

# Grassroots Connections



Celebrating 35 Years of Solidarity

**WCCN**  
Investing for Social Change



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# 35 Years of WCCN: Letter from a Founder



Dear friends,

WCCN began in the 1980s as part of a movement for peace in Central America and has evolved into an organization that works to lift people out of poverty in Latin America through microfinance and innovative investing. However, I find that words like "poverty" or "microfinance" are abstractions that fail to capture the joys, sorrows and pleasures of the people we invest with.

My own involvement with WCCN began in the '80s. I remember helping organize shipments of medical aid and humanitarian relief to assist victims of war and other crises. As the wars in Central America wound down in the '90s, we recognized that our mission needed to change as well. Long-term solutions required that we address economic issues.

We organized a study tour in Nicaragua to explore ways to promote trade and investment. We were a small organization back then – we still are – and initially we considered importing and selling ceramics and similar crafts in the US. I remember the day we visited a small pottery workshop in a poor neighborhood. Members of our group were sweaty and parched from heat. And though the poverty in that community was clear, a woman noted our thirst and offered us oranges. That's what I remember best about my involvement with WCCN: everyday reminders that people are capable of great compassion, generosity and kindness.

During that trip, WCCN discovered that we could achieve more by enabling people in the US to invest in Latin America and help 'micro-entrepreneurs' lift themselves out of poverty.

Throughout the years, we have witnessed countless stories of hardship and triumph over adversity. The people we serve have strength, wisdom, resilience and enormous potential yet to be realized. Seeing and hearing their stories inspires me. My involvement with WCCN has shown me that victory over poverty is possible. It occurs through the countless small triumphs of individuals cooperating to build better lives.

In 1984, the year WCCN was founded, over 39.2 percent of people in the world lived in extreme poverty. Today that number stands at 10 percent. During that same period, the percentage of people in Latin America living in extreme poverty has fallen from 15.9 percent to 4.1 percent. WCCN's work has contributed to this progress and is part of humanity's larger movement to meet the needs of people everywhere for food, health, and dignity.

I've always felt grateful to be part of WCCN, an organization that builds lasting change. WCCN has connected me to wonderful people who have devoted themselves to its mission and goals. Thank you all for your friendship, and thanks to everyone who has given or invested with WCCN. You have made a difference in the world.

Sheldon Rampton  
WCCN Founder

# Celebrating 35 Years of Solidarity

On June 22nd, over one hundred people gathered to celebrate WCCN's 35 years of mission in Latin America. It was an evening of friendship, storytelling, music, and thanksgiving at beautiful Lake Windsor Country Club as we recognized all of the people who have contributed to WCCN's mission over the years.

We were graced with live music from Madison's Angela Puerta Band, a delicious dinner, a silent auction, and service awards recognizing the contributions of our community. Veronica Herrera, our keynote speaker and the CEO of our Nicaraguan partner MiCredito, traveled to Wisconsin to share more information about how the people we support are dealing with the ongoing political and economic crisis.



**"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."**

Veronica Herrera (above) quoting a well-known proverb.

*Veronica Herrera, CEO of our partner agency MiCredito and President of the Nicaraguan Microfinance Association, joined us at our anniversary celebration. She spoke on MiCredito's impact, the current civil conflict in Nicaragua, and the importance of microfinance to helping families regain stability. Veronica also stressed the strength embodied in solidarity and working together to solve the world's problems.*

## Reflection & Recognition

The 35th Anniversary Celebration gave us a moment to reflect on all the good that WCCN has been able to accomplish. Since our beginnings, we have helped people in many different ways, including investing over \$134 million in the working poor of Latin America, growing to reach over 20,000 people each year and becoming a global force for good.

Father Tony Kroll, one of the many volunteers who have made our success possible, was honored with a WCCN Lifetime Achievement Award. Over the last few decades, his tireless efforts to promote our work have brought in an incredible \$500,000 in investments and donations.





# From Executive Director Will Harris

*Excerpt from Will's comments at the 35th Anniversary Celebration*

"At WCCN, our history and our work is predicated on the idea of people helping people. In our most current iteration we ask people in the United States to share their resources through investments and donations, with people in Latin America. Those people then return those resources, plus some interest to our investors.

"If you go on an investor trip with us you'd meet some of those folks in Latin America that you invest in. They are just like you and me, working, raising kids and finding the occasional moment to relax and enjoy life, and microcredit helps them do all of those things a little easier.

"That said, the world has never been static and the present moment is no exception. We are living in a time of rapid change, not only technologically, but politically and environmentally. We currently invest with the working poor in six countries in Latin America, four of them in Central America.

