

# ROCLA UPDATE ON THE AMERICAS

A PUBLICATION OF THE ROCHESTER COMMITTEE ON LATIN AMERICA

## ROCLA

### The Rochester Committee on Latin America

(ROCLA) for many years has sought to be a bridge between the Rochester community and the people of Latin America.

In addition to providing information, ROCLA is committed to working for systemic justice and supports numerous organizations that are on the front line of this endeavor. School of the Americas Watch, the Mexico Solidarity Network, Rights Action and the Rochester Labor Film Festival are among the many groups that receive our assistance and encouragement.

Monthly meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month at the Downtown United Presbyterian Church (DUPC) and provide an opportunity to learn more about what is going on in that part of the world.

### Steering Committee

Marilyn Anderson, Peg Gefell, Bob and Marilyn Kaiser, Arnie Matlin, Lew Montemaggi, Sandy Morales, Peter and Gail Mott, Gloria Osborne, Callie Rabe, Vic Vinkey, Tom Ward

### Publishing Team

Editors: Gail and Peter Mott,  
Designer: Jim Anderson



## LA BESTIA: EL TREN DE LOS DESCONOCIDOS

### The Beast: The Train of the Unknowns

A power-point presentation by Joseph Sorrentino about his recent stay in a shelter for Central American migrants and his time with Las Petronas, a group of women in Veracruz, who hand food and water to migrants passing on the train.

**Wednesday, April 4, 7-9pm**

Downtown United Presbyterian Church, 121 N. Fitzhugh Street, Rochester. Wheelchair-accessible and looped for those with hearing loss. For more information: Bob Kaiser, rkaiser3@rochester.rr.com.

## CLOSE OUR BORDERS?

*An essay by Joseph Sorrentino*

We aren't going to stop illegal immigration from Latin America by building more walls and fences at our southern border. More soldiers, border agents, drones or even militias like the Minutemen won't stem the flow of people.

These things will certainly lead to more migrants dying, but millions will still take the risk. Anyone who doubts this need only visit a shelter for migrants in Mexico and talk with people headed to

the U.S. Two things will strike you during these conversations: how horrific the trip is and how desperate the people are.

About 1,000 people a month pass through Hermanos en el Camino, a shelter for migrants in Ixtepec, Oaxaca, which was founded by Padre Alejandro Solalinde. And that's only a fraction of those who get off the train there. Most of the others are traveling with, or meeting, smugglers (called coyotes or polleros). The majority of

migrants at this shelter come from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador – with a few from Nicaragua – and they travel on a train they call La Bestia: The Beast. It's aptly named.

Migrants face any number of horrors on the trip. Just sitting on top of a train or between cars is dangerous enough. Manuel, a migrant from Guatemala, fell asleep on the train. He fell off as it crossed a small bridge over a narrow stream a short distance from the shelter. He lay on the bank – with a broken arm, broken hip and a gash in his leg – screaming for eight hours before someone found him. Leopoldo, from Salvador, was robbed by men dressed in police uniforms. Marta was raped. Michael told of a woman who lost her grip on her baby and watched it plunge onto the tracks below. Screaming, she threw herself after her baby.

Here are some cold numbers: 80% of the migrants will be assaulted or robbed; 60% of the women will be raped. A lucrative side business for the drug gangs (mostly the Zetas, apparently) is kidnap-

ping migrants, which nets them \$1,500 to \$2,500. Between April and September 2010 there were 11,333 reported kidnappings.

People are migrating because the poverty in their countries is worsening. To say they want something better for their family doesn't really capture the situation; what they really want is for their families to survive.

