



PRIMER FOR VOLUNTEERS  
Corazón House Building in Mexico  
Self Storage Economics December 11, 2004 House Build  
Questions and Answers

***What is Corazón?***

Corazón, Inc. is an all-volunteer, nonprofit, nondenominational corporation formed in 1978 to serve the poor. Our goal is to help raise the standard of living amongst the poorest of struggling families within our reach. We have learned through hard experience that we need to work with the family over a period of time, assisting with many of their needs, but also requiring them to help others as they are capable. We call this integrated approach to service "*familia* Corazón", and all of our projects conform to the *familia* Corazón approach to helping our neighbor. We believe in providing as many volunteers as possible with the incredible experience of directly helping and working with the poor, rather than just asking people to send money. We are loosely organized but highly effective! (PS: Your contributions welcome & tax-deductible.)

***What is "House Building Plus"?***

House Building Plus is our new approach to construction projects for the poor in Mexico. For twenty years we have built small homes in Mexico, becoming quite comfortable with the process. In the past, we considered the house building to be an isolated project, separate from the normal activity of the village. We have learned that we have become part of the village life in various parts of Baja California, and as such, we can have a much greater impact on the living conditions of the residents there through a few simple "additions" to our normal routine. The "Plus" refers to those other projects that, in the past, sometimes we have "added" and sometimes we have not, depending on the weather, time, energy, finances and a few thousand other factors. So now, every Saturday that we build a house, we will also work on a specific theme that will help the various residents of the village, not just the one family who receives the new home. Further, we will tell the residents of the village that we are coming on a particular day, so that they can work to earn the right to take part in the activities that we will bring. *More Projects + Commitment + Discipline = Hope. House Building Plus Hope = A better future for all of us.*

***What kind of house will Self Storage Economics build in just ONE day?***

First introduced in 1996, is our "Super Build" house, or currently named "House Build", which is 16 feet long x 20 feet wide built on a concrete slab (poured ahead of time by the village residents as a community work project). This house includes four windows, tiled kitchen counter, stove, vents, sleeping loft, storage shelf and provisions for a future indoor toilet. This design lends itself to the *familia* Corazón program, because the family now has shelter, but can earn future help with finishing the bathroom area, drywall and other improvements. This house can be assembled very quickly, and as a result, we have been able to build nine of these homes in a single day with adequate financing, leaders and volunteers.

***Who receives the houses?***

The poorest of the poor; we seek out those who have no one else to help them, or who have a particular emergency need. The family typically has several children. At times, there is only one parent, but we do not have absolute requirements. We look to see that the parents are doing everything they can as well as the condition of their current house (discarded plywood, pallets and/or cardboard for walls with a dirt floor and a leaky roof). The family must have the right to be on the land (either by ownership or rights of possession) so we are assured they can stay in the home.

***How do you choose these families?***

Over the years, we have developed a network of individuals who live in the various areas we serve. These include shopkeepers, teachers, ministers and village leaders. They introduce us to the families that seem to be struggling, but we make the final determination. During several visits, over a period of two months to a year, various members of our Research Committee meet with the family members and attempt to discover if this is a true Corazón family. We look for those who are in the greatest pain, where their lack of a secure structure is leading to the destruction of the family. We teach them that we are only here to help them because others have helped us, and that they need to help others.

***How much does a "House Build" project cost, and who pays for it?***

The "House Build" will cost \$5,500. If you are not able to attend on December 11, 2004 we would appreciate any and all donations as Self Storage Economics will be responsible for the entire \$5,500 plus any additional expenses.

### ***How long does a Corazón house last?***

We estimate that our current designs will hold up for about twenty years with very little maintenance. We've been building houses since 1978, and we have adapted and improved our design to better meet the needs of the families who live in them. Several of our very first houses are still in use; a few others have been remodeled, rebuilt and occasionally removed to make room for a new, larger home, as the family is able to prosper due to better living conditions.

### ***Why do you build in Mexico when there are so many homeless in the U.S.?***

Generally, the need is greater and it is easier to make an immediate change in a family's standard of living. Mexico has less of a welfare "safety net" for its poor, and fewer national resources to support them. Also, we could not legally build our house in the U.S. because it has no plumbing or electricity, although the house is structurally sound.

Corazón is all volunteers, and we are capable of having outreach programs locally when and if leaders come forward who are willing to run the programs. Through our research in developing the *familia* Corazón program, we believe the same techniques will work to help families in the United States when we find and develop leaders and volunteers who are ready to work here.

### ***Where do you get your volunteers?***

From all walks of life, from all faiths, from all ages, and from both sexes! We have no dues, nor formal membership, and we welcome any person who wants to help others. As an individual or family, you are welcome to join us for one trip without any further obligation, or you may come as often as your schedule and energy allow! If you are part of an organized group, we ask that you sign up to sponsor your own project, rather than bring all of your members unannounced to someone else's project. In this way, we can better plan for both trips. Building experience is not necessary; a helping heart creates helpful hands. We have a strong crew of experienced construction leaders to guide and supervise, and you will soon learn.

