

November 4, 2010

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200 E. Wells St. Room 205  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Sister City Committee:

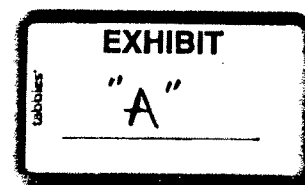
On March 24th, 2009, the Mayor of Carora, Edgar Carrasco, visited with Mayor Tom Barrett in Milwaukee's City Hall. At this meeting, the Sister City relationship between Milwaukee and Carora, Venezuela, became official. Since then, the Milwaukee-Carora Sister Cities Committee (MCSCC) has been utilizing and promoting the Sister City relationship in a variety of ways. In accordance with Sister City International's mission statement and goals, citizens of Milwaukee have engaged in countless activities and laid the groundwork for many others, with the intention of promoting peace, education, and people-to-people connections between our two great cities and nations.

In Milwaukee, MCSCC has hosted and co-sponsored a number of educational events related to Carora and Venezuela. These events are always free and open to the public, and promoted by Milwaukee-Carora Sister City volunteers. We have included a list of some notable events.

Documentaries Desde el Sur is an annual, week-long film festival at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee that is now in its fourth year. The festival offers a variety of films, many of which are focused directly on Venezuela and its culture, social system, etc. Attendance throughout the week has risen each year and usually reaches about 300 people, who leave with a greater grasp of the reality of life in our Sister City. Aside from being an enjoyable event, MCSCC takes this opportunity to reach members of the community and update individuals on upcoming events and opportunities.

Charles Hardy, a former priest from Wyoming who spent eight years living in a cardboard shack in a dangerous, poverty-stricken "barrio" (poor neighborhood) of Venezuela as part of his religious mission, was invited to come to Milwaukee by our local Sister Cities organization to share his story which he has compiled in a memoir entitled *Cowboy in Caracas*. The book is a unique blend of culture and history, as seen through the eyes of a man committed to working with some of the poorest and most marginalized people in the world. Mr. Hardy's perspective is humorous and optimistic, although many of his experiences were anything but so. His visit was greatly contributed to an understanding of Venezuelan culture for all the Milwaukeeans in attendance.

Another event organized by the Milwaukee Carora Sister Cities Committee was a "report back," in which several Milwaukeeans presented their observations to the public on their stay in Carora during a major electoral process. The speakers gave a highly educational multimedia presentation, and the audience. The speakers not only shared their firsthand experiences with life in Carora before, during, and after the elections, but also attempted to transmit a variety of



unique Venezuelan perspectives on the matter that they gathered throughout the time they spent immersed in the culture.

MCSCC was also proud to host Dr. Mark Weisbrot, an economist and co-director of the Center for Economic Policy and Research who has served (and continues to serve) as an advisor to a number of Latin America nations, including Venezuela. Mr. Weisbrot gave the audience an expert analysis of the history and reality of Venezuela's politics, economics, and culture, and also shed light on many questions about daily life for Venezuelans, their government's foreign policy (including prospects for improving relations with the United States). He is scheduled to visit Milwaukee again this coming spring, and will surely have much to share in light of Venezuela's recent economic recession, power outages, and Venezuela's recent parliamentary elections.

We believe that art is also a fruitful and intimate avenue for stimulating cultural understanding and people-to-people exchange. Carora is a city known for art of all kinds: painting, poetry, music, philosophy, among others. When a Caroran travels to other parts of Venezuela, the question is almost automatically asked: So what kind of artist are you? Recently, a Milwaukee musician, supported by MCSCC, had the exciting opportunity to visit Carora, with the goal of connecting with talented Caroran musicians. Mike Helbick established contact with a nationally famous band from Carora named El Pacto, and was invited as a privileged guest to take part in the production of a music video that premiered on national television just days later. El Pacto's accessible, complex, and uniquely Venezuelan style has prompted MCSCC to begin work on bringing them to Milwaukee (and likely also help them play in other U.S. cities).

Mr. Helbick also was given the opportunity to play music with another Caroran group, Fusioncayado. A blend of traditional Venezuelan styles and modern rock, this band includes a seasoned artist who has played concerts in the United States as well promising, young musicians. In Fusioncayado's recording studio, Mike was able to perform with the band and record an original song with traditional Venezuelan influence. Fusioncayado would also like to perform in the United States and present their music and culture to American citizens. We look forward to doing everything possible to include these and other musical acts in facilitating an exchange of musical acts between Milwaukee and Carora.

The Milwaukee-Carora Sister Cities Committee has a number of other exciting educational and cultural projects in the works, as well. One such project is the facilitation of a delegation from Milwaukee to Carora. The delegation would have the opportunity to visit and experience many exciting things that Carora has to offer: friendly citizens of all ages who are always thrilled to receive North American visitors, modern and traditional musical and dance performances, cultural landmarks, local cuisine, and a few nights in the breathtaking mountains that surround Carora, among many other activities. MCSCC applied for and received a grant from a generous private donor towards this delegation, which will be used in part for sponsoring individuals of low income who want to participate. We are extremely excited for the opportunity to offer Milwaukeeans this trip to our sister city, Carora, which will be one that participants will always remember and will greatly advance people-to-people ties, friendship, and understanding between our two cities and peoples.

MCSCC has also been researching and working on other projects. We working to establish a "sister church" relationship between parishes in Milwaukee and Carora, under the auspices of the Sister City pact. Sister churches generally send delegations to visit the respective churches, undertake projects together, and offer aid (tools, human resources, etc.). Currently, we are considering a number of bilingual churches in Milwaukee for the project, as well as considering a selection from a number of Caroran churches, as well. We feel that this "sister church" relationship will help create an atmosphere in which community development in both cities can be strengthened.

The Spanish language is an important language in Milwaukee and the world: in our streets, our schools, and our business community. That is why MCSCC is seeking to create a Spanish language school in Carora. This would give Milwaukeeans the opportunity to immerse themselves in Venezuelan culture and the Spanish language while receiving one-on-one class time with a Caroran tutor. In this way, we can not only promote important people-to-people connections between our cities, but we can provide the opportunity to acquire the lifelong skill of bilingualism--an important skill in many professions. Jesus Rojas, a Caroran English teacher and long-time advocate of the Sister Cities relationship, has already received an invitation from MCSCC and Alderman Nik Kovac to come to Milwaukee and discuss plans for the school. We are working on the logistics for his visit so he can play an integral part in this process.

The Milwaukee-Carora Sister Cities Committee is proud of our mission to promoting peace, education, and people-to-people connections between Milwaukee and Carora. We are pleased with work we have done thus far, and look forward to working diligently on our upcoming projects. We thank the City of Milwaukee for its support of both our local organization and Sister Cities International.

Respectfully,

Volunteers of the Milwaukee-Carora Sister Cities Committee