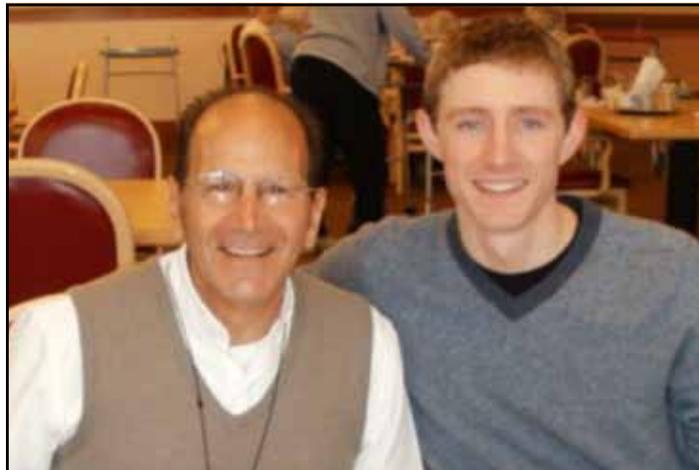
When asked about the dangers of the trip, most migrants say they know it's dangerous and simply shrug their shoulders – they have no choice. Most acknowledge some fear but José Luis, from Salvador, didn't. "We all know we're going to die," he said. "Here or there, it doesn't matter."

So the U.S. is faced with millions of desperate, impoverished people at its southern border. Our answer to stopping them from entering the country has created more obstacles, more border patrol agents, more soldiers. None of this will work. We need – now and at the very least – an expanded, fair guest worker program. H2A, as the current program is called, has its faults but it's

a start; and something has to be done immediately. For long-term solutions, we need changes in our immigration policy and trade policies; and investments must be made in Latin America that stimulate their economies.

This brief article has only

talked about migration from Central America. A bit further north, the agricultural crisis in Mexico worsens and it hasn't rained in their northern states for – I'm told – eighteen months. Where do you think those millions of campesinos are going to go? ■



**Padre Alejandro with his translator, Tim Shenk, Coordinator of the Ithaca-based Committee on U.S.-Latin American Relations (CUSLAR).**

## **PADRE ALEJANDRO SPEAKS ABOUT MIGRANTS**

*By Phyllis Tierney, SSJ*

On Feb. 14 Padre Alejandro Solalinde spoke at Hobart-William Smith and St. John Fisher Colleges about his work with migrant travelers.

Padre Alejandro operates one of fifty shelters throughout Mexico to assist those who are traveling north to look for work and a better life. His shelter is located near a train station. Migrants (sometimes hundreds!) ride on the top of trains, braving many dangers, even death, to cross the U.S. Mexican border in search of a better life.

"What befalls our brothers and sisters as they travel from Central America through Mexico en route to the United States is a humanitarian tragedy. Most travelers are young, many are women and children.

Of every 10 women who migrate, at least six are raped. Women, perhaps in any place, are the least appreciated. They have to suffer and pay a lot on their route to United States, and many don't arrive.

The migrants risk it all for their families. They're suffering all the way up knowing that they are not wanted in their home countries, they're not wanted in Mexico as they're passing through, and they won't be wanted in the United States either ... Migrants are teaching us that for love they risk their lives. I've learned so much from them, and they have preached to me," he said. ■

*From the weekly SSJ newsletter, JustUs, edited by Sr. Phyllis Tierney.*



### **AQUÍ Y ALLÁ**

*Life for impoverished Mexicans in the United States and Mexico*

Photographs by Joseph Sorrentino

Lavery Library Gallery, St. John Fisher College

Exhibit runs from now through April 13

## ROCLA IN SOLIDARITY WITH LATIN AMERICA MOVEMENTS FOR JUSTICE

This is a continuation of the list of organizations ROCLA supported in 2011. Last month we highlighted the Latin America Solidarity Coalition (LASC).



### Alliance for Global Justice

<http://afgj.org/> (Chuck Kaufman). \$200.

“We envision societies which explore and implement alternatives to the unjust domination of governments, global financial institutions and multinational corporations which denigrate the world’s peoples and devastate ecosystems. We envision the development of a unified domestic and international movement of transformational grassroots organizations that promote a socially, ecologically and economically just world.”

