THE CHILDREN OF COSTA RICA

By Nicole Leonard

On Monday, March 19th, I and nine students embarked on a journey that I will never forget. Under the banner of the Foundation of the International Medical Relief of Children (FIMRC) we spent seven days in Costa Rica. The primary focus of the Costa Rican branch of FIMRC is to provide a medical clinic in the Alajuelita community for the children of Nicaraguan refugees that do not qualify for Costa Rica’s health care system.

The following day we all piled into a van and made our way to the FIMRC clinic. The first two hours were spent touring the three communities and it was mentally, physically and emotionally exhausting. When you see the infomercials asking you to donate $0.25 a day to help a child, you never really get it until it’s right in front of you. Some children wore mismatched shoes. Some kids wore no shoes, and one little girl wore shoes designated for the same foot. Some houses did have four walls, a roof and a cement floor, but the majority of the houses were pieces of corrugated tin with one room and a dirt floor. The uppermost community was, in my opinion, the worst off. The main water source for every household was a narrow stream that was used as a dumping site for a pig farm. As the rest of the week passed and we spent more and more time with the kids, I begin to notice something. Despite their living conditions, every child we met was happy. They had their family, their friends and a place to play. Shoes got in the way of playing soccer, the dirt floor was a good place to draw and a game of tag was better than any Barbie doll or Power Ranger. They all laughed, played and fought just like every other child in the world.

GTrailblazers

By Carola Conces

A group of Honors Program students is blazing the way towards becoming a chartered organization at Georgia Tech. Will Boyd, Martha Lesniewski, Jonathan Saethang, and Sydney Shaffer organized the alternative spring break trip, GTrailblazers 2007 on the Appalachian Trail (AT), that combined backpacking and community service.

Twelve students were selected to go on the trip out of a pool of over twenty applicants. With funding from the Honors Program Student Challenge Fund, REI Atlanta, and the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, the students traveled to Harper’s Ferry, West Virginia, where they

“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”

-Leo Buscaglia
FEATURED STUDENT

Martha Lesniewski

Materials Science & Engineering major, Martha Lesniewski, has been busy. One of founders of GTrailblazers, who organized a campus-wide alternative spring break trip to hike and help maintain the Appalachian Trail, she also serves as Howell Hall Council treasurer, and plays on the Women’s Club Frisbee team. Her research in the Advanced Materials Laboratory garnered her 3rd place in the Undergraduate Research poster competition this semester – quite an accomplishment for a first-year student (here shown explaining her work to Randy McDow). She loves Tech’s wide array of opportunities. “I can do anything here with planning, enthusiasm, and determination.” Her favorite class this semester is the Honors Program Seminar: Energy, Environment and Society “because we have speakers from campus and area businesses that show us new perspectives on the energy crisis and what we can do about it.”

She has quite a summer planned -- from studying Spanish in Mexico and Spain (where she will see the running of the bulls) to visiting family in Poland. An experienced world traveler, the one place Martha has to see before she dies is Madagascar “maybe because of the lemurs.”

GTrailblazers (cont.)

met up with volunteers from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and Potomac Appalachian Trail Club. In addition to hiking the trails, they helped to improve a slippery side trail that was prone to erosion. This serious manual labor involved using steel hand tools and rock drills to cut steps out of slabs of sandstone, and then transporting the steps with an overhead cable system to lay them on the slope. “By helping build a side trail on the AT prior to backpacking, we hoped students would better appreciate the hard work put into building and maintaining the AT, as well as the hiker friendship surrounding the AT and its community,” Lesniewski remembered.

“Backpacking in the rain for two days made for muddy trails and wet gear, but our spirits remained high,” recalls Boyd. He looks forward to future camaraderie-building endeavors on beautiful and challenging trails.

Words with a Nobel Laureate

BY MONICA HALKA

On April 12, HP students had the good fortune to be able to meet and ask questions of Nobel Prize winner in physics, Dr. Klaus von Klitzing. The Honors Program is deeply grateful to the Honeywell Nobel Laureate Lecture Series and the College of Sciences for allowing us this rare and exciting opportunity. Dr. von Klitzing, who won the prize in 1985 for his discovery of the quantized Hall effect, was both enlightening and amusing on everything from science to society.

On the burden of being a Nobel Prize winner: “People assume you can answer anything and expect you can solve all the world’s problems.”

On the power of being a Nobel Prize winner: “People really listen when you give an opinion. I got a letter from a person jailed in Russia asking me to help, so I wrote a letter to the Russian government. Within only a few days they called me to set up a meeting.”

