

Community Comment
Tuesday, February 16, 2016

This is Erin Dunn of the Fortuna Chamber of Commerce with a Community Comment.

I returned last week from a Rotary mission in Nicaragua. I went with a Santa Rosa club on their biannual trek to the south of Nicaragua on the San Juan River to fit local villagers with eye glasses and sun glasses.

I don't speak Spanish—yet—but I memorized a few words to get me through. My accent was atrocious and I could get through most fittings until the person I was working with had a question, and then I was a deer in the headlights. Luckily, one of the Rotarians grew up in Mexico and did the bulk of the translating for me.

By the second day, the group figured out I would be best utilized by doing sunglasses only. While it was a bit of a demotion, it was where my heart was anyway. I only had to worry about showing different styles, there was no checking to see if they could see better—or worse—with them. I rocked that job. And many of the kids only needed sunglasses and they were fun to work with. The ladies for the most part, loved the glasses with the bling, so I quickly learned what options to give them. Bling is a universal language.

Each day we took an hour boat ride from Sabolos to the school in the village. We stayed in the Sabolos Lodge—rustic accommodations right on the river. There was no electricity in the open air cabins but they did have running water—cold only—and luckily, a toilet. Mornings were glorious—howler monkeys chatting away, cool air, and bug-free. We met for breakfast each morning in the main lodge where we could plug in our electronic devices and hop on wifi.

I didn't feel the same after 4 p.m. each day. The bugs came out and I was miserable, even under the mosquito nets. One night we were late on

the river coming back and the moths—or something that looked like them—were thick over the river. Ick.

Here's the deal. I'm not a camper. I'm not a jungle or river person. For 16-hours of the day I was kinda miserable. I had to keep reminding myself I was there for the greater good—and that helped a little.

So happy to get to Managua and a hotel with hot water where I could wash my hair. We spent a day in Masaya and Grenada, and saw the bright red glow of the Grenada volcano from several miles away. Loved it.

People say that Nicaragua is what Costa Rica was like 30 years ago.

Nicaragua is in the heart of the Zika Virus outbreak. Yet I didn't hear anyone talking about it. I double checked with people that know Spanish, and they confirmed that the talk wasn't of the Zika Virus and there definitely was no sense of panic.

It made me wonder if the lack of immediate concern was because our media has hyped it, or because their media hasn't. Either way, I'm happy that the US has taken a lead on trying to control the virus.

This has been Erin Dunn with a Community Comment. Adios.