It is the mission of the Alliance for Global Justice to achieve social change and economic justice by helping to build a stronger, more unified, grassroots movement. We recognize that the concentration of wealth and power is the root cause of oppression requiring us to work together across ideologies, issues, and communities. The Alliance nurtures organizations seeking fundamental change in international and national conditions that disempower people, create disparities in access to wealth and power, poison the earth, and plunder its resources.

We support locally-based grassroots organizing by sharing political analysis, mobilizing for direct action, monitoring the centers of corporate and government power, expanding channels of communication, and sharing skills and infrastructure. Our commitment to solidarity and to a non-hierarchical democratic process enables us to respectfully listen and respond to each other within the movement. ■

## Thank you, Vic! Welcome, Lew!

There are several jobs in ROCLA that usually aren’t recognized but are essential to all our operations – from the Cuba Caravan and Rice and Beans Dinner to the annual membership – and beyond. The Treasurer is in that category. The work entails not only being in charge of all ROCLA’s finances but also tracking down social security numbers for guest speakers and the 501c3 status of organizations ROCLA supports, plus making frequent trips to the Metro Justice office for all matters associated with money. Farewell and many thanks to Vic Vinkey, who has performed that task willingly and cheerfully for many years.

And a warm welcome to Lew Montemaggi, who has agreed to serve as our new Treasurer. Lew is a lawyer (listed by Best Lawyers in America in the area of Workers’ Compensation since 1995) with great interests in Latin America - particularly Guatemala. He volunteered with Habitat for Humanity International, building homes in Guatemala, in 2006, 2007 and 2008; and he was part of the NISGUA Spring 2011 Tour on Mining and Violence in Guatemala. He joined ROCLA’s Steering Committee in January, 2011. ■

## 24TH ANNUAL RICE & BEANS – A GALA EVENING



By Bob Kaiser

The 24th Annual Rice and Beans Dinner of the Rochester Committee on Latin America found the dining room of the Downtown United Presbyterian Church filled to near capacity on March 2nd. Good food, lively conversation, interesting items being auctioned and concern for justice issues in Latin America made for a very inspiring evening. The International White Dove Award was presented to Brian Concannon of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti. Brian spoke about the on-going struggle to obtain legal rights for the people of that nation and how the United States seldom has helped in the effort.

Marilyn and Bob Kaiser received the local White Dove

Award for their long involvement in ROCLA and issues pertaining to Latin America.

Such was the feeling during the evening that people left looking forward to next year’s event: the 25th Annual Rice and Beans Dinner. ■



Brian Concannon



Marilyn and Bob Kaiser

## ROCLA'S MAY PROGRAM: Ambitions and Contradictions: Rhetoric and Reality in Bolivia

ROCLA'S  
MAY  
PROGRAM

ROCLA's May Program features Rochester activist, **Emily Good**, who returned recently from a three-month trip to Bolivia and will discuss her experiences there.

Although Bolivia's new constitution grants indigenous groups the right of self-determination and gives broad rights to the environment, Emily realized nevertheless, that violations of these rights are rampant, and the struggle of the poor and the workers continues.

You will be interested to visit her remarkable blog: <http://lapazandlove.tumblr.com>. It includes a harrowing account of her attempt to climb the 6,088 meter Huayna Potosi peak; her two weeks in La Paz; and other fascinating reports, such as this one from February 7: "Romulo asked me where



**Emily Good with with the miners who are on a hunger strike.**

I'm from, and I told him upstate New York, where it's usually (used to be?) snowy in February." He said that here in the altipla-

no of Bolivia there used to be much more snow also, and that in his lifetime he's seen the snowline recede dramatically.

I asked him what's going to happen to everyone who relies on that snow for water when it all melts and evaporates, and he said, "we'll dry up like raisins, like charcoal, and we'll be part of the earth and the world will go on." ■



**South America's only land-locked country**

## NY State DREAM for Thousands of Undocumented Youth

By Lory Ghertner

The New York State Dream Act (S.4179/A.6829) would allow undocumented students who meet in-state tuition requirements in New York to access state financial aid for higher education. The bill, introduced by Senator Bill Perkins (D-30) and Assemblyman Guillermo Linares (D-72), was first introduced on March 22, 2011 and is now co-sponsored by 22 Senators and 51 Representatives.

