



SUMMER

of service at SHPC

Mexico Mission Trippage 2-3
 Galveston Mission Trippage 4
 Civilian Rations (C-RATS)page 4

Mexico Mission Project: 2009

Good work, new friendships, cultural understandings, following Christ’s mission examples. . . these are all concepts SHPC workers have learned firsthand from 9 years of building houses among the poorest of the poor in Reynosa, Mexico. For those of you who have never been to Reynosa, it’s a city of contrast. Modern consumer goods and services are available, but most residents have limited access to them. In the improvised communities of the colonias, dogs, mules and chickens roam the landscape and children play amongst the rubble and near pools of water collected in rutted dirt roads. For those in the colonias lucky enough to have a job, an average line worker’s wage of about 70 pesos (about \$6.50) per day doesn’t go far—but those with jobs are thankful for any income.

This year SHPC commissioned 14 adults to return to Reynosa to build houses, dig foundations, pour cement roofs, and develop relationships with our neighbors only 6 hours to the south. Like Habitat for Humanity projects, new home owners in Reynosa have put in months of sweat equity by helping their neighbors build their houses. This June 7 - 12, SHPC built a house for Maricela Gonzalez Saiz and her husband and two-month-old baby. Her friends and neighbors were there to help build and cook. She prepared simple yet delicious meals for the SHPC volunteers every day on her wood burning stove just outside the hut where she stayed. (SHPC provided



shifting sand and gravel to the cement-mixing pit

sandwiches on white bread and fresh fruit and chips for the local workers.) SHPC’s group also dug a foundation for another neighbor, and poured a roof for yet another. (We should mention that all cement mixing is by hand and shovel, in the old style, transported by bucket lines from cement pit to rooftop.)

Safety was an issue we all considered primary this year since we heard of increased violence along the US-Mexico border these past several months. Fortunately, things in Reynosa had calmed down, but several work groups canceled their mission trips to Reynosa, which in turn has resulted in a serious slow down in Ministerio de

Fe projects. Many of our Mexican friends expressed their thanks to SHPC and other congregations for continuing to come and build houses in the Reynosa colonias. Perhaps you will join us next year!

submitted by Junie Ledbetter

One of the best things about this year’s trip to Reynosa for me was reconnecting with my friend Francisca. I met her two years ago when we built a house for her 78-year-old father. (He retired from being a “vaquero”

Maricela making lunch



on a ranch when he was 75.) I don't know why Francisca and I became friends, but we did. I admire everything about her—her wry sense of humor, her goodness, her generosity, her devotion to her family, and her tremendous faith. She gave me pillow cases she had embroidered. I left my work boots for her to wear when she mixes cement. We cried when we said good-bye. I couldn't help but think of all the things that could happen before we meet again. I am so much richer for knowing her and her family. I wish everyone could have the same wonderful experiences in Mexico I have had and am very grateful to



Francisca and Chris with Juan Carlos and Sophia

Gaston and the church for providing this opportunity.

—Chris Boyd

I had never been to Mexico with the housebuilding team before. I didn't even know much about the project until Larry talked to the congregation one Sunday about needing a few more adults to go along. I signed up, talked to my husband (while he

was reading the paper), and then wondered if I had made the right decision. But when I got to the team meeting in May, I knew in my heart that it was the right thing for me to do.

I thought that the physical exercise would be good for me, and the whole experience would be an adventure, too. I thought I was in pretty good physical shape, and I've been fairly pretty athletic most of my life, but this was hard, hard work. (Wait, I think that the difficulty of this work should be a secret until you actually have

to do it—wouldn't want to spoil the surprise for any newcomers!) We started the long cement pile by shoveling sand and gravel and measuring it out in wheelbarrows. We poured pile after pile on the ground in a wide, long trail, and then broke up cement bags on top of the mix. The first 4 buckets of water disappeared in the sun-baked mix. More water. We started to mix the heavy, sticky goo by the shovelful all up and down the line, moving it like a long, gray caterpillar over the ground toward the house. It took 40 minutes to move the mass about a

yard. I looked up once to see where we were, how much was left, and I was overwhelmed by the sheer physical effort of every person on the line to move that gray mass even a foot closer to the house. I just put on blinders and mixed what was in front of me, not thinking about that the 30 feet of sand and gravel crawling slowly along.

What surprised me even more was my warm connection to the people in the colonias, and how my heart filled with their kindnesses. Maricela, the owner of our house, was 17 years old with a 2-month-old baby. She carried herself with such grace and poise, back and forth from a little wooden choza over to her mother's to prepare something for us to eat at lunch and sugared coffee for us to drink in the mornings. She would bless us and ask if we were all right.

We poured a roof for Sarah at another house. It, too, was hard work. Afterwards, even though she had worked right alongside us on the roof, she and her family served us a cooked lunch at the church. Such generosity. My heart overflows.

—Muffie Peterson

Muffie with Ana Rosales outside the house they built



wallbuilding



Don't leave out the folks at home! What a great response to our "civilian rations" collection effort for Operation Interdependence.



Galveston Mission Project

Mission projects usually have a long lead time. Planning was just heating up for SHPC's Mexico project when reports of violence in border towns started making the daily news. It was decided that, for 2009, the student component of the Mexico project would be suspended... so what, then, would our students do? The answer: go to Galveston! Take a look at our high schoolers' latest beach trip.

