

San Francisco Libre News



Reading's Twin Town in Nicaragua



www.reading-sfl.org.uk

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Adios, John Bullus

John Bullus, well-loved Treasurer of the RSFL Trust, passed away in the early hours of Sunday 12th March.

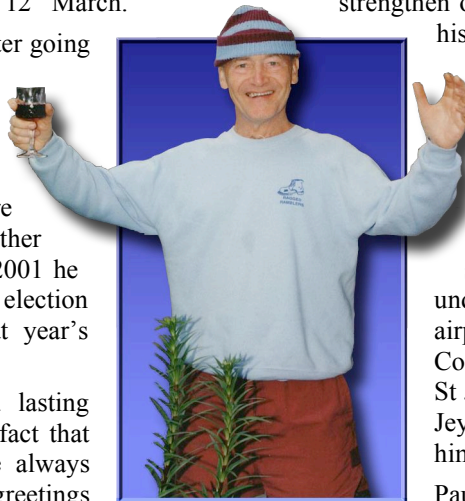
John joined the RSFLA early in 2000, after going to a talk at a Spanish class he attended, given by someone who had recently returned from a visit to SFL. He became treasurer of the Trust in 2001.

John went on to visit San Francisco Libre three times, both on his own and with other members of the RSFLA. In November 2001 he joined a delegation of international election observers in Nicaragua to monitor that year's presidential elections.

John quickly formed many good and lasting friendships in SFL – evidenced by the fact that subsequent visitors from Reading have always been called upon to bring letters and greetings back to him.

Fellow RSFLA member, Lorraine Barker, remembers: "His visits to Nicaragua, and his involvement with the association were very important to John. We spent many hours in his kitchen talking about the

people we had met, and discussing what we could do to strengthen our links and improve their lot. He never lost his enthusiasm or his concern."



John David Bullus
1940 – 2006

As well as being Treasurer, John took an active role in the planning and staging of RSFLA events. He also spent a lot of his time touring Reading's schools to talk about the town's link with Nicaragua.

When SFL teenager Jeyserd spent a year studying at Reading College, John took him under his wing: he picked him up from the airport and acted as the main link between the College and Jeyserd's supporters in the Parish of St James and St William of York. John also took Jeyserd on sightseeing trips, and helped equip him with carpentry tools for his return to SFL.

Paul Starkey, chairman of the RSFLA joined other members in recalling John's amazing cheerfulness in the face of his long illness.

We offer our sincere condolences to John's wife Carole, and his sons Nicolas and Peter and their families.

Va pues, amigo. Que te vaya bien.

It was John's wish that instead of buying flowers, friends remember him by donating to Cancer Research UK. If you knew John, and wish to help his nominated charity, please visit: http://donateinmemory.cancerresearchuk.org/pp_1562/John_Bullus.aspx

Reading Half Marathon

We would like to congratulate Ruth Gladwyn on completing the 2005 Reading Half Marathon, and thank her for selecting the RSFLA as her chosen charity – raising a fantastic £250 for projects in Nicaragua.

This year Anna Batchelor and Rupert Shute, both members of Reading Road Runners, stepped into the breach, kindly offering to represent the association in the 9th April event. After completing the run, Anna described the weather conditions as perfect for the event: mild and sunny. More details of the day will be posted on the RSFLA web site.

Congratulations and thanks to Anna and Rupert for completing the course for the RSFLA, and thanks to everyone who sponsored them. If you were one of the sponsors, and are a U.K. taxpayer, please remember to send a Gift Aid form with your sponsorship money, allowing the association increase your donation by up to 28%.

WOMAD 2006

This year, the WOMAD festival will be held on 28th-30th July at Rivermead.

Over the last four years, the RSFLA has developed a tradition of staging popular, Nicaraguan-themed activities at the festival – and we're planning to repeat our success this year, with a 'musical moving quiz' and Nicaraguan games.

WOMAD's official site: <http://womad.org/?festival=reading/>

Revamped Web Site

We are currently redesigning the RSFLA web site, and hope the new version will go live in a few weeks time.

