

Rancho Mastatal Updates

November 2009

This will be our final newsletter before our return to Mastatal in a few days. We've had yet another wonderful visit to the Northeast and after some special time with family and friends and some beautiful fall and winter scenery we feel ready and rested for our return to the Tropics. Solé has changed immensely as you might imagine an 18-month would during this stage of their life. She was able to help build a snowperson and throw her inaugural snowball, important firsts amongst many prior to her return to see friends and resume life in Costa Rica. She has also had the opportunity to spend some truly quality time with her cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents and new and former friends. That will make it a particularly tough goodbye for everyone. On a more forward-looking note we're looking forward to another productive and fulfilling year. Our new group of interns arrive on January 10. We have plans to begin and move considerably forward on the construction of the [community library](#), build a goat stable for two does that will be arriving to the Ranch in early-January, complete the magnificent Starboard Cork, expand our gardens and orchards, build an improved toilet for our new biodigester, improve our humble office (or as it's called the Ranch "the basement") and begin designs on a few new structures for future consideration. Moreover our [Events Calendar](#) is filling up once again. The New Year will kick off with our annual [Solar Energy International](#) renewable energy workshop followed closely by our yearly Wilderness First Response Certification and Wilderness-EMT courses offered by [Aerie School for Backcountry Medicine](#). We'll do our best to get back on a normal newsletter schedule once we get settled in. I'd like to thank everyone for all of their wonderful additions to this and past editions. And please don't forget that these newsletters are archived with pictures on our website at <http://www.ranchomastatal.com/pages/aboutus/updates3.php>. And while you're at it please check out our new [Videos](#) page. Thank you Delfino for yet another great feature to our ever-improving website. And to SPARKY for all of the amazing footage. Enjoy the update!

This month's update includes:

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RM Program News: **Canta No Llore - The Songs of Mastatal**

Hey folks. Well the Ranch CD that has been in the works for about 18 months is now a reality. The cost of the CD is \$15.00 (unless purchased at the Ranch where it will sell for \$10) and all proceeds go to the [Mastate Charitable Foundation \(MCF\)](#). To purchase a copy please go to the Marion Institute website at <http://www.marioninstitute.org/shop>. We had tons of love, help and musical support from musicians and friends from all over the country to see this through.

Thanks TYLER, ERIN, RED, SPARKY, AARON, ANYA, TIMO, SUCIA, DICKEY, LINDSAY,

DEIVITO, for writing, performing and recording 14 beautiful songs that are intimately connected with our lives and experiences at the Ranch. Extra special thanks for the musical support and accompaniment from our friends in New Jersey, NICOLE SCORSONE, MATT MCMICKLE, and in Seattle JACKIE AN. MICKEY POPOVICH, thanks for turning Casi Casa in Seatown into a recording studio a few months back to add the final songs, voices and technical support that rounded off many of the songs. And to the same NICOLE and friend KYLE CADENA for post-production engineering. Thanks to TYLER and NICOLE ESCLAMADO for learning, recording and mixing down on that little 4-track recorder that MAXINE generously brought to the Ranch, which led to last year's prodigal season of songwriting and musical brilliance. And again, NICOLE ESCLAMADO for the perfect representation of RED and TYLER that covers the CD. The following people added words, music, time, energy, space, and love to make this happen. NATE, GEOFF, BRITT, SOLEDAD, ELYSSE BRIAND, MIKE MOE, and of course the people who make it possible TIMO and ROBIN.



Red and Tyler jamming at the Hohl

Without DESA these projects wouldn't happen. She is the most “Make-It-Happen” person I know. She provides the resources, and puts teams of people together quickly, amazingly and without complaint or excuses, and usually with the pressures of Bioneers hovering close by. Thank You Desa. We love you.

To see a clip of one of the songs on the CD, performed live at Bioneers by us, The Waddling Fools, go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNBjs-7TKaU>.

The following are the words on the insert of the CD, which explain how it came to be, and the mission. Please support the music and MCF. Buy your CD, the holidays are coming!

“Canta No Llore: Songs from the Ranch” is a collection of songs written by artists who have found inspiration in a humble town in the tropical mountains of rural Costa Rica called Mastatal. Each musician on this album found his or her way to this beautiful place through Rancho Mastatal, an environmental education and sustainability center located in the heart of town. We all found that it was impossible to be somewhere like Mastatal without interacting regularly with the community and falling in love with the people and their surroundings in the process.

