

# MALTIOX

News for Donors to the Association of Indigenous Women for Holistic Development (AMIDI)

Number 5

Spring/Summer 2010

## A VISIT WITH ANA MARIA

Last month Ana Maria Chali Calan, the leader of AMIDI (Association of Indigenous Women for Holistic Development), visited Sonoma County as a guest of Slow Food Sonoma County North. On behalf of the AMIDI members, she would like to express their heartfelt gratitude to everyone who made the trip and its activities so rewarding. Ana Maria left feeling inspired and supported by the generosity and genuine caring shown to her. Ana Maria got home safe and sound and was met at the Guatemala City Airport by the colorful country bus that services Pachay las Lomas, a 2 1/2 hour drive away. It was full of villagers welcoming her home.



Ana Maria co-teaching a cooking class with Lia Huber at Relish.

## OUR EXPANDING PROGRAMS MEET AMIDI'S GOALS



### Scholarships

AMIDI members (left) value education both for their children and for themselves. Our educational program currently gives scholarships to 36 students: 12 in elementary school, 11 in middle school, 12 in high school, and one in college. AMIDI members, some of them illiterate, would like to learn ways to increase their agricultural production in a sustainable and organic manner. Classes are offered in a nearby town in beekeeping, coffee cultivation, and growing traditional medicinal plants. Thanks to donors, AMIDI members will soon be back in school! Actually, for some of them it will be the first time. (continued on page 2)

Maltiox, pronounced mal-ti-osh, is a Kakchiquel Mayan word that means "thank you". Kakchiquel Mayan is the language spoken by our scholarship students, and the sentiment is theirs.

### Weavings

As highly accomplished weavers who have sold their weavings at the National Textile Museum, the women would like to develop a market that yields a fair price for the work they create on their traditional back strap looms. To that end the weaving sales, especially the one at Jimtown Store in July, were a huge success. The weavers are very grateful for the income, recognition, and appreciation of their skills. The total sales, all of which goes to the weavers, amounted to \$4,049; but that's not the end of it. Should you want to join those who have placed custom orders for napkins, guest towels, runners, and placemats, please contact Marilee Wingert. Her email address is [marileewingert@earthlink.net](mailto:marileewingert@earthlink.net). One of AMIDI's goals is to maintain and strengthen their culture. By purchasing their weavings, buyers are a part of that effort.



Stephanie Chiacos ready to sell AMIDI weaving at Jimtown Store

*“Our women have known how to struggle for our culture. It's women who preserve the art of weaving ; we are the weavers. Our knowledge concerning weaving, our art, is very advanced. That's why many people everywhere consider the Guatemalan woman to be an artist. And weaving is an art.”*

Nobel Peace Prize winner

Rigoberta Menchú, a Guatemalan Mayan, 1983.

### Disaster Relief

Tropical Storm Agatha swept through Guatemala this summer, causing mudslides, flooding, and washed out roads and bridges. At Pachay las Lomas, crops and livestock were buried under mudslides, mud invaded several homes, and the village water system was badly damaged. In response to this disaster, we started a fundraising effort that has provided \$5,125 for AMIDI. These funds will be used to replace coffee trees, traditional medicinal plants, corn/bean seeds, and livestock that were lost in the mud slides. A special donation of \$3,000 was given to repair the water system that was damaged during the storm. This increased relief funds to \$8,125. The villagers plan to expand the reforestation program on their very steep land. As part of their community service, scholarship recipients participate in reforestation.



AMIDI members and scholarship recipients working together to clear mud from the village.



## IN HER OWN WORDS

During her recent visit to Sonoma County, Ana Maria touched many people, in part because of her dedication to AMIDI. At one point someone asked her about her view of leadership. This is what she had to say: “My father was a leader in our community. So from an early age I was aware of that role. When I realized that I had leadership abilities, I began to see myself as a tool. I decided to commit myself fully to benefit my people, especially the women. For me that commitment is essential. In any leadership situation, I begin by proposing a goal. With great care and always in a calm state, I begin the fight to reach the goal. There are many obstacles along the way such as *machismo* or discrimination toward women—even more so if they are indigenous. I never expect money for my work. God will compensate me. I am content with my life’s work. I look for opportunities to teach leadership skills to women. For instance, sometimes I cannot attend all of the activities to which I am invited. I used to ask Gabriela [one of the master weavers] to go to the meetings as a representative of AMIDI, but she said that she wouldn’t know what to say. I kept asking her, and now when she sees that I cannot accept all the invitations that arrive, she offers to go in my place.”