See pg. 4
The Poet
A poem by Christopher Olson

I woke up this morning and my mouth was gone,
but it’s not so bad compared to other things I’ve lost.
You learn to love the silence, and really hear the world,
like picking figures from a cluttered canvas.

Sitting at the table, doing last week’s puzzle
even though it’s already been solved.
Still, there’s something about the lack of doubt that comes
from writing down something you’re completely sure is right.

I like to sleep because it’s the only time I’m free
of dreams, and I know I’ll wake up in the future:
A few more hours I’m alive, a few more hours lost to time.
I still wouldn’t answer the phone if I had one.

I collect photos from the obituaries;
A few inches of paper means preservation.
I don’t own a mirror because I’d rather not hear
what it has to say about my own condition.

Each night before I go to bed I pray I may have speech again,
but this ink is all I have, so please listen:
I call myself a poet, but I’m really just a liar
because my favorite form of fact is fiction.

Mamma Mia! Still Rocks Broadway
By Sarah Gilbreath

One thing everyone should do in New York City is see a show on
Broadway. So, while Jen, Erin and I were there for part of spring break,
that’s exactly what we did. There were plenty of shows to choose from, but
only one I really wanted to see – ABBA inspired Mamma Mia! The play was
first released in London’s West End, the British equivalent to Broadway, and
though I had actually been in England during its run there, I wasn’t able to
go. It was an equally big smash when it came to America, and ever since I
had read nothing but rave reviews. By the time we got to New York, it had
lost none of its glitz and appeal – plus, most of the other shows were things
like Disney’s Beauty and the Beast, which we’d all seen performed live.

I don’t know how we got so lucky, but even buying tickets the day before
the show, our seats were great. And the show itself was amazing. The plot
focuses around two women, Donna, a single mother who owns a Greek inn,
and her daughter Sophie, who is getting married. Sophie wants her father to
give her away at her wedding, but no one knows which of three men her father
actually is. She invites all three to the wedding in hopes of learning which one is
her dad. At the same time, her mother, an incredibly strong woman and former
lead singer of the 70’s girl band Donna and the Dynamos, has to grapple with
her feelings towards Sophie’s possible dads (all men who left her) while trying
to remain independent. All of this happens during the course of the few days
leading up to the wedding. The music and dance sequences are remarkable.
The plot is more distinctive than anything that Hollywood has produced in decades,
and the whole thing is just really fun. Somehow the curtain call managed to
segue into a dance reprise, and then the next ten or fifteen minutes just became
a pure concert, with the entire audience on their feet, singing and dancing along
with the performers. The best part for me, however, came after the show. The
cast paired with the Broadway Cares charity (all proceeds go to fight AIDS),
and for a donation we could purchase hats, mugs, CDs, and best of all, pictures
of us posing with Donna and the Dynamos in all their 70’s glory. (See color
insert.) Don’t we look ready for Broadway? ABBA, thank you for the music!

Political Masturbation
An Op-Ed by Liam Rattray

This past spring break some of my more politically and socially inclined friends and I went
on a “road trip” via public transportation up the east coast to DC, Philly, and NYC. Along the
way we made a point to stop by DC for the March on the Pentagon that was being held to call
for the withdrawal of combat troops from Iraq. (Bring our brothers and sisters home alive
and in one piece, mates!) We all believed, and still do, that the current American presence in
Iraq is a huge catalyst for anti-American sentiment and terrorism. Even more importantly, we
should respect Iraq’s democratic sovereignty and end the occupation for the very simple reason
that the majority of Iraqi citizens demand it! Why should we Americans suffer the human and
financial consequences of a war that is not being fought for our own people? (I’m not talking
about corporations here, the war is certainly benefiting KBR, Blackwater, and Halliburton.)

Many people have asked me what I thought of the march, and to be honest I thought the
march was like masturbation – it was great for those involved, but didn’t affect the world or
policy. As we saw during the civil rights movement with the Selma to Montgomery marches in
1965, however, a march can be extremely effective in consolidating and bringing awareness to
a movement. Sadly, only one in a hundred marches makes headlines and brings great attention
to the problems at hand. I attended that march this spring break because by just being active,
one person increases the likelihood of “getting off” a movement for change and justice.
Two Hours in Barcelona
How a moment of idleness left me coming home empty-handed

BY EMILY PECAR

I consider myself a rather seasoned traveler; I’ve been out of the country almost ten times, visited seven different countries, and even traveled through parts of Europe on my own. When I started on my trip to Morocco and Spain this spring break, I never expected I’d come home practically empty handed after only a miserable few hours in Barcelona.