The web site already contains information about SFL and Reading's projects there. For this, and more details of our events in Reading, plus the many ways that you can get more involved in the RSFLA, visit: <http://www.reading-sfl.org.uk/>

Contact us: <http://www.reading-sfl.org.uk>

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Visits to SFL

Last year two members of the RSFLA spent nine months in Nicaragua.

Eoghan Clarkson and Jane Boyd were there to work on an English language and Community Tourism project in Mirafior, in the north of Nicaragua, but also visited SFL a few times.

On their first trip in June 2005, they met the new Mayor of San Francisco Libre, Lilliam Gomez, who had been elected the previous November.



Jane Boyd and Eoghan Clarkson with SFL Mayor Lilliam Gomez (centre)

Internet Hits SFL!

At a meeting in June 2005, the Mayor excitedly announced her plan to establish internet access in the town. Although SFL town has electricity, it has never had telephone lines and the chances of being hooked up to Nicaragua's nascent broadband network are extremely remote – so the few computers that do exist in SFL have never been linked to the wider world, and anyone wanting to send an email had to do so from Managua, an exhausting two hour bus ride away.

The Mayor's new plan was to erect a microwave tower and create a publicly available 'cyber café' in the town hall, where residents could use email and browse the internet. A further attraction would be the ability to place international phone calls through the computers, allowing people much cheaper contact with relatives abroad.

By the time Jane returned in February 2006, the microwave tower had been built, and a small room kitted out with four multimedia computers equipped with web cams was already in use.

The RSFLA provided a boost to the project by donating \$1,000 for the purchase of extra computers.

Project Roundup

Eoghan and Jane held a total of four meetings with the Mayor of SFL and local contacts between June 2005 and February 2006.

Peter Oakley Trust

Jane delivered the next tranche of cash to assist Reading's 16 sponsored students with their studies in the coming year. Alina, the association's main contact in SFL, has informed us that three of the recipients, Sayda, Jamilet and Johana, have written letters to Reading, which await delivery.

We hope SFL's new cyber café will allow speedier communication, and would like to establish a schools link between Reading and SFL – if you are a teacher interested in such a project, please contact the RSFLA.

Bicycle Project

The Mayor restated her support for RSFLA's bicycle project, which was set up by SFL's previous Mayor, José Ángel, to provide students from more remote communities with a reliable means of transport to and from school.

At a meeting in July 2005, Jane saw how monthly repayments by those who have received bicycles would fund the purchase of new bikes, allowing more people to benefit from the project.

Bus shelters

In 2004, the RSFLA contributed to a project devised by then Mayor, José Ángel, who wanted to build a series of bus shelters along the 30 kms of dusty road connecting SFL to Nicaragua's main highway.

A sturdily built brick and corrugated iron example now stands on the edge of town, sheltering passengers from the fierce sun and torrential rains.



Viewed from the bus: SFL bus shelter 'financiado por Reading'

Tourism in SFL

Jane was keen to explore SFL's potential for tourism – aimed at those travellers seeking to get off the beaten track and visit a traditional community. A new 'hospedaje' (guest house) has just opened in the town.

Specialist tours of birdwatchers, or music lovers could be developed. Also, SFL's location on the shore of the magnificent lake Xolotlán opens the possibilities of boat trips to explore nearby volcanic islands.



A 'hospedaje' in San Francisco Libre

Hurricane Damage

The 2005 hurricane season was particularly devastating – with the destruction of Hurricane Katrina, and the horrific landslides that buried entire villages in Guatemala. Nicaragua was also affected, with many losing their homes, crops and animals, in the north and east of the country.

San Francisco Libre did not entirely escape. In what is becoming an annual event, the 30 km road linking SFL with the rest of the country was cut by swollen rivers. The residents of SFL town were stranded for 15 days – 12 of which they endured without electricity or drinking water (which is electrically pumped into storage tanks).

The Mayor of SFL has outlined her plans to seek government funds to construct flood defences, including a 2 km dyke, to protect the road.

Thank you

The RSFLA would like to thank Cable and Wireless and the Park United Reformed Church for their generous donations last year. We're also grateful to everyone who contributes to the RSFLA by monthly direct debit.

Reading San Francisco Libre Association — RSFL Trust, Registered Charity No.1006736

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