### ***I work in construction; what can I do?***

Plenty! The construction skills we use most are framing layout and supervision, operation of power tools, and reading plans. The leadership skills we use most are organizing the building activities so that everyone is included and working productively, especially our unskilled novices. The experience of "hands-on" helping by our volunteers is more important to us than getting the job done efficiently. Encouraging your friends in the trade to volunteer time or donate materials is also valuable. Be aware that our work is planned to make the best use of the volunteers' time, so the day may flow differently than you are used to on the job.

### ***I'm a novice at construction; what can I do?***

Pounding nails is basically pretty simple, and we provide plenty of nails! But there are a lot of other jobs: digging holes for the foundation, painting the siding and trim, tile setting, laying the linoleum, installing the door and windows, and fetching and toting materials. Each month carries a theme for projects to help in the village in which we are working, so you may find yourself handing out vitamins, helping at a mini-clinic, creating a library, planting trees, patching a neighbor's roof, or some other project. There is always reading to the kids, playing soccer, and rewarding those who have done their homework with an ice cream!

### ***I'm too old... weak...unskilled... clumsy... lazy... uncoordinated to be useful in house building.***

Then stop thinking of it as house building. This is a day to share with the poorest of your neighbors. Bring whatever skills and energy you have, and together we will create new hope for those living in the dirt. Read all of our material very carefully-- you will find there are many ways to serve the poor!

### ***Do I need to bring tools?***

Corazón has a limited supply of tools. If you want to build, you should bring your own hammer, nail apron and work gloves (with your name on each one). If you are a contractor by trade, bring your work belt and tools. We have all of the power tools and generators that we will need. Paint brushes, rollers, and trays are also needed.

### ***Should I bring donations of used clothing, candy, etc.?***

PLEASE DO NOT BRING GENERAL USED CLOTHING! When we think of the poor, we often think of clothing, but in truth, clothing is not the prime need of the families we are visiting. These families need better protection from the elements, better cleanliness, and a better future. To this end, please bring jackets, shoes, tarps, blankets, hygiene & school supplies, etc. While you may get a kick out of giving candy to the kids, we need to bring dentists to pull all of their teeth after you leave. Kids will get just as excited about school pencils and toothbrushes as they will about candy (and they will learn to care for their teeth and their school work). *Please make every donation a lesson in better living, not just a convenient way to discard unwanted items.* As part of the *familia* Corazón program, we now have work projects for the local people of each village where we are active. These projects are for the benefit of the families and their community. Anyone who helps us with these projects may "exchange" their labor for the donations you bring. This has proven to be a great system to help those who struggle and discourage those who beg.

### ***Can I bring my children to help?***

Teenagers can be great workers, and much of our support comes from youth groups. We also like to broaden their horizons by giving them a Third-World exposure. They will learn from the experience if you are willing to teach them ahead of time about the nature of poverty, work with them one-on-one during the project, then, counsel them after the trip, so they understand what they have seen. Children under fifteen should be accompanied by an adult on a one-to-one basis (because of the steep terrain, power tools, unvaccinated dogs, dirt, accessible outhouses, etc.).

### ***What else should I bring?***

Wear or bring layers of clothing (t-shirt and shorts underneath, long pants, warm jacket for the chilly morning); winter days can turn out to be hot and sunny. A hefty breakfast and lunch, and a cooler with plenty of ice and drinks. Sunscreen, a visor or cap, toilet paper. A little money for dinner in San Diego or emergencies. A "go-with-the-flow" and "I'm here to learn" attitude. A camera and an extra set of clean clothes. **Lunch:** The family you are building for will make you a lunch of rice, beans, and tortillas. It is cooked with potable water and oil, not lard.

### ***What about "going to the bathroom"? ("¿Dónde está el baño?")***

The facilities are primitive. There is no running water or electricity where we build, so plan to either go native (i.e., an outhouse) or go without going. Bring your own toilet paper.

### ***Why do we have to carpool and caravan?***

We typically do not make a final decision as to which family to build for until the morning of the trip. It is impossible, therefore, to alert you ahead of time that we will meet you at a certain point in town. We also want to take as few cars in as possible because parking is often limited, and caravans make it easy to form carpools.