"Central America is squeezed by two tectonic plates which lead to frequent earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. It is also bordered by both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans which bring annual hurricanes, but can also bring droughts. To top it off, the region has been the victim of wealth extraction for over 500 years, which continues to this day and tends to support political corruption, the drug trade and gang violence.

"And yet, as with most things, there is a balance. For every bad thing happening in Central America, there is a beautiful thing. People persist there, as they have for millennia...and they are some of the kindest and most sharing people you will meet in your life. They are our neighbors, they are our friends, and they are just trying to get by."



*Guest speaker Ayan Omar with Tony Kröll who received the WCCN Lifetime Achievement Award.*

*The Angela Puerta Band provided music during the celebration.*





# WCCN Visits Guatemalan Partners

This past July, WCCN staff traveled to Guatemala to visit its partners on the ground. Our staff try to visit every partner at least once a year to ensure good relationships with its partners and to make sure they continue their good work.

On this occasion, we made our way to five different communities to speak with our partners and borrowers from ADICLA, SERVICUA and ADISA.

It is clear there continues to be a great need for credit in Guatemala. The borrowers we met with were very appreciative of WCCN and its investors and donors for the support they receive. Below are some stories of the diverse businesses and people we met with.



*Interviewing a SERVICUA borrower in Chichicastenango, Guatemala*



## **Gloria Sajuc, San Andres Semetabaj**

Gloria had experience with a solidarity group 20 years ago, but left when other members stopped paying back their credits. She decided to take another chance on credit when she needed money for her children's schooling. Gloria used her credit of \$1000 to invest in a new business growing oyster mushrooms that she sells to a local association. She's now managing her own credit and the profits are making a difference in the lives of her and her family. "It's improved our lives. Our children are able to study and we can eat better. More vegetables and what we like."

## **Martin Chavez, Solola**

Martin is a longtime client of ADICLA. He's a small farmer cultivating onions, potatoes, carrots and radishes on 3 cuerdas (roughly equivalent to 3 acres) of rented land. It's hard to find affordable land in the area, so he continues to use credit to finance his farm. ADICLA is flexible with payment when the harvest isn't good. Credit has allowed him to keep his children in school. He has five children from ages 12-21. "I don't have a lot to give my children, so the inheritance I can give them is an education."





## Campaign for Nicaragua during the Economic and Political Crisis

We are happy to announce that we are just \$2,000 away from completing our \$550,000 campaign to support the people of Nicaragua in their time of need! We are so thankful to all who have donated and helped us to reach this target in record time.

If you are interested in helping us to finish out our goal, please send us a donation in the enclosed envelope and let us know it is for the Nicaragua Campaign.

With your support we have already begun to help our partners through restructures, new investments and technical support. Our partners and their borrowers are most appreciative!



## WCCN Supporter Spotlight: Marilyn Townley

Starting this quarter, we will begin sharing more stories about the supporters who help to bring the mission of WCCN to life! Our first installment of this series focuses on Marilyn Townley, a longtime supporter of WCCN who provided a large matching gift for our Nicaragua Campaign.

Marilyn Townley's story begins in Illinois, where she was born, educated and raised four children. However, she always maintained an international focus. Townley was a volunteer for student exchange program AFS for a decade, helping to find good homes for incoming international students from all over the world. She came to learn about WCCN 10 years ago through her church congregation, as well as friends who been on WCCN study trips to visit borrowers in the countries we support.

As someone who had taken various mission trips to places like Indonesia and the Philippines, Townley had seen the experience of the working poor and the difference that microloans made in their lives. In her own words, "If you understand how different life is in different places and how fortunate you are, you have to feel the need to support others in a difficult world."

Marilyn gave WCCN a lead gift of \$216,000 last year to start its Nicaragua Campaign. We wouldn't be where we are today without her or the help of all of our investors and donors.





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## WCCN in the Community

We will be attending this year's **Fair Trade Holiday Festival** on **December 7th** at **Monona Terrace** from **8am to 3pm!** WCCN will be selling Fair Trade pottery from our partners in Nicaragua, photographs from our photographer Michael Kienitz, and more! Stop by and say hello!

### WCCN Staff

Will Harris, Executive Director  
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## WE HAVE MOVED!

**211 S. Paterson Street, Suite 260, Madison, WI 53703**

WCCN has moved offices! We are now located at 211 S. Paterson Street, Suite 260, on Madison's East Side nestled between East Washington Avenue and Williamson Street.

We are excited to be back in the heart of Madison and the East Side!  
Drop by to catch up and check out the new space!

For any questions or to learn more, call us at 608-257-7230 or [info@wccn.org](mailto:info@wccn.org).



Founded in 1984, Working Capital for Community Needs (WCCN) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit impact investing fund whose mission is to create opportunities for access to microfinance, services and markets to improve the lives and communities of the working poor in Latin America.