Ana Maria Chali Calan

Ana Maria was invited to talk to the members of the Cloverdale Rotary Club while here. As she does not speak English, she watched the process of their meeting. While the group is comprised mainly of men, their leader is a woman. Ana Maria was impressed. “All those men were so respectful. When the leader spoke, they all looked at her and listened. No one carried on another conversation or left the room. When she called on them, they promptly stood up and responded. They listened attentively to me too. This gives me some ideas, some inspiration.”

## MEDICINAL PLANT PROJECT

Two of AMIDI’s goals are cultural preservation and health education about a wide range of topics, including subjects that are delicate for the Mayans to discuss—like family planning and AIDS awareness. These two goals have been combined in the newest of the AMIDI projects. Earlier this year, four AMIDI members and four scholarship recipients took a short course in the cultivation, drying, and use of traditional Mayan medicinal plants. The class was offered by a well organized NGO that was founded and is successfully run by a group of Mayans. They have a high tech laboratory and a growing business making and selling tinctures, soap, and pills. For a year, Ana Maria served on their board of

directors and in the process developed the idea for the medicinal plant project. Unfortunately, storm Agatha washed out many of the AMIDI plants, but the women will replant. The NGO has given them two solar dryers and has promised to buy all the product that they can produce. One stumbling block to the project’s success is the lack of sufficient water during the dry season. The village water system, now damaged, is not designed for agricultural use, and they do not have the means to buy a spring located at the top of the mountain. At this point, the women will grow plants that will mature during the 6 month rainy season. Watch for more information about this project in the next issue of Maltiox.



If you would like to make a tax deductible donation to the AMIDI scholarship or disaster relief fund, please make your check payable to Global Community Works, a local 501 ( c ) 3 non-profit that manages the funds at no cost. Please send the check to:

Slow Food Sonoma County North  
P. O. Box 1494  
Healdsburg, CA 95448

THANK YOU.

### THE NOW FAMOUS STOVE PROJECT

Months ago a group of indigenous women from another region of Guatemala visited Pachay las Lomas to see the fuel efficient, well vented, safe, wood-burning stoves that we funded for the AMIDI members. Always looking for a chance to empower women, Ana Maria Chali Calan taught them how to conceptualize and submit a proposal for similar stoves. On August 20th of this year, their 500 stoves will be inaugurated. Ana Maria, asking only for bus fare and food, will be one of the guests of honor at the celebration.



### AMIDI SUPPORT—PEOPLE TO PEOPLE

Your donations to AMIDI—for scholarships, safe stoves, and disaster relief—represent personal, direct aid to deserving people in need. Every dollar goes to AMIDI. There is no bureaucracy involved: no government agency, no telemarketing, no paid advertising. This is a people to people endeavor. A Sonoma County non-profit, Global Community Works, serves without charge as the project's fiscal agent.

Regarding the weavings, the Central American Free Trade Agreement specifies that no customs duty be applied to handmade goods coming from Guatemala to the U.S., so the price of AMIDI table linens is not inflated by taxation. All proceeds go to the weaver.

We are on Facebook now.

Visit

AMIDI: Mayan Women Who Farm  
and Weave.

The photo album contains images of the weavers and their fine work.

### A COMMON PERCEPTION

Development professionals who work worldwide have a common perception about disadvantaged people who live in isolated places, like the women of AMIDI. Although these women are not sophisticated or well educated, they are among the most resourceful, hard working, resilient, courageous, tenacious, and hospitable people in the world. It is ironic that the least valued and most neglected among us can be the best of who we are. They can set a standard for who we can become. Some of the people who met Ana Maria felt that way about her. For some of us who have visited the AMIDI women in Guatemala, this description holds true.