### ***Where and when do we meet to caravan to Tijuana?***

**At 6:00 a.m. at the Ramada Inn in Chula Vista.** Take the 5 south to San Diego County, then the 805 south to Chula Vista; exit at "E" Street (seven miles north of the border), turn right at the bottom of the freeway off ramp, then right again into the Ramada Inn parking lot. Snacks, gas, and Mexican insurance are available here from 6:00 on; if you plan on eating at the Denny's across the street, arrive by 5:30 and don't delay there, because we will be gathering together at 6:15am for a quick safety talk and **we will leave the parking lot no later than 6:30am.** We will not wait for stragglers, and we will not go searching for you. If you are interested in staying at the Ramada Inn on Friday night you can call for room reservations at (619) 425-9999. Address: 91 Bonita Road, Chula Vista, CA 91910

### ***Why do you start so early in the morning?***

Crossing the border is easier and faster at 7:00 a.m. We can't predict what delays we might encounter and need to allow extra time if we run into a problem. In hot weather, we like to finish the heavy work early. Also, only truly motivated volunteers will meet at 6:00 am.

### ***If I drive my car, should I get Mexican insurance?***

This is up to the driver; we recommend it. Corazón has insurance only for its own vehicles. Mexican insurance is about \$10/day and is available after 6:00 a.m. at our Chula Vista meeting spot. Mexinsur: phone 619.425.2390. Due to time constraints, you may want to purchase your insurance through the mail ahead of time. *If you must purchase insurance at 6:00 am, be advised that we will not wait for you.* Therefore, if you have a large group, you can save time by having one person go into the insurance office alone with all of the registrations and payments. This is much faster, since the employee does not have to explain all of the details to each of the drivers.

### ***But I don't want to drive my car in Mexico...***

There is usually room for a few extra people in the cars going into Mexico, at our meeting spot in Chula Vista; but since everyone is a volunteer, we never truly know how many spots will be available. (PS: If your car is not reliable, you should not drive in Mexico.)

### ***When will I get back home?***

This varies from trip to trip, anywhere from 8:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. is typical. There are many variables during the day, so it is impossible to know exactly when we will be done. While you may leave early if you need to, we would prefer that all volunteers stay for the entire day, especially on their first trip (we don't want you to miss the satisfaction of seeing the completed house and being part of our closing prayer). You will never forget the look of the family when they receive the house from us.

### ***What happens if I get injured in Mexico?***

Corazón stresses working carefully and safely, and we have never had an injury requiring hospitalization. What might be just a minor mishap in the States could turn into a major mess in Mexico because we work far from medical help, and the facilities that are nearest are not as sophisticated as the ones we are used to. We always have a first aid kit with us, but getting to a stateside clinic can take up to three hours. We strive hard to prevent injuries, and restrict use of power tools to experienced adults. You can help, too, by handling tools carefully, especially when working close to others, and by making sure that you don't let tools, lumber, or yourself fall on others. If you feel insecure in any situation, ask a leader for a better/safer way to do it, or let someone else handle it. The trip leaders are authorized to stop all activity if unsafe procedures are noticed. We will not consciously risk your safety or health in the interest of speed or achievement.

### ***What will I get out of this?***

A long day in the hot sun away from your normal Saturday activities and companions... Tired and sore muscles... Dirty and dusty... Fraternization with an incredibly diverse but like-minded group of volunteer workers... A rudimentary knowledge of general construction techniques. First-hand experience in a "Third-World" environment, just hours from our affluent communities. Amazement at what an incredible effect fifty volunteers working for one day can have on the rest of the life of the family we build for. Satisfaction at having done something immediate and permanent to help those born into less fortunate circumstances than yours. A heightened perspective as to what is truly important in life, and what is not.

### ***How can I sign up to go?***

If you belong to a group that is sponsoring a build, just sign up with them. If you come on your own, you don't need a "reservation"; just get the current schedule (see above), and pick your trip. If you pick one that is sponsored by a small group, you'll be busier and more needed. *Please do not bring a large group unannounced.* Our general rule is that if you can all ride in one car, you may come anytime. If you need more than one car, call ahead to schedule a good date. It would not be fair to the sponsoring group to be overwhelmed by other groups on their special day.

### ***What if it rains?***

According to conventional Corazón wisdom, "it never rains on a Corazón trip". There have been dozens of trips where rain was predicted, or rain seemed imminent, or it rained on the freeway on the way down, but cleared up when we arrived at Chula Vista. We strive to always bring the trucks, tools and leaders to Chula Vista, and make a final safety decision there. You will be pleasantly surprised! If you are still unsure, you can call our answering machine the night before. Any canceled trips will be announced as part of voice mailbox #7.

### ***Where can I get more details?***

Corazón, Inc. is a tax-deductible, 501(c)3 nonprofit, charitable corporation. Our Tax id numbers are Federal: 95-3527450; California: D-8641100. Corazón, Inc., P O Box 2669, Laguna Hills, CA 92654. 949-830-7494; fax 949-830-7429. Since we are all volunteers, you will usually get the answering machine. Leave us a message and someone will call you back.

### ***Any questions regarding the Self Storage Economics December 11, 2004 "House Build" please contact:***

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Thank you for your support!