



# DRSEA INFORMER

Volume I, Issue 4: A Publication For Your Reading Enjoyment

***La Lectura Es Fundamental (Reading is fundamental)*** – Remember when your mother used to read to you at night, tucking you into bed to narrate one of your favorite bedtime stories? The image probably has stuck with you all of your life and it was the beginning of your interest in reading, right?

The DRSEA, in an effort to “brand” itself, is looking to create a reading program for kids patterned after a tradition in the cigar industry called *el lector de tabaquería*, or cigar reader. In both Cuba and the Dominican Republic, the cigar industry, even today, has long employed a reader to entertain the cigar rollers while rolling and cutting the leaves. The *lector* reads aloud from newspapers and novels to help while away the hours. The rollers show their appreciation by tapping their *chevatas*, or cutting knives, on their tables. The readings came to be regarded as a social and cultural right, and spurred many cigar rollers to learn to read, and also to social activism.



In keeping with the tradition, we are looking to develop a *Lector de Semana*, or reader of the week, sending people out into Dominican communities to read aloud to children. Hopefully, we

can engage some baseball players to do some of this, as these role models in a baseball crazy country can definitely encourage children about the joys of the written word.

We are hoping to get books donated so that the children can take them home and have their parents, brothers and sisters, or others read to them. At the same time, we will be spreading the word about the DRSEA and hopefully developing a feeder system for the school.

Tell us what you think of the idea and how to refine it. Again, your feedback is always welcome and appreciated.

### ***Encuentre A Eván (Meet Eván)***



Meet Eván, a doe-eyed 4-year-old I met in the barrio of San Carlos, one of the poorest sections of Santo Domingo. The neighborhood is typical of too many communities in Santo Domingo and other cities and towns throughout the Dominican Republic. Corrugated tin covers many of the roofs that house a maze of tiny compartments with no glass in the windows to keep mosquitoes out, bare cement floors, a single bulb swinging from the ceiling, a sink and a toilet. Often, a family of five and more crowd into a single room, the only privacy, if you can call it that, is a walled-off bedroom. It is life at its most basic, yet the community is alive with the sounds of music, of children playing and dancing in the streets, adults slamming dominos on rickety tables, the smell of *platanos maduros*, *arroz con habichuela* and *pollo* simmering in the hot air to the strains of *salsa* and *bachata*.

Eván seems like a happy child, full of curiosity about the stranger who has come to visit. We carry on a conversation; my Spanish remains limited, but is getting better every day. He is the type of boy you might call all-American, if this were not the Dominican Republic, and most certainly not after you learned the history of his brief life.

Before he was born, Eván's father, a reputed drug dealer, was gunned down in the streets of San Carlos. After this mother gave birth to Eván, she developed an infection but was too scared to go to the doctor. The poison spread through her body, racking her with pain as she vomited blood and bile. She was dead by the time they took her to the hospital.

The community, poor as it is, responded by taking Eván under its collective wing. An elderly man has made sure the young boy has food and a place to sleep, and clothes other children have outgrown end up on him. He has hundreds of eyes keeping watch, shielding him from further harm's way. The village *is* raising Eván!

After hearing Eván's story, I was in tears as I saw his elderly "guardian" come and get his charge, the two walking hand in hand down the muddy street. Tears come now as I write this because I wonder what will become of this small boy, so full of wonder, so inquisitive. He has already had a harder life than most kids can imagine, in a country where poverty traps people for generations. If you are poor in the Dominican Republic, the chances are better than 50 percent that your children will be poor, and your children's children will share that poverty, in a never-ending cycle.

Thanksgiving is not a Dominican holiday, but I will be celebrating it with a few other Americans I have met here, and I have much to be thankful for. And I realize even more how blessed I am when someone like Eván touches my heart.

I am going back to Eván's neighborhood next week, because I enjoyed the visit very much. People invited me into their home to share their dinner, and then brought strong, hot, sweetened *café* to sip as I smoked an after dinner cigar and watched the sun set, its last rays reflecting off the tin roofs. But most of all I enjoyed the children, laughing and playing, carefree and joyous because, you see, children don't know when they are poor. But they do know when they are loved. And Eván is loved.

### ***Linda Haithcox Es Una Persona Especial* (Linda Haithcox is a special person)**



Another key member of the DRSEA Board of Trustees, Linda Haithcox is Executive Director of the National Organization of Black County Officials, Inc. (NOBCO). She is responsible for the overall daily operations of the organization, including fiscal management, personnel and staffing matters, national programs development, private and public sector partnerships.

Linda has more than 25 years of experience in organizational management including diversity policy creation and program implementation, political relationship building, organizational management, public relations, special events management and budget development.

Her career has the benefit of varied industry experiences, as well. She has worked for and with Fortune 500 corporations; with leading institutions of higher education; with African American owned corporations; with Capitol Hill special interest political groups; with numerous national and state political campaigns, including the 1992 Presidential Campaign; and with two of America's highly respected national organizations: UNCF and the NAACP. Prior to joining NOBCO she was the Vice President of Corporate and Political Affairs of The Romar Group, Inc., a California based minority-owned apparel manufacturing company.

During her tenure with the NAACP, she directed the Economic Development Department by managing various projects including the Fair Share Program with more than 50 corporate agreements; the Corporate Advisory Council; the Commerce and Trade Council; and the Economic Reciprocity Initiative, which produced annual reviews from the lodging, cable, banking and telecommunications industries.

Linda, the founder of Women Love Sports Too! (WLST), a support organization for females interested in sporting industry careers and professional interest, chairs the development committee of the DRSEA.

## **LETTERS TO THE DRSEA INFORMER:**

### **Alex Rhodan of Chicago asks: How is the economy in the Dominican Republic?**

Surprising, very stable, in light of how things are in the United States and others parts of the world. The Dominican Republic went through its own recession a few years ago and rebounded well because the crisis was considered internal, and foreign exchange factors, namely goods and service exports, including tourism, were not affected. The peso is strong against the dollar, making this island a good investment opportunity. Real estate is among the least expensive in the Caribbean and the country is actively seeking investors in a variety of industries including real estate, technology, environmental, and biofuels, to name just a few, and, because the Dominican Republic has a free trade zone, the time is ripe for the expansion of export opportunities. One of the DRSEA's top advisors also advises potential investors on investment opportunities, so let us know if you would like to know more. The benefit to the DRSEA is our advisor has promised to donate a percentage of any income to the DRSEA, so helping yourself helps the DRSEA.

### **Stephen King of Reston, VA asks: How do I go about making a donation to the DRSEA? I think what you are doing is great and want to support the cause.**

Stephen, thank you in advance for your *very generous* donation. We are in the process of updating our website to allow direct contributions at [www.drsea.org](http://www.drsea.org). In the meantime, you can write a check or money order to the DRSEA, Inc., 600 Anita Street, #16, Chula Vista, CA 91911. The DRSEA is a not-for-profit corporation and you will receive a letter thanking your for your contribution that includes the DRSEA EIN number. Only through support such as yours will the DRSEA become a reality.

*Charles S. Farrell*

## **DRSEA Contact Information in the Dominican Republic**

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