. 28, the cases were transferred to immigration judges in Denver. Those judges have set more reasonable bonds, starting at \$1,500, with many between \$3,000 and \$6,000, but with some inexplicably as high as \$15,000. In a particularly cruel move, the government is appealing those bond decisions. Asylum officers have also begun issuing positive credible fear findings in the same kind of cases they ruled against a few months ago. The result of fairer consideration of the cases is that some women and children are being

released . . . In the meantime, the U.S. government is using all its might against women and children jailed in Artesia, trying to deport them by denying them a fair chance to present their asylum claims.

*This article appeared in the New Mexico Mercury, NewMexicoMercury.com, October 27, 2014. It is reprinted with permission of the author and the New Mexico Mercury. ■*



## **JANUARY 2015 ROCLA FILM SHOWING!**

***"Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot uneducate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore."***— Cesar Chavez, Address to the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco, Nov. 9, 1984.

On Wednesday, January 7, 2015, at 7:00 PM, ROCLA will show the film "Cesar Chavez," which tells the story of the Mexican American civil rights and labor leader who organized the farm worker community and allies to improve working conditions and secure living wages for farm workers.

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The film follows Chávez's efforts to organize 50,000 farm workers in California, some of whom were *braceros*—temporary workers from Mexico permitted to live and work in the United States in agriculture, who were required to return to Mexico if they stopped working. Working conditions were often poor for the *braceros*, who were often not paid and subjected to racism and brutality at the hands of employers and local Californians. To help the workers, César Chávez formed a labor union known as the United Farm Workers (UFW). The owners of the large industrial farms where the *braceros* worked opposed Chávez's efforts, sometimes violently. The film depicts several major nonviolent campaigns by the UFW: the Delano grape strike, the Salad Bowl strike, and the 1975 Modesto march.

The film will be followed by a brief discussion about farm workers in NYS and current campaigns that aim to improve their working conditions. We hope to see you all there! ■



## ROCLA CO-SPONSORS ROCHESTER'S HUMAN RIGHTS DAY 2014

You are invited to  
**"Human Rights versus Capitalism"**  
 Monday, December 8, 2014  
 Downtown United Presbyterian Church  
 121 N. Fitzhugh Street  
 5:30 PM Community Potluck and Tabling  
 6:45 PM Program

This year, we ask big questions: Why do poverty, racism and sexism persist? Why can't we really do something about climate change? Why are we spending so much on war, while cutting back on programs that benefit people? Why don't we have Medicare for All? Why is the minimum wage so low? Why do we have to keep working so hard for change, with so little result, no matter who is in power?

This year, we search for radical answers: Could it be that nothing can change because we live according to an economic system, capitalism, which actually depends on maintaining current conditions for its very existence? What would our coun-

try look like under a system where people, not money, were in charge? Can capitalism be reformed? Or must capitalism be abandoned in favor of a system truly conducive to life flourishing on our planet?

Spoken Word Artist Shanterra Randle-Brown will set the tone of the evening with a special performance.

A distinguished panel of members of the Rochester community will join us to respond from their own unique perspectives:

**David Cay Johnston**, author of *Divided: The Perils of Our Growing Inequality*;

**Paola Macas Betchart**, environmental anthropologist and founder of the Ecuadorian Support Network;

**Colin O'Malley**, Organizing Director at Metro Justice;

**Danielle Ponder**, Assistant Public Defender and vocalist;

**Ream Kidane**, International Socialist organizer and Occupy activist;

**Denise Young**, Public Employees Federation organizer, will serve as moderator.

You are invited to listen, ask the panelists questions, respond, and to think about a new way of life that will benefit all of us, not just the few. ■

