

WIXARIKA RESEARCH CENTER

April 27, 2013

A Solar Wood Drying Oven, Carpentry School and Forestry Program for Tuapurie's Bachillerato Comunitario Tamaatsi Páritsika

In October of 2012, The Wixárika Research Center agreed to participate in the development of the new campus for the Bachillerato Comunitario Tamaatsi Páritsika after being formally petitioned by the Community of Tuapurie¹ at their general assembly. This independent preparatory school offers students who complete elementary school the opportunity to continue their basic education in the Sierras without being forced to move to a distant city. In the past, students who wanted to attend high school had to leave their families and community at a very young age. This was not only costly for their families but kept them from participating in the religious traditions and yearly cycle of ceremonies. The schedule of holidays for all Mexican schools is based on the Christian and Mexican calendars which do not coincide with the yearly cycle of important Wixárika/Huichol ceremonies. Students could only return to their families during the summer months because of the distance and cost of travel and eventually many never return to their homeland.

The Bachillerato Comunitario Tamaatsi Páritsika was founded on May 28, 2008, and had their first graduating class in June 2012. Four of the full time teachers and the school's director are all natives of Tuapurie who received their college degrees from ITESO² and several classes are taught in their native tongue. Students receive all the classes they need to graduate, enter a university and become prepared for a variety of careers. The expanded development of this school and its unique curriculum will be of great value because it will be tailored to the needs of the community and its youth. The community's goal is to add courses that will train students in trades and skills that are relevant and appropriate for their environment and which will be an asset to them in the near and distant future. Some will undoubtedly go on to college, but for many this new school will offer training that will create new job opportunities at home and support the autonomy and survival of their ancient culture.

In February 2012, the Community of Tuapurie unanimously voted at their general assembly to donate a large parcel of land, adjacent to the old landing strip in Nueva Colonia, for the Bachillerato Comunitario Tamaatsi Páritsika's new campus. The land is ideal for this purpose and has three springs of pure water to support the needs of the school and its programs. Besides building a

¹ Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitlán, Municipality of Mesquitic in the State of Jalisco, Mexico.

² Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Occidente

carpentry school, the community plans include a nursery for reforestation, fruit orchards, organic vegetable gardens, bee keeping and other activities. Once the solar oven and carpentry school are built the community would like to move the existing weaving workshop to the new campus so it forms an integral part of the school. All of the above activities will help generate income for the school through the sale of products produced by the students.

Since the founding of the school in 2008, basic carpentry classes have been taught by those trained in our program between 1986 and 1996, but without the proper equipment and necessary installations to learn advanced skills. This project will build a new, more efficient solar oven for drying wood, install a small portable sawmill, build a well-equipped carpentry school, a small greenhouse for the reforestation program and a structure for storage of the sawmill and dried wood. Wood crafts produced by the students can be sold to help offset some of the schools operational expenses.

The original carpentry workshop, built in 1986, is more than one and a half hours by truck from the location of the new campus and too distant for students to travel for classes. The old solar oven and sawmill are 26 years old and in need of replacement. For this reason the community asked the Wixárika Research Center to locate the necessary funding and oversee the construction of a new carpentry school on the site of the new high school campus.

It should also be noted that The Wixárika Research Center has signed an agreement with the Institute of Wood, Cellulose and Paper from the University of Guadalajara where the new solar oven was designed by one of their professors, Engineer Raúl Rodríguez Anda. Professor Rodríguez will oversee the construction of the new solar oven and train the carpentry students in its use. Designated members of the community who are experienced in the use of the old sawmill, will travel to Chihuahua to receive training in the use and operation of the new portable sawmill prior to its being transported to the community.

It is our goal to begin this project in the fall of 2013, with the construction of the new and improved solar wood drying oven, the installation of a small but efficient portable sawmill and the construction of a building to house the carpentry school. We hope to see this work completed no later than spring 2014. Once done, we will focus on moving the weaving workshop from its present location to the new campus.

Based on our decades of interaction with the Wixárika people and their communities we believe the development of this new and unique campus for the Bachillerato Comunitario Tamaatsi Páritsika and its success to be of vital importance to the Community of Tuapurie, its environmental and human health, and to their continued autonomy.