We cannot live anywhere without respecting who and what are around us or without thought for what is to follow. The people of Mastatal care deeply with an intimate knowledge of the forests, rivers, animals, and mountains that surround them. As tourism in the area grows, development is imminent, but Mastatal still has a chance to demonstrate that this can happen responsibly and respectfully and to inspire even more.

All proceeds from the sale of this album will go directly to the Mastate Charitable Foundation, which directs all of its funds to the community of Mastatal. This includes projects such as: the building of a Community Learning and Sharing Center, health assistance, local education scholarships, home repair, protecting resources, and much more. You can find more information on our website <http://www.mastate-foundation.org> or on the Marion Institute's website www.marioninstitute.org."

The track listing looks like this:

- 1 The Haze – Erin “Soupy” Campbell
- 2 Blueberry Pickin’ – Jared “Red” Feola
- 3 City that Sleeps – Nick “Dickey” Shattell (with not an Airplane)
- 4 White Balloon – Brian “Sparky” O’Rourke/Feola
- 5 Hope for the Flowers – Alan “Sucia” Smith/Campbell
- 6 Starboard Cork – Deivis “Deivito” Garcia (with The Porchistas)
- 7 A Hundred Years – Campbell
- 8 Senorita – Smith
- 9 Flipside – Lindsay Wojcik
- 10 Dragonflies – O’Rourke
- 11 Sourdough – Anya Rose
- 12 Family – Aaron Westgate
- 13 Zombies – Tyler See
- 14 Sole’s Lullaby – Tim “Timo” O’Hara

Thank you so much for doing your part in keeping the inspiration alive. And to anyone that I may have forgotten to mention, please accept my apologies. Keep on doing the right thing, do it in a creative way, compost what you can, spread the word, and keep the music alive! You are an inspiration to everyone you meet, so keep it positive! Pura Vida!!!

Building Report: After Some Bumps, CLSC Poised to Break Ground

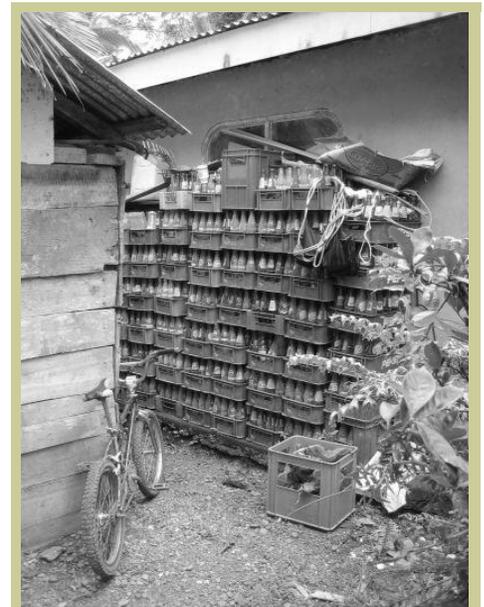
After years of dreaming, scheming and fundraising, MCF and the community of Mastatal stand on the brink of moving forward with the construction of the Community Learning and Sharing Center (CLSC). At this time last year, plans were underway for a brand new structure to be built on one of the most prime pieces of real estate in town, as agreed upon by the local government, who owns the land between the police house and the *telesecundaria*. Meanwhile, back in the States, MCF was hard at work putting its yearly fundraising drive together, motivated by the exciting proposition of building “the library,” as it was casually named in the beginning, right in the heart of town.

It’s hard to imagine what might happen in Mastatal in the two and a half months that Tim and Robin spend away from the Ranch, but there’s almost always a guarantee of some big news. Last year, word was received that ICE, the electric-telecommunications giant, had dug a giant hole in the proposed CLSC site and were days from erecting a cell phone tower. While details remain unclear of why the Asociacion broke its agreement to do ICE the “favor” of donating this prime land in return for the promise of cell phone service, the decision was made while Tim and Robin were thousands of miles away, and like it or not, the tower was soon in place, sending MCF was back to the drawing board.

With nothing to do but adapt, MCF began exploring other options. Seeing little other desirable land available, it was ultimately decided, in conjunction again with the local government, to renovate the old “*casa de cacao*,” located just behind the tower. Indeed, this would revitalize an underutilized structure (currently a catch-all storage unit), preserve a central location for the CLSC, and likely cost less than new construction. Thus the ball was rolling again, and meetings were called to create a local committee of *Mastalenos* interested in being a part of this exciting project. A handful of considerably productive meetings produced about a dozen dedicated minds of both genders and all ages, and the idea bank was again open for business.