The New York State Dream Act has continued to build momentum for the past year and is supported by a large coalition of immigrants' rights groups, including member organizations of the Greater Rochester Coalition for Immigration Rights, the New York Board of Regents, Senator Gillibrand, Mayor Bloomberg, CUNY, SUNY, and a number of private universities including Cornell University. A similar bill is now the law in California,

Texas and New Mexico.

At the core of this bill is an affirmation of justice, compassion, and belief that all human beings deserve the right to realize their full potential. We hope you can stand with us and support the New York Dream Act.

Please join the cause by writing and calling your local senators and state representatives and ask them to support the New York Dream Act. Together we can make the New York Dream Act a reality and help New York stand on the right side of history.

This legislation "will allow undocumented young adults who entered into the country before the age of 18, have lived in New York State for a minimum of 2 years, are under-the age of 35, and have demonstrated a commitment to education and good moral character to have access to financial aid opportunities within the state." – Assembly bill 6829 and Senate bill 4179. ■

## Message of Thanks for ROCLA's Contribution to Kids for College

Ricardo dropped out of the very prestigious Automotive Technology program at MCC when gas prices made it impossible for him to drive from Wayne County everyday. Karina made the difficult decision to continue at FLCC instead of SUNY Brockport because she couldn't figure out how to pay for her books. I work with Hispanic students regularly who are not only fighting for their survival due to our federal immigration policy of deportation politics, but also struggling for their DREAMs of higher education. And the largest obstacle is not their college acceptance; rather, it is their families' inability to financially support them, even for many of those students who are U.S. citizens.

\$200 to many of us is "just" a couple of hundred dollars. To DREAM kids, it is the difference of being able to go to college or get that book they need or a month of food, so they don't have to work to support their family. But even more so it is an affirmation that our society does not totally neglect these children, that someone cares for them, and that someone values their worth.

Your donation to **Kids for College** will help one of our children in more ways than we can imagine. Many may consider it small and of not much value, but its true value is immeasurable. Until our state legislature recognizes the humanity in all our children, including those of undocumented parents, and supports the New York DREAM Act, every donation to programs that support our immigrant communities is valuable.

**Muchos Gracias,**  
Lory Ghertner

[Ed. note: In 2011 ROCLA contributed \$200 to the Kids for College program, c/o John L. Ghertner, MD, 6055 Robinson Rd., Sodus, NY 14551.]



## Gail and Peter Mott to receive Genesee Valley Peacemaker Award

By Arnie Matlin

Genesee Valley Citizens for Peace was founded in 1972. Every every five years we have a major celebration and recognition of a Genesee Valley Peacemaker. The Genesee Valley Peacemaker is a person (or persons) whose lives have had a major impact on peace and justice locally and internationally.

Previous recipients have included draft resister Bruce Beyer, Rev. William Sloane Coffin, Fr. Roy Bourgeois, Representative Louise Slaughter, and educator Dr. William Cala.

This year's recipients of the Genesee Valley Peacemaker award are Peter and Gail Mott. Everyone who knows the Motts knows that they are the ideal people to be honored on the 40th anniversary of GVCP's founding.

The Motts participate in numerous struggles – peace, Latin American solidarity, immigrant rights, labor rights, and many others “too numerous to mention.” They deserve to be recognized for doing the wonderful work they do, and being the wonderful people they are.

The celebration will take place on Tuesday, April 3rd, 6pm, at Interfaith Center, 11 Franklin Street, Genesee (adjacent to the SUNY Genesee campus). We will have a potluck dinner followed by the presentation of the award, after which the Motts will share their perspectives on peace, justice, and solidarity.