## Touch Infinity— Educate a Child at the Alternative Fair!

By Sarah Brownell

On the ROCLA table at the Alternative Fair, the non-profit Friends

of Borgne (FOB) will be offering their "Touch Infinity" scarves and assorted Haitian crafts (see photo below) for sale to fund their work in and around the town of Borgne in the northern part of Haiti. Dedicated volunteers run this small organization ensuring that every dollar raised reaches the people on the ground in Haiti. The educational programs of Friends of Borgne include sponsoring students to attend local Haitian schools, supporting teachers at two underfunded schools, a library that travels by mule, a food program for 35 poor students, providing musical instruments and training for the local Scout marching band, and sewing instruction programs. FOB still needs funds to launch a pig husbandry project and to support the food program through the  
*(Continues page 6)*



*(Alternative Fair continued from page 5)*

full school year. View the marching band (wearing Honeoye Falls soccer shirts!) at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fliAAd6BCM> Please consider adding our gifts to your Christmas list! ■

## ROCLA asks for your Membership Support!

### Dear ROCLA Member,

"I'll stuff envelopes, I'll make phone calls, but just don't make me ask for money." We've all heard that hundreds of times, including hearing ourselves say it. However, if ROCLA is to stay alive, the Steering Committee must ask you for money. It's unlikely that the U.S. government or the Koch brothers will provide funds for ROCLA's work. That's because much of what we do is to oppose and try to change U.S. policy towards the nations and people of Latin America. So, each year we turn to our members and ask for donations.



ROCLA is the only organization in the Rochester area that is concerned with all of Latin America. We send out a quarterly newsletter that covers topics of interest about Latin American politics and culture. Although we pay bulk mailing rates, the cost of mailing the newsletter is substantial. On the first Wednesday of each month ROCLA invites expert speakers to present their views about Latin American topics of current importance—Chile, Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, as well as domestic topics such as immigration and migrant labor. Without ROCLA, these critical issues would go unheard. Most of the speakers donate immense time and effort to the causes in which they are active. We think it's fair to pay them a modest honorarium (usually \$100).

This year, ROCLA sent medical supplies and building equipment, and over \$2,000 worth of medicines, to Cuba. We work with FRIENDSHIPMENT each year to help offset the effects of the cruel and illegal embargo on Cuba imposed by our government.

Every year, ROCLA presents the Rice and Beans Dinner. Not only do we have a great meal, but also we honor a local solidarity activist and a national or international solidarity activist with the White Dove Award.

We also support over 20 groups and individuals working on the front lines with Latin Americans to bring about economic and social change.

ROCLA is important and effective, but we need money to continue to do our work. Please do your share to keep ROCLA alive.

### **Please begin or renew your membership now!**

We hope that you will respond to this membership appeal with a tax-deductible gift. We have enclosed a donation envelope for the convenience of people who receive the letter by postal mail. Membership is only \$30.00/year. (More if possible, less if necessary.)

Thank you very much from ROCLA's Steering Committee: Marilyn Anderson, Paola Machas Bechart, Bob Kaiser (Convener), Marilyn Kaiser, Grania Marcus, Arnie Matlin, Lew Montemaggi, Gail Mott, Peter Mott, Callie Rabe, Vic Vinkey, Tom Ward.

ROCLA is proud to be a Task Force of the Metro Justice Education Fund.

For more information: <http://rocla.us/>

Make check payable to MJ/ROCLA and mail to:

**Kathy Goforth**  
**45 Lynbook Drive**  
**Rochester, New York 14609**

Thank you ■

*(Social Media continued from page 1)*



Currently the page has 113 likes.

Typically between 5 and 15 people view each posting on the Facebook page. That number increases into the dozens when

someone "shares" the post and other folks see that share. So, sharing what you see on ROCLA's Facebook page increases the reach. You should also post things on the page that are related to Latin America. Social media only works when it is social and more people view and share stories about Latin America.

If you have a Facebook account but don't use it much, then I would encourage you to at least use it to promote those issues and political pages that you support. I personally would not be on Facebook if I were not able to share and find information about the issues that I care about. Remember, you do not have to post personal information or photographs of your pets or grandchildren (as I do) to make political use of Facebook. It is worth spending a half hour every couple of days to go to Facebook and look at the pages you support. You will see links to interesting stories in the media and announcements of events you may want to attend. Share the things you like so your Facebook friends will know about them as well.