Since then, a team of designers and architects has been hard at work drawing up building plans, which include a timber-frame addition in the front of the primarily concrete existing structure. Meanwhile, a joint team of dedicated builders and visionaries is being assembled to coordinate the construction process, scheduled to get underway shortly after the New Year. This will undoubtedly be a unique, collaborative effort between MCF, Mastatal and the Ranch, and we are all very excited to see this project come to fruition. You can follow the progress of the CLSC at MCF’s website, <http://main.mastate-foundation.org>.

Tyler



Back of the Cantina

photo by John Oles

Conservation Update: Alex

In my half a dozen years of bringing groups to the "developing world" of Central America, I've watched quite a number of gringos go through culture shock. While many people adapt gracefully and enjoy experiencing a new culture, others don't fare as well. I remember students and others wailing about taxi drivers, weather, bugs, scary roads, foreign people, and wild animals. Often I'm left concluding that our North American education is very narrow, and doesn't leave us very adaptable or open-minded.

On the other hand, it's been a delight to help students from Central America experience gringolandia for the first time, and my recent experience with Alex Hernandez of Mastatal was not an exception. I was pleased but not surprised that Alex had so many firsts in his life in one short month, but took it all in stride.

Alex spent a month with us on Guemes Island in northwest Washington State, attending four renewable energy workshops. He helped with workshop preparation and operation, and around my homestead, where he stayed with my family. The month was non-stop and intense, with four groups totaling 100+ students in from all over the world, and a schedule designed by a certain type-A personality.

I very much enjoyed seeing my own culture through Alex's eyes, as I tried to imagine what it would be like to get on an airplane for the first time at age 28, after growing up in a small town and spending time in the city. Dealing with bureaucrats, airport logistics, changing planes, a different language, and just coping with such a different experience might challenge a less centered person.

Alex also had to deal with a different climate (fortunately a moderate one, but much colder than he is used to), different diet, and being away from all family and friends for perhaps the longest stretch in his life. He handled it all with grace and balance, taking time to rest, but always available to help. After the workshops, we got a chance to go up to Mount Baker, and Alex experienced snow for the first time. It's hard for me to think of an experience in my life comparable to hiking several miles in a blizzard after growing up in the tropics. Alex was delighted and unphased, asking for pictures frequently, and enjoying the new experience.

I hope Alex's time in the workshops was all he hoped for, and that it will move him down the road of helping his community improve. In addition, having Alex in the workshops changed us. Sharing time with someone from a different culture always has the potential of changing you, if you keep your mind and heart open to it. I enjoyed watching several other workshop participants reach out to Alex and share interests, conversation, and laughter. I also very much enjoyed sharing the Guemes and SEI communities in North America with the Mastatal community via Alex. It's a connection I hope to foster more in the future.



Alex getting intimate with his new surroundings

Alex also had the chance to connect with Ranch friends in New York state and Seattle, a bonus engineered by his friends here. I encourage you to talk with Alex about his experience. I know I'm looking forward to seeing him in Mastatal in a few months, and I hope to hear his perspective on his U. S. adventure after some time back home.

-- Ian Woofenden, Solar Energy International

Community Facts/Stories: Homage to a Man

“Sometimes, there's a man, well, he's the man for his time and place. He fits right in there.” In late-90s L.A., that man was the Dude. In Mastatal, there are a handful of men that come to mind. Worthy as they all are, for the purposes of this article there can only be one at a time. This time, that man is Juanico.

To shake his hand is to feel the earth through his bare feet, up the trunk of his body and out the muscles of his fingers, squeezing, smiling, squeezing some more. “What’s wrong?” he might ask, seeing that your own four fingers have become one in his grip. But believe me, to lose feeling in your hand for those few seconds is a true honor. This is a man whose sheer presence evokes strength and respect. And though you might have a hard time seeing it behind that big bushy mustache, his sly grin shows you he’s more than muscle. Indeed, Juanico is a man of many talents, a veritable stalwart in the community. Well-respected as he is, his work has unfortunately not always received the gratitude it deserves.



