

HACIENDA MERIDA WINS FIRST PRIZE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO INNOVATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT



On October 28, 2009, Hacienda Merida was awarded the top prize in the competition for the Jaime Incer Barquero National Prize for Innovation and Human Development, which attracted community-development leaders from across Nicaragua. The contest, run by the Nicaraguan Science and Technology Council (Conicyt) and supported by the United Nations, rewarded the creation and implementation

of sustainable social and environmental projects that have the potential to be replicated by others.

Other entrants in the competition included the University of Commercial Science (UCC) and the National University from Managua and León, but these institutions left without prizes, highlighting the fact that it doesn't take a big budget and a PhD to make a lasting and important difference.

THE PROJECTS

Five initiatives enabled Hacienda Merida to surpass the competition. All have an environmental or educational focus (or both) and provide real benefits to the local community:

1. [Migratory Birds Project](#) – Since April of 2003 the Hacienda Merida has worked with the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C. to implement the Migratory Birds Project. The objective is to increase the knowledge and understanding of participating students and teachers in both Nicaragua and the United States of the more than 200 species of migratory birds being monitored. Students at the northern end of the birds' migration route exchange drawings and letters with students in Ometepe, at the southern end. Through this exchange more than 1,700 students in 16 different schools have built cross-cultural understanding and bonds of friendship while increasing their knowledge of migratory birds and their dependency upon a biologically diverse habitat.



2. [Veterinary Brigades](#) – Each year since 2007, six veterinarians and 22 students from Oregon State University and Managua's Commercial Science University (UCC) have provided both care for animals and education for residents to assure better animal management and disease prevention for the area's 6,000+ pets.



During the [brigade in November 2009](#), over 500 animals were seen. This included 49 returning patients and 12 species, including dogs, cats, horses, pigs, goats, cattle, mules, donkeys, sheep, parrots, monkeys, and deer. The following were among the procedures performed, all free of charge:

- Sterilization of 82 dogs, 12 cats, 10 pigs, and 16 horses
- 10 equine pregnancy checks
- 5 equine dental examinations
- Several explanations of canine diagnostic results
- Wellness exams
- Internal and external parasite control
- Administration of antibiotics
- Wound treatment and other minor procedures



3. **Bilingual Education and Computer Literacy** – Since the summer of 2007 Hacienda Merida has used English-speaking volunteers from around the world to provide free English-language training to more than 50 local children between the ages of five and 17. In this short time, some of our students have acquired not only sufficient English but also the confidence to communicate directly with English-speaking professionals. When Robert Callahan, the U.S. Ambassador to Nicaragua, recently visited Ometepe, Helen Martinez, a 13-year-old bilingual student from Merida, sang "You Are My Sunshine" to him in English and without an accent.



Along with bilingual education, Hacienda Merida provides free use of its high-speed Internet and [20 Netbook computers](#) to more than 85 children and students from the local community. The children each use the computers for an average of 50 hours per month. The confidence and empowerment that come with learning these skills are giving our rural children the chance to compete with the more privileged children in other parts of our country and, just possibly, become the future leaders of Nicaragua.



4. **Fiberglass Signs Project** – In rural areas of Ometepe, there is a complete lack of understanding of the importance of biodiversity, and as a result, it is not uncommon for wild animals (including birds and monkeys) to be captured for sale as pets or killed for food. To draw attention to this issue and its impact on the larger community, Hacienda Merida has designed, constructed, and strategically erected fiberglass road signs discouraging poaching and advocating wildlife protection.



5. **Garbage Separation and Recycling Project** – Hacienda Merida believes that environmental consciousness and responsibility are important for the sustainable economic development of Ometepe Island. To this end, the Hacienda Merida has designed and constructed tables and chairs using garbage-filled plastic containers as the primary building blocks.



Plastic containers, such as empty water bottles, are stuffed with discarded materials such as food wrappers, straws, and plastic bags to form a solid “brick.” The bricks are then surrounded with concrete to create a solid structure that will last for years, while at the same time getting rid of garbage that could not otherwise be disposed of responsibly. For visitors to the hostel, this means the knowledge that the garbage you create during your stay is dealt with conscientiously. For local students, it means the chance to participate in the construction and learn about environmental stewardship. For local schools, which receive the finished products, it means new tables and chairs to use for educational activities or as dining halls.

GET INVOLVED

You can make a difference in these or other [projects](#), either as a volunteer or as a donor. [Volunteers](#) for the school and those with medical training are the most in-demand, but even if you have no training and only a short time available, you can still [help out the local community](#). If you choose to [make a financial donation](#), feel free to specify a program, cause, student, etc. that you would like your funds to go towards. And of course, efforts to promote or strengthen the programs are always appreciated.