Please plan to attend – the Interfaith Center is less than 45 minutes away from most Rochester locations. (No excuses about having to travel so far to Genesee, please!) Naturally, we'll expect a large turnout from GVCP members and from the SUNY Genesee Peace Action chapter. The Motts have many constituencies – all of them are welcome to join us for this important and wonderful event.

Please – bring your dish to pass (students excused) and be in Genesee on April 3rd to honor the Motts! ■

*[The author is Founding Member of Genesee Valley Citizens for Peace and a member of the ROCLA Steering Committee.]*

## Small Grants – Big Results

ROCLA specializes in small grants where they can make a sizeable difference in people's lives (made possible through your membership and support of the Rice & Beans Dinner). Below is a note to steering committee member, Marilyn Anderson from Paul McKay of EPIC, an organic farming and cultural preservation group, which received a \$100 donation from ROCLA in honor of Kai Clouds. An upstate agronomist supported by many people in Rochester in the 70s, Kai was murdered in 1980 by death squads in Guatemala for his work in organic pest management and for promoting sustainable farming among Maya people. Their website: <http://www.epicprojects.org/index.html>

*I wanted to let you know that we received a generous donation from ROCLA which has been designated for the refurbishment of the original Land Cruiser purchased with Kai memorial funds. See picture attached, Felipe Tomás adding water to the radiator while hopeful villagers watch on!*

Cordially, Paul ■

## Introducing Jim Anderson

Jim Anderson is the new graphic designer for ROCLA. Jim designed the recent Rice & Beans program booklet, and he has now volunteered to design the ROCLA newsletter.

Jim grew up in Jamestown, was the AFS exchange student to Greece, played basketball for Grove City College, then followed his heart to Pratt Institute in Brooklyn to study Industrial Design. After Pratt, he moved to San Francisco and begin his career. Ten years later he decided to do some travelling, first to Mexico, then to Sweden to find his roots, where he lived and worked for five years. While in Sweden he designed the iconic Absolut Vodka bottle.

Returning to the states, Jim settled down in Rochester to be closer to family and has been a long-time member of Rochester's social justice community, designing for Metro Justice and the Gay Alliance of the Genesee Valley. Three years ago he and his life-partner/best friend, Amy Pitt, picked-up and moved to the San Francisco Bay Area to be closer to two incredibly brilliant grandchildren. Welcome, Jim! ■

# ROCLA

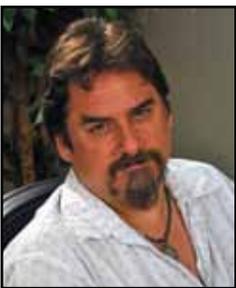
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## ROCLA UPDATE ON THE **AMERICAS**

### Thank You John Locke



John Locke, friend of ROCLA and Director of Instructional Design and Multidisciplinary Studies in the Wertman Office of Distance Education Center for Professional Studies at Keuka College, recently stepped down from his years of publishing *Update on the Americas*, designing the White Dove Awards, and being a lively and enthusiastic master of ceremonies at the Rice and Beans annual dinners, because of his increased workload.

Bob Kaiser expressed the heartfelt thanks of all of ROCLA when he wrote: *The gift calendar you received from ROCLA certainly was well deserved but you also should receive a medal for all that you have done to support concerns in Latin America. Most people would have relinquished their responsibilities when they moved into a new position away from Rochester, but you stayed with ROCLA and the result has been newsletters that are the envy of many non-profits. I know it hasn't been easy with all you are doing at Keuka; and the demands of your graduate program have increased the pressure, but we certainly have been fortunate to have your talents shared with our endeavors.*

*You will be missed in so many ways including the Rice and Beans dinner, the newsletter and just your on-going support for ROCLA. I know that support will continue to be there. Thanks so much for all you have done.* ■



### Successful Campaign!

On February 9 Trader Joe's and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) signed the Fair Food Code of Conduct – a set of labor standards developed in a unique collaboration among farmworkers, tomato growers, and the food industry leaders who purchase Florida tomatoes. Now we can welcome Trader Joe's to Pittsford Plaza! ■