Juanico

Like many daily blessings, the gift of clean mountain spring water can easily be taken for granted until it is suddenly absent. As many of us know firsthand, Mastatal water is some of the best in the world, and yet losing it temporarily is not that uncommon, given the nature of the system and various other fluctuating circumstances. Oftentimes, a break in the line can only be treated by someone shutting down the pipes, and we’re not talking computers here. I don’t know how many times Juanico has made that walk, either up the road to the tank or miles into the forest to the source itself. But the fact remains that he is more often than not solely responsible for restoring the flow of clean water to the community. Sure, there are times that require volunteer labor and there’s even a water committee to handle certain situations, but for all intents and purposes the solution is Juanico.

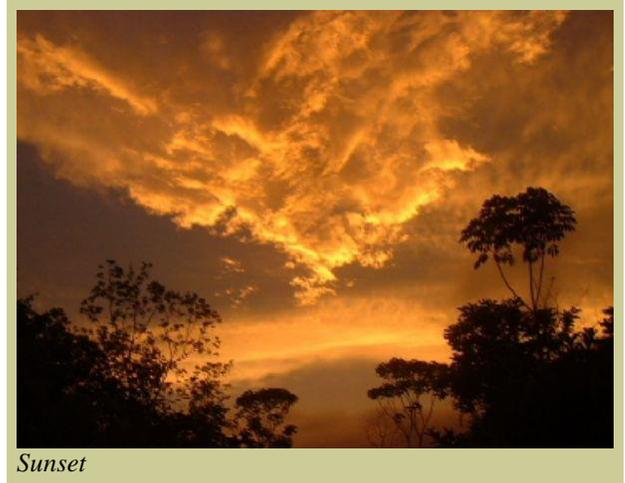
Such it was when, after years of serving this post with minimal to inadequate compensation, Juanico took a hiatus as water manager. His replacements did what they could; they even brought in machinery to install a whole new pipeline. However, problems persisted, and to this day I’m not sure if the new pipes are being employed. Thus it was time to call on the big man again – it just wouldn’t work without him. Being the superstar that he is, Juanico agreed to return, under certain conditions. The difference was virtually immediate, and the community is once again indebted to his valiant service.

Yet Juanico is so much more than the waterman, evidenced by his construction work around town, his lovely family and mother (the one and only Dona Maria), and his bold community presence. We at the Ranch hope to continue collaborating with him well into the future. I have no doubt he has plenty more to teach us, and we have plenty more thanks to give. So next time you have the pleasure of shaking his hand, stand up tall, give it your best, and who knows, you might learn something.

Tyler

Intern/Guest Gossip: The Lightning The Hawk and The Rainbow

During the rainy season, late afternoon, in a dense tropical jungle, a group of 5 best friends play horseshoes, drink beer, and relax, after a noble day of labor. The clouds mosey quickly through the valley in front of them. The friends are at the edge of a flat spot that drops off to an old growth rain forest. The tops of ancient trees meet them at eye level. A warm rain falls steadily. Thunder roars consistently, sometimes close, sometimes far, always echoing off the mountain.



Sunset

Two bolts of lightning rip across the valley from opposite directions and meet at the center creating an explosion. Simultaneously a majestic Hawk swoops down from somewhere crossing all of their fields of vision. Hawk lands in a tree about 25 feet above forcing the group to watch. Simultaneously, beside the Hawk, a broad section of sky opens to blue, and a vivid, eloquent rainbow stretches wide, falling into the clouds on both ends. Maybe 3 seconds have passed from lightning to rainbow. Hawk matter-of-factly peers down at the group. Rain continues to fall in the Valley.

Sucia

Comida Corner: Turkey Chowder with Wild Rice, Crimini, and Pancetta

This recipe comes from *Bon Appetit*, November 2007, and is a great one for after Thanksgiving. Once you are done carving the turkey throw the whole thing in a stockpot, cover with water, and simmer for a few hours. Strip off all the meat and you have a great turkey stock! Serves 8. Buen Provecho!!

