

## Our First Goodwill Ambassador

### Elkin Enrique Fonseca Zapata Returns Home to Nicaragua

By Janet Foerster  
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Direct engagement with the children, families and elders of the participating communities is an essential aspect of our culturally focused project management strategies. In October 2006, Janet Foerster, President of innerCHANGE associates international and Project Director for CHESS was conducting a preliminary site visit to one of the 12 target community schools of Villa El Carmen. During this visit, Ms. Foerster met Miriam del Socorro Araica, the grandmother of eight-year old Elkin Enrique Fonseca Zapata. Elkin had fallen from a tree 14 months prior and had hit a fence post that fractured his larynx and transected his trachea. Elkin was emergently operated on in Managua, but because the country does not have ENT surgeons with expertise to handle this type of injury, and the family has no healthcare, Elkin was left with a metal tracheotomy device and very little medical care or follow-up treatment. Miriam Araica, the grandmother, entreated the CHESS project to help her grandson, one of five children (ages 5-12) under her care after their mother died three years ago.



In January 2007, during the Gran Pacifica annual shareholder's meeting in Managua, Dr. Edward Barksdale, Associate Professor of Surgery of Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh was appraised of Elkin's situation. He provided an on-site medical examination of Elkin in his home in Villa El Carmen, and subsequently presented this as a potential humanitarian global health care case to The Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, one of two preeminent centers in the United States for Laryngo-Tracheal Injury treatment. Because of the great need and urgency of this case, Mr. Roger Oxendale, the CEO of Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, authorized bringing Elkin to Pittsburgh for evaluation and medical care resulting in potential surgery. The Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh agreed to cover the hospital and medical care costs for this complex reconstruction surgery.

With innerCHANGE spearheading the multifaceted effort, arrangements were made to bring Elkin and his grandmother to Pittsburgh. This proved to be no small feat as passports, powers of attorney, visa interviews, and appropriate medical documentation were necessary; the costs incurred were covered by Gran Pacifica. Airline accommodations, ground transportation and translation services were arranged. Carl Ross, Professor at the Robert Morris University's School of Nursing, and his family opened their home to Elkin and his grandmother while they were in Pittsburgh. The Rotary Club of Pittsburgh, which is leading the Rotary effort in supporting the CHES project, covered local support costs for Elkin and his grandmother.



On May 1<sup>st</sup>, Elkin, his Dona Miriam, Janet Foerster, and Becky Milano, of the American Airlines and Airline Ambassadors program, departed Villa El Carmen. Elkin spent his pre-operative time soaking up the culture of Pittsburgh and the love of his hosts. This remarkable 9-year-old boy persevered through uncomfortable pre-operative examinations regardless of the fact that he was in a foreign environment.

On May 17, Elkin underwent the surgical procedure necessary to repair his larynx thereby returning his power of speech and enabling him to attend school; this procedure opened doors to a future that, without it, Elkin would never have known. Elkin remained in an induced coma for 7 days to allow his body to recuperate; once weaned from the medication and respiration devices, Elkin's recovery was dramatic. Within just 10 days, Elkin was able to return to his home-away-from-home with the Ross family and continue his recuperation.

On July 21, Elkin, his grandmother, his gracious host, Dr. Carl Ross and Janet Foerster, returned to Nicaragua completing a momentous journey for this young man. Elkin will continue to convalesce with family in the community of Los Cedros and will receive ongoing medical treatment from the Villa El Carmen Health Clinic; the prognosis for his future is excellent physically, mentally and spiritually.



He returned to his school, Calle Nueva upon his return to Nicaragua. He is rapidly catching up on the last 2 years of living with a debilitating and life-threatening injury. Because the Children, Health, Education and Supporting Services project is a long-term, 28 month commitment, our CHES team in Nicaragua and the US will continue to provide the necessary social support through this recovery phase for Elkin, his family, his school and his larger community of Villa El Carmen.

