



NOVEMBER 2002

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## PORTLAND CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

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### President's Message

What an *impressive* group of people! Who? Well, *Amigos everywhere!* I attended the Amigos Annual meeting in Houston recently, and was struck—again—by the diverse, committed, talented, articulate and enjoyable bunch of people that comprises the whole organization, from the permanent staff in Houston, to the Project Directors and their staffs, to the training directors and volunteer boards in each chapter. *All* of these people are dedicated to the same purposes, the purposes represented in the Amigos Mission Statement (below). To me, it's great to be part of the incredible Amigos family—and I hope you feel that way too! --D. Pribnow

**Mission Statement:** Amigos de las Américas builds partnerships to empower young leaders, advance community development and strengthen multi-cultural understanding in the Américas.

### MEET THE TRAINING DIRECTORS

The Portland Chapter of Amigos de las Américas has two new training directors, Ann Griego and Max Campos. Both Ann and Max bring a lot of Amigos experience with them to this year's training. They attended the training conference put on by the International Office in Houston and are ready to go with some great ideas for this year's vols. In addition, they both currently are on the board of the Portland chapter, have helped out with training in the past and of course, have been Amigos themselves. Let's meet them:

Ann is originally from California, where she trained with the East Bay Chapter of Amigos (60 volunteers in the chapter each year!). Her first Amigos experience was in

Cotapaxi, Ecuador in 1996 as a volunteer. "The town was very small - 20 families. On the other hand, the altitude was very high - 8,000 ft! Most memorable from that summer was the beautiful Cotapaxi volcano that looked down over the valley onto our village." *Continued page 4*

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## Came Home

Who remembers how many tortillas Katy Stevenson ate in Intibucá, Honduras this summer? (Well over 200, as I recall.) And how many charlas did Nate and Kiera give in Nicaragua? (Well...*not* over 200.) At the Coming Home Fiesta in August our returning vols told us about all sorts of adventures in living, sleeping, not sleeping, teaching, dining, wrenching, building, gardening, mural painting, playing soccer, cooking, dancing, hanging out and otherwise being totally immersed in local culture in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Mexico, Honduras, Costa Rica or Bolivia. According to our Amigos vols—now *vets*, actually—most of their adventures were fabulous and unforgettable, even though some aspects were challenging and difficult. While all of the vols came back having better Spanish listening and speaking skills, a few of them recounted how intimidated they were at first when, upon arrival at their host families' homes, everyone around them spoke only Spanish and they couldn't understand a word! ("It might as well have been *Greek*," said one volunteer.) Well, *that* sure changed quickly! Most vols came home with strong emotional bonds to their host families or to other special children, youth or adults in the communities where they lived. And, as in years past, we heard over and over how delightful and exuberant the Latin American children were, regardless of the project location—also many vols recounted how nice it was to take it easy and spend leisure time just talking with people in the project communities. The children there were *always* easy to talk to.

The Portland vols related that many a latrine or stove or chicken coop got built during the

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## When our 2002 Volunteers One Volunteer's Summer in the DR

*Below is an edited version of a letter that Emily Stebbins sent to friends, family and the Portland Chapter Board members of Amigos describing her experience this past summer.*

Querida, querida todos, 9 Aug 02

I honestly wasn't planning on writing another thank-you letter. But coming back from this summer I feel so blessed I need to thank someone, if not everyone in this big, beautiful world.

I wanted to say much-is-is-is-imas gracias for making it possible for me to have the most amazing and life-changing summer in my life so far. I wish I had some neat little words of wisdom to send out to you all, a simple lesson I've learned, but nothing's quite that straightforward. I can say I've

fallen in love a million times over with la Republica Dominicana (mi país), Río Limpio (mi pueblo en el campo), Rafaela (mi madre), Ayda (mi hermana), and all my no longer new friends. I'm in love with merengue and bachata and I even know how to dance them now. I'm in love with the dirt roads with children and chickens and houses all painted bright green and pink and blue. I'm in love with the coffee they make with so much crunchy sugar it makes a layer of sugar-soup at the bottom of your tin mug. I should write a list of all these things, but I'd rather tell you more. There's no way I can sum all this up in a letter. You'll all have to

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*Continued page 4*

## '02 Volunteers Came Home, cont--

summer, and a number of youth groups and even women's groups got organized and underway. Upon reflection a *lot* got done by our Amigos—and that's even though things happened more slowly than the kids were used to, especially in the beginning. It was truly impressive to hear how a group of young people was able to go and accomplish so much in places that were initially so unfamiliar. Adaptability and flexibility were critical, they would tell you. They would also say that their most important accomplishments were not products of physical labors, they were the mutual friendship and understanding that evolved over the summer in their host families and communities.

