

## GREENWAYS

### To protect and serve

Students interested in getting more green than ever can be directed to the Student Conservation Association, also known as America's conservation corps. Its members protect and restore national parks, marine sanctuaries, cultural landmarks and community green spaces in all 50 states.

SCA holds contests for getting schools to go green as well.

Ongoing programs for college and high school students include national crews for summer projects, community programs for urban high school students, internships, and corps work.

Check out [www.thesca.org](http://www.thesca.org).

### NYSERDA news

Check out these two Web sites from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority

■ [SchoolPowerNaturally.org](http://SchoolPowerNaturally.org) has details of a program designed to educate New Yorkers about energy and the role solar electric power — photovoltaics — can play. Through the organization, funding is available for activities designed to create a long-term and sustainable support system for technical and educational activities.

■ An environmental monitoring, evaluation and protection resource page for teachers and students lets you explore power generation and its affects. Visit [www.nyserd.org/programs/Environment/EMEP/teachers\\_&\\_students.asp](http://www.nyserd.org/programs/Environment/EMEP/teachers_&_students.asp).

### Pass a resolution

You can promote green schools in your community or school district by proposing a green schools resolution. The language of the resolution will vary depending on a community's specific circumstances, but sample resolutions are available at [www.greenschoolbuilding.org](http://www.greenschoolbuilding.org).

### Simple green tips

Many green ideas are available at [www.globalstewards.org](http://www.globalstewards.org). Here are a few:

- Replace paper napkins with cloth napkins.
- Old, cut-up T-shirts make great replacements for paper towels.
- Print documents on once-used paper or on bleach-free, recycled paper.
- Create note pads from once-used paper.
- Leave messages for family members or roommates on a reusable message board.

# 'Why are you sweeping?'

By Kathleen L. Martin

It's the first official day of my summer vacation. It's about 100 degrees out and I am soaking wet from sweat. I am standing on top of a garbage dump in Nicaragua, trying to ignore the smell. In the midst of the garbage we find two adorable and smiling kids. The blond streaks in their hair are caused by extreme malnutrition.

I am part of a delegation of 10 people coordinated by Maureen Casey from the New York State Labor-Religion Coalition. We are mostly teachers/unionists from around the state, and all of us are interested in Fair Trade and its effects on global communities.

But this trip is so much more than just that. Nicaragua is a beautiful country with immensely proud and wonderful people. However, the country is climbing out from under years of political upheaval, two wars, devastating natural disasters and extreme poverty.

In Managua, we meet with Dos Generaciones, an organization that works with the children who live, eat from and dig alongside their families on Managua's municipal garbage dump.

It is everything you can imagine a city dump to be, except for the human beings who live on it.

A woman sweeps in front of her door. Her barefoot, dirty children laugh and play nearby. The house is built of Coca-Cola signs and corrugated scrap metal. "Why are you sweeping?" I wonder. "No matter how much you sweep, you will never sweep the dump away."

Afterward, about 25 kids happily await us and we gather in a cement building where we have different activities for them. I brought beads so the kids can make bracelets. Working with them keeps me from doing what I really want to do — cry. (I do that later).

We visit many other outreach organizations



Two of the many Nicaraguan children we met during our trip.

## FIRST PERSON

and communities, talk to civil coordinators, fellow unionists, economists and others involved with Fair Trade. We even see the countryside.

At Masaya Volcano National Park we drive up the side of the active volcano to a parking lot where we are advised to back in so we can escape if the volcano erupts.

Peering over the edge into the toxic steamy crater, I decide I prefer the American way of watching from a safer distance, where we would not be advised to climb under the car if expulsions of rock should rain down.

During my favorite part of the trip, I stay with coffee farmers who live in the little rural village of La Pita, where I see firsthand how earning a living wage is helping these Fair Trade farmers.

The community has decided to use their Fair Trade money to bring eco-tourism to their village. A four-room eco-lodge, built entirely by community members, will bring in additional money when it opens.

Allyson Kelly and I stay with Dona Paula and her family. Her grandchildren, Bayardo and Julissa, rarely leave our side. At night, with a small fire burning to keep mosquitoes away, my

host family describes how their farm works, and we share aspects of our own cultures.

One day, the women of the community give us a lesson in making *nacatamales*, a popular Nicaraguan dish of cornmeal, chicken, potato and tomatoes all wrapped up in a banana leaf. That night we enjoy our own handmade *nacatamale* for dinner.

We tour organic coffee and cacao fields, and visit the village school. Our supplies are welcomed by the teacher who teaches 30 kids from kindergarten to sixth grade. She tells us how she breaks pencils in half so every student has something to write with.

I will share my pictures with my own students in Smithtown who collected some of these supplies. I keep thinking back to the experiences and know that for the people this was not an experience for them — it is their reality.

Poverty is everywhere in Nicaragua; however, Fair Trade brings a glimmer of hope for many people. I constantly think of these people, especially when I am sitting down enjoying a good meal or purchasing something frivolous.

*Kathleen L. Martin is a member of the Smithtown Teachers Association.*



Delegation member Ken Kurzweil tours the Masaya Volcano National Park in Nicaragua.

### About First Person

First Person shares personal stories of profound or memorable experiences from our members. If you have such a story to share, please e-mail it to:

[nyteach@nysutmail.org](mailto:nyteach@nysutmail.org)

Please put First Person in the subject line, and include your phone number and NYSUT affiliation. Submissions should be no longer than 700 words.