My three travel companions and I had made it seven days and three continents without any major problems, so twelve hours before we were supposed to go home I had stopped being worried about the basics of traveling. Big mistake. As we rolled into the Barcelona train station, fatigued and homesick, the boys were immediately drawn to the station’s McDonald’s to savor the delicious local delicacies, of course. We piled our bags behind our table; I remember thinking that they were not protected as well as they could be, but I also remember not having slept properly in 8 days and assuming that as long as we could see them the bags were fine. After finishing our $9 Big Macs I turned around to gather my stuff. Jacket? Check. Suitcase? Check. Backpack? My heart started to race. In my exhaustion I had left it on the outskirts of the pile, open to the walkway by the table. I looked around desperately for any sign of it, my anxiety rising with each second. I ran out into the station to look, but still no sign. I knew it was gone but couldn’t fathom the idea. My head was fuzzy with panic. I was stuck in a city where I didn’t speak the language. I had to catch the last train out in order to make my flight in the morning … and I had just lost almost everything I had.

Despite how experienced you think you may be as a traveler, situations like this can come out of nowhere. In about ten minutes I went from having an excellent, worry-free trip to losing everything…my wallet, money, camera, cell phone, Ipod, books, clothing, medicines, pictures, everything. My only saving grace was that I had just taken out my tickets and passport and put them in my pocket – otherwise I might still be in Spain. With all the things that I learned from my first time to Africa and the international leadership conference, I never expected to learn one of the biggest lessons on the way home. Needless to say I’ll never be letting my bag out of my sight when traveling ever again. Never let your guard down, not even for a minute. Oh, and stay away from McDonald’s; the food is horrible, expensive, and to locals you are screaming, “Steal my stuff!”

Laureate (cont.)

On energy: “The sun effectively gives us all the useable energy we have on earth. We need to make solar power a main goal of our future energy plan.”

On politics: “In Germany, once a year the Ministry of the Interior invites all the Nobel Prize winners in the country to a meeting to tell them what is wrong in the government.”

On succeeding in your career: “You have to really really love your work.”

On society: “Why is it OK to be ignorant about science? More people should have some idea, like in literature or music. Imagine if you knew so little about music that you had to ask ‘Who is Beethoven?’ We need to keep science in our culture.”

On being urged to hurry to the next meeting: “For what am I here? The students! Let’s not let protocol get in the way.”
Morocco

By Maddie Stoddart

Ano kountoo fe al-Maghreb. I was in Morocco. It is one of those incredible, ludicrous, surreal, amazing experiences full of ideas that completely change your perception of the way your life works. You stand there and think about how ridiculous that actually sounds, “For my spring break, I went to Morocco.” Who says that? One of those dreamlike moments, and there I was. In the middle of Morocco surrounded by over two hundred amazing individuals and nineteen different cultures, living the dream… maybe I should start at the beginning.

In September, when I was just a Recently Acquired Techie, I was dragged to an student organization information session by the Honors Program's very own Emily Pechar, and when I say dragged, I mean dragged. I had no desire to walk across campus (I'm lazy) to hear about another student organization intent on my membership (I had walked enough on Skiles even after that first month to recognize that pattern). But in that information session, I found exactly what I wanted in an organization, and it was called AIESEC. AIESEC is the largest entirely student-run organization focusing on leadership development and cultural understanding through international exchange. It offers around 4500 international internships in over 100 countries per year for students and recent graduates of over 800 universities.

Long story short, I joined. And through AIESEC, I have had so many opportunities that I would not have had otherwise. Which brings me to Morocco.

I was granted the opportunity to attend the Middle East North Africa Leadership Development Seminar (with financial assistance from the HP Student Challenge Fund) taking place in Bouznika (an incredibly tiny town on the Atlantic coast of Morocco) with about 240 delegates, including the aforementioned lovely Emily Pechar. I met people from nineteen different countries, ranging everywhere from Brazil, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates, to the Netherlands, Bahrain, and Tunisia.

