

Making a Difference through the International Friendship Club

By

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My second day in Vallarta in 2020, I joined a Mexican cuisine cooking class sponsored by Vallarta Abuelos (VA), one of approximately 15 charitable organization supported by Vallarta's International Friendship Club (IFC). These classes were but one way VA seeks to fund support for disadvantaged families in the 5 de Diciembre neighborhood. Being an abuela or abuelo entails supporting a "grandchild" in school by paying school fees, for uniforms, transportation, books, etc. An abuela or abuelo may become close to the grandchild's family. One may support the child and family in additional ways, making a meaningful contribution to the community.

After a few months in Vallarta, I became an abuela to a 16-year-old boy who hopes to play pro-baseball one day. I try to see my "grandson" weekly, and to go to his baseball games. We have had some great lunches, joined by his younger brother and, sometimes, by his mother who usually is working. The boys typically have two meals. Pancakes, eggs, bacon, followed by spaghetti and meatballs, for example. They are growing rapidly and use a lot of energy in their sports. We try to speak in English at lunch as learning English is part of the VA program. We also often go out for brunch with live music. Some abuelos pay for guitar lessons or other enrichment classes or activities for their "grandchildren." Several of us have helped with dental work. Or provided laptops. The need is great.

The International Friendship Club supports the Vallarta Abuelos Backpack Program where, each Fall, backpacks for about 600 children in Colonia 5 de Diciembre are purchased and filled with school supplies. These backpacks and supplies are invaluable in helping the kids to get off to a good start at the beginning of the new school year. Each "help up" makes success more likely.

Another favorite of mine, supported by the IFC, is Instituto de Artes Musicales Puerto Vallarta (IAMPV). Both the Salty Paw Jazz Orchestra and the Vallarta Symphony Orchestra fall under the IAMPV umbrella. Salty Paw is a youth jazz orchestra, and a lot of fun to listen to. The name for this jazz group comes from the fact that in the 1950s it was common for children in Puerto Vallarta to go shoeless until they were about 10 years old. Pata salada means "salty foot," a phrase used to refer to those from the coast who get their feet salty in the ocean.

I can't wait for the **Salty Paw benefit concert this Sunday, March 5, 4:00 PM**, at Oscar's Restaurant on Isla Cuale. The concert is a fundraiser jointly hosted by IAMPV and the IFC proceeds from which will be used for musical education scholarships and instrument purchase and repair. Tickets include the concert, appetizers and a cocktail . Get yours today at the IFC website, ifcvallarta.org.

How can the IFC support organizations such as Vallarta Abuelos and IAMPV? One of the chief ways is by offering **top-rated tours of exceptional homes and villas in the Vallarta area**. Each Tuesday and Wednesday, at 10:15 a.m., air-conditioned buses load up outside Sea Monkey, on the Malecon at Aquiles Serdan, to see approximately 3 or 4 one-of-a-kind homes, escorted by IFC guides who make it their business to make the tours interesting and fun. These tours are

rated in the top 10 (out of 411) tours and activities in Puerto Vallarta on Trip Advisor. I went on one such tour last week, and visited an hacienda turned into an art museum, a home high up in Conchas Chinas bursting with a collection of Mexican art, a sprawling estate with panoramic views in Boca de Tomatlan, and a tastefully decorated home in Gringo Gulch. Tickets are available on the IFC website, ifcvallarta.org. They must be purchased in advance; no walk-ins. Because these homes are often located on steep slopes paved with cobblestone, good mobility is essential.