Conversations at our potluck feast revealed that the vols' summer adventures, while "exelente" in so many respects, were not *uniformly* "terrific." We heard legitimate complaints about partner difficulties, about occasional troubles interacting with host family members, and how a couple of vols had to find ways to supplement their meals. Some challenges were pretty tough, but the kids learned to deal with them—they learned to be resourceful and resilient and, when necessary, assertive. If you're an Amigos parent or vet, you *know* how profoundly the Amigos challenge can affect the lives of the vols. Perceptions changed—perceptions about people and cultures and our relationships with them. Parents' perceptions of their sons and daughters changed in the course of that experience, too, as we heard at the fiesta. On balance, all of the volunteers got an enormous amount out of their summer's experience. Virtually every one of the vols that we asked said that they want to return to Latin

## Summer in the DR

talk to me. I want to describe all the wonderful friends and teachers I've had this summer, but I'm afraid you'd have to meet them. I want to bring the world to Río Limpio. But looks like I'll have to bring Río Limpio to the world.

The first day we drove with the members of our group (route) up to Río Limpio. Río Limpio is not actually in the province of Dajabon where the project was based; it's just across the border in Elias Piña. It's also by far the biggest town on the route with approximately 250 families.

That first week I thought seven weeks was forever. I didn't so much miss the physical comforts of home. We had a porcelain toilet, for heavens sake! It was more just being totally clueless. Having those evil fruit vendors come with their pineapples and mangoes and discuss me in front of my face; they called me names I couldn't understand. I learned a lot about being a child that first week. Depending entirely on strangers and their unconditional love. The community was like a mother in that way. Everyone welcomed us, fed us, and the children begged us to play with them. Jairo, the president of the youth group, became our guardian angel who did everything with us and introduced us to everyone.

By midterm our accomplishments in terms of projects were a ton of English classes, a tooth-brushing charla, and an awesome map of Río Limpio on sheet metal. That's not that much. It was really hard bringing our youth group together to get things done. Everyone's lazy in the morning, and then in the afternoon when they're ready to work it

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## '02 Volunteers, Cont--

America soon, several of them hoping to repeat sometime as Amigos volunteers. That's great—we hope to see them at another Coming Home Fiesta someday!

--David Pribnow

## TRAINING DIRECTORS, CONT--

“Guinea pig (Cui) was the local delicacy. Villagers would trade guinea pigs as currency. The house that I stayed in had a little house for the guinea pigs outside, but a number of houses had guinea pigs inside the house running around. Where I stayed, the local indigenous cultures were very present, particularly in the older members of the village. Many of the old women only spoke Quechua - the native dialect.”

After a few years off, Ann returned to Amigos as a project supervisor and went to San Juan, Dominican Republic in 1999. According to Ann, “the Dominican Republic was hot and tropical. We ate lots of mangos, beans, rice, platanos, yuca and had lots of fun listening to music and dancing.” Ann is a graduate of Yale University and is very excited about working with Max and the vols on training this year.



Max Campos also has a lot of experience with Amigos. “I started with Amigos when I was 16 in Houston. That first summer I learned a great deal about myself and gained a sense of adventure.” After that Max just kept coming back for more. His Amigos stints include: 1995 as a volunteer in a teacher housing project in Costa Rica and in 1996 as a vol in a community sanitation project in Paraguay. In 1998 Max became a project supervisor in an environmental education project in Azuay, Ecuador. And finally Max was again a supervisor in 2000 in a community sanitation project in Oaxaca, Mexico. *Continued page 5*



Ann Griego, Co-Training Director

Janelle Milam and Max Campos (left)

## TRAINING DIRECTORS,

"I've recently graduated from the University of Illinois @ Urbana-Champaign, and have a degree in computer science. I'm a software developer working on starting up my own consulting business. When not working, I enjoy sharing coffee with friends watching movies, and inline skating."

"I'm really excited about working with Ann in facilitating this year's training. We have great plans and can't wait to get started."

## Hey, Amigos Veterans!

Queridos veteranos de Amigos--qué tal? Qué quieren hacer el verano que viene?--y lo que sigue? Think about going back to Latin America as an Amigos *project sup!* Your Spanish and your desire have to be pretty strong to take this on, but I'm sure several of you qualify nicely. No es verdad?! If you apply and are selected by the IO, you will have few if any expenses as a project sup, since airfares, training costs and other fees are covered! No, you don't get *paid* as a project sup--but think what a *kick* it would be. Remember your own project sup(s) and what they did as route leaders? It can be an unparalleled leadership experience for you—and this challenge might be followed with a shot at project assistance director or even project director. Did you realize we had *three* PDs from Oregon out there last summer? They were Sita Davis (Dominican Republic, Willamette U. graduate); Renata Thomson (Mexico, Reed College graduate), and Portland's own past-TD and board member, Anna Johnson (Paraguay, Whitman College). Several of you have said that you want to be project sups sometime; and now maybe others among you are thinking about it for the first time. Why not check out the IO website for more info about becoming a sup? Give me a

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call if you like, and I'll gladly talk with about the pros and cons. This is a chance you might just have to take!

