

GUEST COMMENTARY

The road to La Grecia

BY ELLEN SULLIVAN, ENGLISH TEACHER, HIGH BLUFF ACADEMY, RANCHO SANTA FE

The road to La Grecia is rocky. Literally. The last two kilometers to the Escuela Vera Angelita are unpaved, meandering like a dry riverbed steadily upward. A half hour outside of Matagalpa deep in Nicaragua's beautiful tropical cloud forest, we pass coffee trees nestled in the shade beneath banana palms and broadleaves 1,000 meters above sea level. The road smooths out as we pull in the driveway, greeted by the cheerful sounds of dozens of girls switching classes, some running to the sports court to play soccer, others making their way to the library with floor to ceiling windows looking out over the green valley and mountains beyond.

We are the first group of Americans who sponsor EVA students to visit the campus. The school, an initiative of the U.S.-based nonprofit organization Visions Global Empowerment in partnership with philanthropist Robert D. Friedman, is an environmentally sustainable boarding school for girls in grades 5-12 who come from underserved and vulnerable communities throughout Nicaragua. Its doors opened in late January 2022 and currently there are 69 students in grades 5-8.

My school, High Bluff Academy in Rancho Santa Fe, launched the Hands Across the Hemisphere Club to sponsor Tatiana, an eighth grader at EVA. I visited EVA to meet Tatiana and her classmates, and to work with the administration and faculty to set up weekly virtual sessions between our students and theirs. Through the club, students at High Bluff Academy are not only able to establish a relationship with students at EVA, they are also learning about the challenges people face in the developing world, both in education and in preserving the environment, and how we can work together to mitigate them.

Like most developing nations, Nicaragua struggles to preserve its natural environment in the face of extreme poverty. It is a daily challenge for citizens to get access to even basic services; according to the World Bank, about 12 percent of the population lives on \$3 or less a day. It can be hard to imagine what that really looks like for those of us who spend more than that on a single cup of coffee.

So it is inspiring to be a part of Escuela Vera Angelita, which is on track to be a change agent for the girls and the environment in Nicaragua. Investing in the education of girls is one of the most effective ways to realize economic and environmental change. Educated girls become productive entrepreneurs and - increasingly - community leaders. They become better mothers of fewer children, and through their education accelerate changes in environmental awareness.

Not only does EVA offer young women a bi-lingual (Spanish/English) curriculum with hands-on learning, it is also fully committed to environmental sustainability and eco-education. It will become the first LEED-certified school in Nicaragua, and follows the UNESCO "Education for System Development" academic model which empowers students with the ability to address issues of global importance, particularly with



RITA GARCIA-SZCZOTKA

Caroline and Ellen Sullivan with Tatiana (center), an eighth grader at EVA.



The student garden at EVA. ELLEN SULLIVAN

regard to the environment.

EVA is tucked into the Vera Angelita Estate, an entirely self-sufficient, environmentally sustainable and organic oasis of 437 acres encompassing a nature preserve, coffee plantation, plant nursery, botanical gardens, fully functional farm, and eco-resort, all aimed at supporting the school. The school and the estate employ 170 full-time staff.

My daughter, Caroline, a junior majoring in environmental studies at UC Santa Barbara, was particularly encouraged by the ecological progress taking place at Vera Angelita. Since 2019, Estate Director Michael Bitton has been working with his staff to restore the soil, plant and water systems on the property. This has allowed for the revitalization of animal life – birds, sloths, and monkeys have returned and become part of campus life.

The efforts of the restoration have clearly shown how important it is to preserve and take care of the land. It is the most "alive" place I have ever visited. The sounds of the birds, insects, reptiles and mammals are abundant at all times. Having the school campus in the midst of this revitalized tropical paradise allows students to "live" the importance of respecting and appreciating the land and all it supports.