2-½ cups water

¾ cup wild rice (about 5 ounces), rinsed, drained

¼ teaspoon salt

1-tablespoon vegetable oil (or butter)

6 ounces sliced pancetta (Italian bacon), diced (or regular old bacon)

12 ounces crimini (baby bella) mushrooms, sliced (about 5 ½ cups)

½ stick butter
2 carrots, diced
2 celery stalks, chopped
½ cup chopped shallots (or onions)
1/3 cup all purpose flour
10 cups turkey stock
1 teaspoon dried crushed rosemary (or thyme)
2 to 4 cups chopped cooked turkey meat (reserved from carcass)
1 ½ cups frozen corn kernels
1-cup heavy whipping cream

Chopped fresh Italian parsley

1. Bring 2 ½ cups water, rice, and ¼ teaspoon salt to boil in medium saucepan. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer until rice is tender but still firm to bite, 45 to 60 minutes (time will vary depending on variety of rice). Drain; set aside
2. Heat oil in heavy large pot over medium heat. Add pancetta and cook until browned, stirring often, about 8 minutes. Using slotted spoon, transfer pancetta to paper towels to drain. Add mushrooms to pot and cook until beginning to brown, about 8 minutes. Transfer to medium bowl. Add butter to same pot. Add carrots and celery. Cover and cook until vegetables begin to soften, stirring often, about 5 minutes. Add shallots; stir until soft, about 2 minutes. Sprinkle flour over and stir 1 minute. Return mushrooms to pot. Mix in turkey stock and rosemary; bring to boil, stirring occasionally. Reduce heat to medium-low, partially cover, and simmer 15 minutes.
3. Add rice, pancetta, turkey meat, and corn to soup. Simmer to blend flavors, about 10 minutes. Stir in cream. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Garnish with parsley.

Enjoy.

F?tbol Follies: Copa Mundial Draw Is In

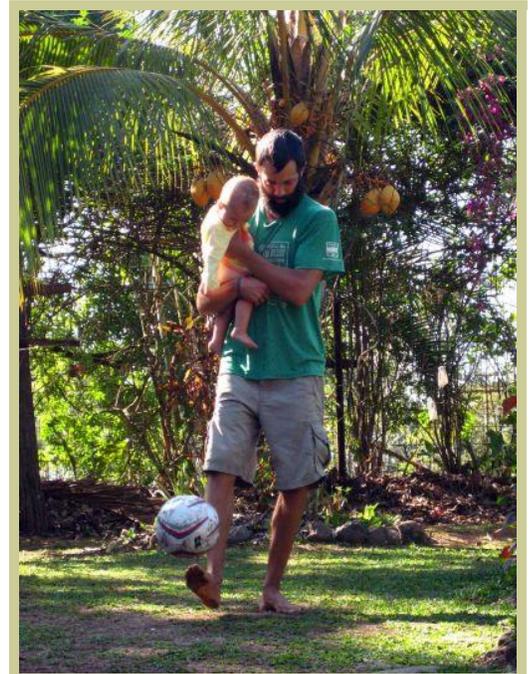
While *futbolistas* continue to anxiously await the coming of the dry season to Mastatal, they can also look forward to next June, when the cantina will likely witness a surge in customers as people flock to watch the 2010 Copa Mundial in South Africa. Four years ago, the Tico population was especially interested given that its national squad had qualified, albeit meeting a predicted early exit in the tournament. This time around, Costa Rica failed to break through qualifying by losing on aggregate goals in a two-game playoff with Uruguay, leaving Honduras as the lone Central American representative in South Africa. Other Latin American teams to be seen include Mexico, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay.

The United States has drawn what many are considering a favorable group in the early stages, facing England right off the bat, with Algeria and Slovenia rounding out Group C. Many would expect the Brits and the Americans to advance, though surely anything is possible. The so-called “Group of Death” for 2010 is by most accounts considered to be Group G, which includes Brazil, Portugal, Ivory Coast and North Korea. Tough draw for North Korea, who hasn’t qualified since 1966, when they managed to defeat Italy 1-0 before being eliminated.

In other news, the UEFA Champions League has completed its first phase, whittling the field down to 16 teams. Competition will resume after the New Year. In the U.S., the 2009 MLS Cup saw star-studded LA Galaxy took on Real Salt Lake in Seattle this past month. It was a grueling double overtime match that ended, sadly, in penalty kicks. Both teams lost key players to injury, including the Galaxy’s starting keeper. His back up played well, even saving two penalties, but captain Landon Donovan missed over the crossbar and Salt Lake went on to win 5-4. This was a big upset for Salt Lake, who actually went under .500 in the regular season.

Though many months off, the torch is lit for South Africa, and the fever will burn all the way to the final on July 11th, 2010. In the meantime, look for *Los Galacticos* to dust off the yellow jerseys soon enough...

Tyler



Former Division I Soccer Player Red showing Sole the ropes

Inspirational Impressions: Thanksgiving

“Let us be grateful to people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom”.

-- Marcel Proust

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew



*Food baskets in corner of porch
photo by Meg*