If you do not have a Facebook account and are not interested in creating one, that is a perfectly reasonable decision. Social media are not for everyone. But if you would like to get help using social media, I encourage you to contact me—I am happy to assist you in setting up a Facebook page and using it. ([bearden@geneseo.edu](mailto:bearden@geneseo.edu)).

I often place stories that ROCLA members share with me by email on ROCLA's webpage (<http://rocla.us/>); then I share that story on ROCLA's Facebook page and not always, but often, I share the link via Twitter (<https://twitter.com/ROCLatinAmerica>). If you use Twitter you can share tweets @ROCLatinAmerica. Currently ROCLA has 49 Twitter followers.

Social media can be used to promote ROCLA and the issues we care about, but only by a group of people committed to using social media regularly and with purpose. But do it only if you want to. ■

S A V E T H E D A T E A N D P R E V I E W

2015 ROCLA CELEBRATION AND FUNDRAISER  
**27<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL RICE & BEANS DINNER**  
 AND  
**WHITE DOVE AWARDS**

Friday, March 20, 2015, 5:30 PM  
 Gates Presbyterian Church, 1049 Wegman Road



We will honor **Jenny Atlee and Tom Loudon**, co-coordinators of the Nicaragua-U.S. Friendship Office of the Americas and the Honduras Accompaniment Project, with the International White Dove Award, for their 30 years of supporting the people of Honduras and Nicaragua in their fight for human rights. **Grania Marcus** will receive the Local White Dove Award for her ongoing support of ROCLA and decades of work on behalf of Latin American immigrants in the U.S.

Join ROCLA for Good Food, Fun,  
 White Dove Awards and Silent Auction!



**Jenny Atlee with the Honduras Accompaniment Project (PROAH) Team (3rd from right)**



**Tom Loudon with the Commission of Truth, Honduras (2nd from left)**



**Grania Marcus**

### Note on the Location of the 2015 Rice & Beans Dinner

For several years, the Rice and Beans dinner was held at the Downtown Presbyterian Church. The church has excellent facilities and the dinners were a big success. Unfortunately, the Downtown Church found it necessary to close the building on Friday evenings. To continue to have the dinner there would have meant paying for custodial services and other expenses involved with opening the church facilities.

ROCLA has been fortunate to find another facility, Gates Presbyterian Church, that also has excellent facilities and good parking. The cost of using the Gates building was minimal and thus the Rice & Beans celebration moved to Gates. While we understand that getting to Gates is somewhat more difficult for some, the steering committee is pleased that attendance at the Rice & Beans dinners held at Gates has continued to be very good. Each year ROCLA offers transportation for those who find it harder to get to this location. ■

METRO JUSTICE EDUCATION FUND  
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ROCLA UPDATE ON THE  
**AMERICAS**

## **SIGN UP FOR ROCLA'S EMAIL LISTSERVE!**

To sign up for the ROCLA e-mail list and receive announcements of our programs and other special information, please visit this link: <http://stopha.com/rocla>. You can enter your name and e-mail there to subscribe or unsubscribe. Stay informed about ROCLA programs, upcoming events and urgent actions! ■

## **HELP KEEP ROCLA'S WEBSITE CURRENT!**

ROCLA has a lively website (see: <http://rocla.us/>) where webmaster Jim Bearden posts current information about Latin America on an ongoing basis, as well as announcements of programs and other news. If you have information, articles or action opportunities about Latin America that you believe may be of interest to ROCLA members, please email the link or content to Jim at: [jeb.bearden@gmail.com](mailto:jeb.bearden@gmail.com). ■

## **REMINDER!**

You can now opt to receive your ROCLA newsletter electronically (and in color!) by email. The members that have chosen this option receive their newsletter sooner than the print version, ROCLA saves the cost of postage and paper, and the environment benefits. If you would like to switch to email delivery, please let Marilyn Kaiser know: [rjkaiser3@gmail.com](mailto:rjkaiser3@gmail.com). ■