It was an incredible five days, and “incredible” hardly does them justice. I had the opportunity to not only learn from these intense cultures and amazing people, but also had the opportunity to be a positive ambassador for America to nations that don’t necessarily see the best in the United States. I actually had the chance to completely shape the perceptions of Americans to a few people, as some of the delegates had never actually seen an American that was not on television. Believe me, that is an eye-opening and rare experience. I discussed everything from marriage traditions in Bahrain to Islam and women to freedom of speech in the Gulf, and learned something extraordinary each time. Imagine chatting over dinner about family life to someone whose father had a second wife, or discovering facets of a religion that tends to be demonized in American media that are so moving and thought-provoking it changes your perspective on the entire region. I learned the concept of Insha’Allah, or “If God Wills It,” and the impact that has on one’s mindset. At one point in the conference I was pushed into the center of a circle of dancers to test my Middle Eastern dancing skills, and to my surprise was told by an Egyptian that I could fit in her country. I found myself watching the sunset over the minarets of Rabat’s mosques and the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, listening to the beauty of an Islamic call to salah (prayer).

If you ever, and I mean ever, have the opportunity to go to Morocco, TAKE IT. The people there are the most hospitable, gracious, and interesting people I have met in a long time. Or if you have the chance to go anywhere abroad, don’t let it pass you by. You will experience a new culture, change your perspective, meet incredible people, and see something that could take your breath away. And it could quite possibly, most probably, change your life.

http://www.honorsprogram.gatech.edu 105 A. French Bldg
You made it.
You made it through your first year at Georgia Tech, and the rest should be easy. OK, it won’t be easy; really, but at least you now know what to expect. Just do it, as the Nike people say.

And the Honors Program – you made it, too. You made it work, you made it lively, you made it fun, and you made it even better than we had imagined.

Those of us who planned the Honors Program – who selected the students, picked the dorm, designed the courses, organized the events – had no real idea in the beginning how everything would work. We did what we thought made good sense to us as academics, and then we hoped for the best from you, our students.

We got it. We got it because you “got it.” You understood, almost without being told, what it was we were trying to accomplish in the Honors Program. You challenged and charmed your professors, you made a home and intellectual haven out of Howell Hall, you asked questions, you had ideas, you pushed and prodded us a bit, and above all, you set the tone that will shape the future of the Honors Program for years to come. “Pioneering partners” we called you in the beginning, and that’s certainly what you turned out to be.

So you made it – you made it happen, and you made us very, very happy. Thanks.

Greg Nobles

You made it, now what?

Well, we’ve got plenty planned for our future – with most of the ideas coming from you. Some of the best thoughts include students as mentors, a fall retreat, the greening of Howell and a carbon footprint challenge. With 120 or so new HPsters joining us in the fall, we’ll be counting on your brainstorming to help us understand how to keep our group as wonderfully cohesive as it’s turned out to be. It’s a sign of your passion for the program that some of you will be peer leaders in Howell and some will be TAs for our core courses. These efforts will certainly maintain a bond between our first- and second-year students.

Our special topics courses for the fall have been generating quite a bit of enthusiasm, too. From The Political Economy of Soccer and Globalization from the Inside Out to Drugs of Natural Origin and The Contemporary Enlightenment, these courses are certain to stimulate intriguing discussion, debate and inquiry. This semester we are holding a poster session for a couple of our seminar courses. Next year our goal is to have every special topics course participate, in order for all our students to be able to share their interests with the campus as a whole.

We are excited about the coming year and look forward to your input!

Monica Halka

Well folks, it’s nearing the home stretch. This has been an extraordinary year and I’m sorry to see it end. I started working in the Honors Program July 5th, 2006 and one of my first tasks was to make copies of everyone’s admission files. Yep, I had to find and copy 108 files. It wasn’t fun, but, as I started copying, I couldn’t help reading. Reading about a person’s visit with family in South America that started out as research for a school project that became strengthen of familial bonds, reading about someone’s accomplishment of losing weight before senior year and reading about someone’s emergence as a leader amongst a group of less than supportive peers, I became excited and eager to put a face with a story. As FASET became the first week of class and the first week of class became finals week, I got to know more and more of you guys (I still haven’t met David Sotto. David I’ve heard so much about you, please come by the office) and was impressed with the drive and determination of this group.

Now as I laugh over ninja squirrels and rearrange fall semester schedules, I truly feel ‘honored’ to be part of a program that has students who are willing to try something new when it comes to their education. I can’t wait to see what next semester holds. Cheers!!!

Nicole Leonard

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Jen, Sarah and Erin with Mamma Mia Cast

Alajuela, Costa Rica

Costa Rican Volcano

Jen, Sarah and Erin with Mamma Mia Cast

GTrailblazers ready for Appalachian Trail

Maddie Stoddart and friends, AIESAC Leadership Conference, Morocco

Emily and Maddie in Morocco