

La Jaboncillito, Coahuila

EWB UT Chapter EXPLORATION

After humble beginnings, Engineers Without Borders at the University of Texas is off to a flourishing start this year. Despite the fact that the chapter is still in its new and developmental stages, dedicated members waste no time. A team of four students from the University of Texas completed a successful exploration trip, spring break of 2006, to Northern Coahuila, Mexico, a region just fifteen miles south of Big Bend National Park.



Although the goals of the trip were many, the principal purpose was to discover most ideal community for the first University of Texas EWB



project. The most important criterion in deciding on a town included the level of community commitment to the project and the need of the people. After days of information gathering and exploring the desert terrain of Northern Coahuila, a community was found: La Jaboncillito, or “J”, as the

members of the team have fondly nicknamed the little town. The team met with the people of La Jaboncillito

and of several other communities in order to establish friendly relationships and to become familiar with the people’s most urgent needs.



The People



A branch off of a larger town called La Union, La Jaboncillito boasts a population of around forty people, or eight families. The majority of the people here and in the surrounding area support themselves through selling Candelilla wax to the government. It is difficult and

backbreaking work, each person bringing in around only fifty dollars a week for his labor. The people drive a fair distance to gather the Candelilla plant, from which the wax is made. The Candelilla plant must then be melted in sulfuric acid and the wax collected.

A small portion of those more well off raise cattle. The people are also eager to garden and cultivate their own food, for both eating and selling, but they do not yet have the water to do so. Helping the community with this problem by designing a water distribution system which would incorporate proper irrigation is a current goal of the Mexico group.

Water

Water is the primary need and most critical concern of the people of La Jaboncillito. Getting water is difficult for them. The water for all uses except drinking is draw in buckets by hand from a well in the community. Water strictly for animals is also pumped into a trough by an old, unreliable motor from another well



farther behind the community. The drinking water must be retrieved from a spring source in a nearby mountain. There is currently a hose system set up to bring the water from the mountain to the town, but the hoses are damaged and have holes in them.

The town members expressed their desire to have water distributed to each individual house from the nearby well, as long as that water would be purified for drinking purposes. They are also eager to have enough water available for daily use, so that they do not feel so restricted in the amount they are allowed to utilize.



Bringing them this clean water is the primary task set before the Mexico Project Group.

Future Plans



This area in Northern Coahuila is a very important one in the eyes of preservation/humanitarian groups. Rotary International and the Natural Conservatory are working in that area to improve existing infrastructure and to educate the people on the

importance of preservation. But they need groups like Engineers Without Borders to help and support them.

The Mexico Project Group is currently planning for an assessment/survey trip to La Jaboncillito in August of 2006, followed by an implementation trip in December 2006 or March 2007. Once the project is successfully implemented in La Jaboncillito, they hope to move on to the nearby town La Union and begin a project there. These are rigorous goals, but the members of the Mexico Team strive for nothing less.

The team learned many invaluable lessons on this trip. They were touched by the tears of the downtrodden, reminded of the needs of a people other than themselves, and refreshed by the simple lifestyle of the people of the communities. They also learned to never eat beef in Mexico, as all four team members contracted food poisoning the last night. Starry-eyed and ambitious, the Mexico Project Group is set to start engineering for the people of the little town called La Jaboncillito.

