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Nicaraguans share their success tales

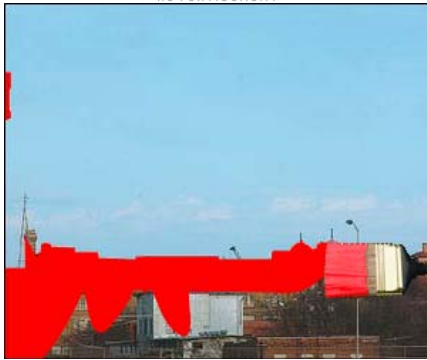
LINDA LEICHT • NEWS-LEADER • APRIL 16, 2008

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As Santos Erving Lopez Carrion told his story of a delayed education, Ellie Widner recognized an opportunity.

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"I can afford to send a few people to school," the former missionary said after a recent presentation by three Nicaraguans who received help from the Rainbow Network. "I'm going to be a Rainbow Network supporter," she added.

The Springfield-based organization provides humanitarian assistance to the poor in rural Nicaragua.

Carrion is one of thousands of students who attended high school through a Rainbow Network scholarship. Now 38, he graduated in 2001 -- after his education was delayed by civil war and poverty -- and was able to get further Rainbow support to get a degree in primary education.

Today, Carrion teaches second- through fourth-graders in a public school.

The diners also heard from Victoria Castro Orozco, who spent 12 years unable to walk because of an ulcer on her leg. Now 64, Orozco easily walked up to the front of the room to tell her story. The Rainbow Network doctors used a simple and inexpensive cure often used for diaper rash in the United States -- zinc oxide -- to heal the ulcer.

Keith Jaspers explained that a Springfield doctor, Tom Frolich, had visited Nicaragua with Rainbow Network about five years ago and saw the ulcers that were often treated by amputation. He remembered the dramatic results that zinc oxide could produce, so the Rainbow doctors tried it on Orozco.

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"She was facing amputation," said Jaspers. "But she was cured for \$10. She and her family view it as a miracle."

Efrain Aguilar Mendoza told his story of moving from overwhelming poverty to being a successful entrepreneur.

Mendoza lives in the mountainous area of Matagalpa, where a sagging coffee market created an economic crisis in recent years. There he lived in a house that was falling apart, he said, adding that even his neighbors laughed at the level of his poverty.

He worked hard for local farms and on a small lot he rented for his family's needs, leaving home at 2 a.m. and returning at 8 p.m., but he made little money and had no time to spend with his wife and children.

"We dreamed and prayed for a home," he said through a translator. "But I only earned enough money to put food on the table."

When his family was selected to get a Rainbow house, they "rejoiced," he said.

LEARN MORE

Opportunities to meet Rainbow Network representatives: Breakfast at Perkins, 729 W. Sunshine St., 7:30-9 a.m. Wednesday.

Workshop on micro-loans by Ryan Owen at 1:30 p.m. Thursday, at Drury University, Lay Hall.

Coffee at Kaldi's, 900 E. Battlefield Road, 3-4:30 p.m. Thursday. Reception at Panera Bread Company, 500 S. National Ave., 7:45-8:30 a.m. Friday.

Web resource: Read about the eight Rainbow Network recipients who are visiting the United States.

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But he wanted more, so he applied for a micro-loan from the organization. He and his wife started with a small store, or pulperia, in the front of their new home. Over time they have expanded and have even added a refrigerator to offer cold drinks and food.

The money earned through the business has allowed Mendoza to expand his own farm, send his children to school and even buy a television and a Nintendo.

"The work I used to give to farm owners, I give to my family," he said with a grin. "Thanks to God and donors who have supported us."

Rebecca Tatlow, a Springfield attorney, wanted to know how much funding Rainbow Network receives from government sources.

When she was told that, of the \$2.4 million annual budget, only about \$50,000 is contributed from grants, with about 3,000 individual donors and churches representing the majority of the funding, she was impressed.

"This is great," said Tatlow, who was invited to the lunch presentation by the Rev. Roger Ray, a Rainbow board member who sponsored the event. "I will be a supporter."

in your voice

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