

Only One America Peace Park Continues in the City of Tela, Honduras

Carol Pobanz
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Since January 2017, youth from all corners of the western hemisphere have worked side-by-side in the tiny city of Tela, Honduras. There, they have already laid the foundation for a beautiful peace park which has brought members of the community together and excited citizens young and old. The youth have travelled from their homes in North, South, and Central America, as well as from the Caribbean, to participate in various phases of the project.

The Only One America project began in Nutley, New Jersey with one woman's vision. Carol Pobanz, a New Jersey Unificationist, wanted to promote peace in a world that was only becoming more divided. Believing that young people could bring about the positive changes that she hoped to see, Ms. Pobanz decided that it was time to do something. Thus the idea for a peace park was born. "This park was conceived as an artistic expression of strength and solidarity of intra-American youth," she explained.

Honduras' Central American location often means that it is at the crossroads of drug trafficking and gang violence. Such problems have caused the crime rate to climb ever higher in some Honduran cities. Ms. Pobanz hoped that by focusing on Tela and its surrounding regions, youth and community leaders might promote a paradigm shift in the struggling nation and in the greater western hemisphere.

Together with Mario Salinas, Director of Universal Peace Federation (UPF) Honduras and co-director of the Only One America project, Ms. Pobanz has brought groups of young people to Tela on three separate trips since January of 2017.

This year, Mr. Salinas and Ms. Pobanz decided to connect the summer trip to the UPF Latin America Summit, which kicked off in Brazil this past August. The theme for the summit was Interdependence, Co-prosperity and Human Values, and the co-directors chose to give this year's project the same title.

Five USA participants, including one Brazilian-born participant and nine Hondurans, gathered for the latest phase of the project, which transpired from August 10 to 22. Youth leaders Nurlyn Salinas, Edgar Castillo and Alejandro Castro Buscas took initiative and acted as Program Manager, Art Director and Work Coordinator.

The youth were not the only ones promoting the vision of a peace park. Members of the Tela community have worked tirelessly to maintain the park since the first phases of its development in 2017. This year, Tela elected a new mayor to the city, and the mayor's son, a young architect, was enthused to help design additional installations for the park. Over the summer, youth and community members collaborated with

one another to install a peace monument, paint the fence, complete a mosaic bench, and build a pergola over the park's gazebo.



Education throughout the latest project phase focused on the potential for youth to be world-changers. In reflecting on her experience, one youth said: "I take Tela away in my heart, and at the same time I leave my heart in Tela, in the heart of the children. I feel I have accomplished so much to have taken part in this peace park project. I received so much joy from the children, the parents and the neighborhood people."

Another volunteer reflected similarly saying, "I am greatly satisfied because I have served others and see the happiness in the people, but mostly I feel satisfied because the work was done from the heart."

The community once again expressed gratitude to everyone who came to complete the latest phase of park-building. "The bonds we have forged in this community are substantial," says Ms. Pobanz, who plans to bring more youth to Tela in either the winter of 2019.

Family Federation for World Peace and Unification of New Jersey, Women's Federation for World Peace of New Jersey, and the YMCA International Service Organization of North Jersey helped finance the Only One America Project.