The property operates an organic farm including greenhouses and plant nurseries. The students even have their own community garden as part of their curriculum. They are then taught how to take the fruits of their garden to the kitchen for preparation and meals. Creating a true farm to table experience. The meals are delicious and vegetarian, which is another reason the campus is sustainable. There are fresh eggs from their 200 chickens, and goats whose milk they use for cheese which they make on the premises. They also grow organic coffee just for estate use.

We know the future of our planet rests on the understanding that the human-nature

SEE LA GRECIA, A29

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BY ELISABETH FRAUSTO

This is a continuing series of online activities to undertake on your computer or tablet, as well as local in-person events.

Lectures & learning

- The nonprofit Mended Hearts of San Diego presents **Michael Candelaria** at 10 a.m. Saturday, June 11, online and at the San Diego Cardiac Center, 2nd floor, 3131 Berger Ave. Candelaria, a cardiac device specialist with Biotronik, will speak about pacemakers, defibrillators and more. Free. Email Sdmhchap62@yahoo.com for the Zoom link.
- D.G. Wills Books presents **Barry Jagoda** at 7 p.m. Saturday, June 11, at 7461 Girard Ave., La Jolla. Jagoda will discuss his

book "Journeys with Jimmy Carter and Other Adventures in Media." Free. dgwillsbooks.com

- The Athenaeum Music & Arts Library presents **harmonica player Gregoire Maret and pianist Kenny Werner** at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 15, at 1008 Wall St., La Jolla. The performance, part of a five-concert jazz series, will feature a celebration of late harmonica player Toots Thielemans' 100th birthday. \$35 for Athenaeum members; \$40 for non-members. The entire series is \$165 for members and \$190 for non-members. lathenaeum.org/jazz
- The Athenaeum Music & Arts Library presents "**Erika Torri: The Continuous Thread**" from Saturday, June 11, through Saturday, July 16, at 1008 Wall St., La Jolla. The exhibit of Torri's textile pieces and other materials representing her tenure at the

Athenaeum will be celebrated at a public reception at 6:30 p.m. Friday, June 17, ahead of [Torri's retirement](#) in July. Free. lathenaeum.org

- Le Salon de Musiques presents "**A Luminous Season Finale**" at 4 p.m. Sunday, June 12, at the La Jolla Woman's Club, 7791 Draper Ave. The program will feature works by Mendelssohn, Brahms and Rontgen performed by violinists Samuel Fischer and Chiai Tajima, viola player Andrew Picken, cellist Stella Ye Lin Cho and pianist Regulo Martinez-Anton. \$95. LeSalondeMusiques.com
- Adventures by the Book presents historical fiction author **Aimie Runyan** and San Diego writer Jennifer Coburn discussing Runyan's upcoming book, "The School for German Brides," at 4 p.m. Thursday, June 16, online. \$5.

bit.ly/ABBJune16

- The UC San Diego Library presents "**A Conversation with Emily St. John Mandel**" at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, June 16, online. Mandel is the author of six novels, including "Sea of Tranquility" and "Station Eleven." Free. lib.ucsd.edu/mandel
- BFree Studio presents "**Painting and Clay: Abstracted Language**" through Wednesday, June 29, at 7857 Girard Ave., La Jolla. The exhibit features new works by John Ratajkowski, Sylvia Tello Trumbull and Richard Trumbull. Free. bfreestudio.net
- San Diego Repertory Theatre presents the 28th annual **Lipinsky Family San Diego Jewish Arts Festival** through Tuesday, July 19, online and at various San Diego locations. The festival features 14 virtual and live performances of Jewish music, theater and art. sdrep.org/jfest

FROM SENIORS, A12

Philosophy & Humanities Professor Peter Bolland. Consider if the wisdom of ancient sages can still be relevant today and, if so, how we can adapt the teachings to the problems of

our modern lives. Class meets Tuesday, July 19, and Aug. 16, at 10 a.m. **4th of July Luncheon** (It's Back!) – You are cordially invited to celebrate Independence Day at the Senior Center with a delicious catered lunch,

complimentary valet parking, golf cart transportation to the parade, and reserved seating at the parade. Lunch will be served beginning at 11 a.m. The cost for lunch is \$20 per person and pre-registration is required by Thursday, June 30. Seating is limited. Please call 858 756-3041 to RSVP.