--David Pribnow, Portland Chapter Pres.



Dave Pribnow in Intibucá, Honduras

## Portland Chapter Seeks Photos

Hey Amigos vets, we are trying to establish a photo library. We would love to include some of your favorite photos from your Amigos experience on our website or in our newsletters. If you have photos to share please contact: Lesly Sanocki at [lesly.Sanocki@attbi.com](mailto:lesly.Sanocki@attbi.com)

Would you like to work with the volunteer Board of the Portland Chapter?

We are always looking for interested and experienced individuals. For more information, contact Portland Chapter President, David Pribnow:

[Pribnowd@aol.com](mailto:Pribnowd@aol.com),

503-771-5152,

or visit our website:

[www.portlandamigos.org](http://www.portlandamigos.org).

## Portland Chapter Launches New Website

Welcome to [www.portlandamigos.org](http://www.portlandamigos.org)  
We are very excited to announce our new website. We hope it will provide our Amigos community with a further connection to the Portland chapter. We have joined the internet age- finally. We owe many thanks to Ankur Naik for designing and creating our fantastic website. We had the website on our wish list for quite a while and we are grateful to Ankur for making it a reality.

Ankur has been familiar with Amigos for a few years. He met Max Campos (an Amigos vet, board member and now co-training director) in college at the University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign. Max and Ankur worked together at a web research company.

According to Ankur "the website didn't take too long to put together because I developed a template that uses a sidebar system on all of the pages." Well, Ankur we can only say THANK YOU, for it certainly took us a while to get it going! Ankur wanted to thank Max, Brent, and Dave, all board members, for their input on the website's content and images.

For those of you looking for your own website, but don't have the time to put it together, Ankur might be able to help. He currently is job hunting and taking on freelance projects related to web design and programming. He studied computer science and philosophy at U of I. He moved to Portland in the summer of 2001, and has been working in the web business for 5 years. If you would like to discuss a project with Ankur, please contact him at:

503-238-3863 or  
[www.strangeways.net](http://www.strangeways.net).

## Summer in the DR Cont--

rains. They are all scared of rain. It will give you the gripe and make your carefully straightened hair curl.

After midterm everything got going. We were so much closer to the community. We painted two little murals, planted 45 orange and lemon trees in the forest (they get lonely if you plant them away from their family), put together new backboards for the basketball court, and gave a bunch more English classes and two more dental charlas once we got the toothbrushes to hand out.

I guess I have some mixed feelings about the project aspect of AMIGOS. I had the summer of my life. But to expect young people to come into a community knowing next to nothing about the culture and the language, and get a lot of material things accomplished- that's a lot to ask. What you get accomplished are relationships, spider web connections between people. Precious moments singing and dancing and washing clothes and learning to make habichuelas con dulce. Your family, your community will give you so, so much more than you could ever make up in latrines or murals. The things the gain are the things you gain. The true things. The soul things.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

paz, amor, y mas amor,

Emili

### PDX Board Members

Max Campos	Brent Chalmers
Mark Cooksey	Whit Gaither
Ann Griego	Donna Kipp
Shawn Miller	Gail Parker
Dave Pribnow	Lesly Sanocki

Do you have an Amigos story to share?  
 Would you like to let us know how  
 Amigos has affected you? Submit  
 stories, observations or interesting  
 Amigos tidbits to:  
[lesly.Sanocki@attbi.com](mailto:lesly.Sanocki@attbi.com)

## THANK YOU

- Don Geddes of Walsh Construction for providing a meeting site for the PDX board
- Karen Brusio for her service on the Portland Board
- To Portland area teachers for help with recruiting future Amigos Volunteers

### Calendar of Events

**Dec. 6 - 7**  
**Team Building Overnight Retreat**  
**St. Michael's & All Angel's**  
**Episcopal Church**  
**1704 NE 43rd**




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Intibucá, Honduras

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### FOR MORE INFORMATION—

If you are interested in learning more about Amigos de las Américas please contact the chapter president by phone or email.

Portland Chapter President, David Pribnow:

[Pribnowd@aol.com](mailto:Pribnowd@aol.com)

503-771-5152

Visit these websites for much more detailed information:

[www.amigoslink.org](http://www.amigoslink.org)

[www.portlandamigos.org](http://www.portlandamigos.org)