Calling All Chess Players! – Researchers have found evidence that playing chess may result in improved brain function, memory, cognitive abilities, and strategic thinking. Each Tuesday from 2 – 4 p.m., enjoy a friendly game of chess at the RSF Senior Center. All levels of players are welcome. Tables and

playing pieces are provided. Please call the Senior Center at 858-756-3041 to reserve your space at a table.

Tai Chi for Balance and Health – Learn basic forms of Tai Chi from instructor Mordy Levine. Emphasis is on posture, balance, muscle relaxation, and breathing and is geared specifically for beginners and seniors. Learn basic meditations with emphasis on breathing and relaxation. This class meets each Wednesday at 10 a.m. There is a \$10 fee per class paid to the instructor. Please call the Senior Center at 858 756-3041 to register.

Art with Jan – Weekly each Wednesday from 1 p.m.-3 p.m., instructor Jan

O'Hara will offer step-by-step instruction to start a new project or assist you with your current work-in-progress art project. Jan will teach any of the following art mediums: oil and soft pastels, graphite (values 6B - 6H pencils), colored pencils, pen and ink-with or without watercolor, acrylic and oil painting, collage, scratch art and watercolor. There is a \$20 per class fee paid to the instructor. Students will need to bring their own supplies. Please call the Senior Center at 858-756-3041 to register.

Chair Yoga – Peggie Moore, a Certified Yoga Instructor, Reiki Master, and

BEWELL Yoga for Cancer teacher, offers a weekly outdoor, in-person chair yoga class each Thursday at 10 a.m. This class will teach you techniques to improve core strength and balance, increase flexibility, and reduce stress. There is a \$10 per person fee paid to the instructor. The first class is free. Please call the Senior Center at 858 756-3041 to register

Stay Active and Engaged with our Virtual Classes – Visit our website www.rsfseniors.org and click the "Online Programs" tab.

— *Terrie Litwin is the executive director of the RSF Senior Center*

FROM NATIVITY, A4

Two pairs of siblings were among Nativity's winners and the students said one of the best parts about volunteering was working alongside their brother or sister.

"My favorite service event was Operation Mercy because it felt good to help people who lost everything in Hurricane Ida," said Katie Lambert who volunteered with her brother Cameron and other family members. "It was great to see our community gathering supplies into two big trucks. It felt even better to go to Louisiana and personally deliver the supplies that were wanted and needed."

—*Chloe Mullen contributed to this report.*

FROM LA GRECIA, A13

relationship must change, and this change starts with education. The radiance and energy of Escuela Vera Angelita's 69 new students, and the expertise and commitment of the staff at every level in creating, maintaining, and teaching

environmental sustainability is truly awe inspiring. The change the world needs is happening here, and the change is happening now. And we at High Bluff are a part of it.

If you'd like to get involved with EVA as well, there are many options. You can start a Hands Across the Hemisphere Club at your own school by contacting me at

ellen@highbluffacademy.com.

For other ways to get involved, contact Tamara LaFarga, president of the Board of Directors of Visions Global Empowerment at tamarafit@gmail.com; or Rita Szczotka, director of development at Visions Global Empowerment at rita@visionseducation.org.

SERVICE DIRECTORY

PET OF THE WEEK

This handsome guy is **Henny!** He's quite the love bug who enjoys cuddling with his favorite humans. As much as he enjoys lounging around on the couch, Henny also loves to stay active. He needs lots of exercise and ongoing positive reinforcement training. He would do best in a quiet home with a small household size and a family who loves adventure as much as he does! Henny is available for adoption at **San Diego Humane Society's Escondido Campus at 3500 Burnet Drive**. To learn more about making him part of your family, please visit sdhumane.org/adopt or call 619-299-7012.



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