

Paper Houses Across the Border, Inc.



I am often asked, "How did you get so much publicity?"

The truth is that everything just fell into our lap. The first story was published in the Houston Police Officer's Union paper, "The Badge and Gun", which is read by over 6,000 Houston Police Department employees, members of the city council and members of the media.

A wonderful reporter named Claudia Feldman contacted me about publishing a story about the colonias and Paper Houses in the Houston Chronicle. We were reluctant, but board members and supporters insisted that such a story would draw more people to the colonias. When the story ran, we were shocked that it was a front page story.

Subsequently, People Magazine contacted us and again we were hesitant. Everything being done within our organization was happening in my tiny one-bedroom apartment. I was struggling to keep up with the flood of e-mails, letters, phone calls and even some hate-mail after the Houston Chronicle story. 99 percent of the contacts were encouraging and supportive. However, every donation had to be recorded in compliance with the IRS and I tried to answer every email and letter. People from across Houston were asking to participate in our mission trips. Thankfully, Ms. Christine Wiegman, volunteered to coordinate mission trips.

Again, the potential benefit of publicity outweighed concerns about the publicity. People Magazine ran their first story after intense fact-checking and visiting the colonias. The reader response was so great that we appeared in additional issues and received the 'People Heroes Among Us' award.

Geraldo At Large, CBS Morning News, FOX, and Naomi Judd's Sunday morning show interviewed us about the colonias. Several radio shows, newspapers and blogs also featured stories.

We were completely unaware of how to prepare for the publicity or the results of the publicity. We were later told by news directors that we should have informed other news and morning shows that we were coming to New York for the filming of the Naomi Judd show and were told that other shows would have invited us. We learned that when People Magazine runs a story about a charity, the charity should hire temporary workers to handle the deluge of mail, phone calls and emails that are certain to follow.

There were also some interview offers and queries about potential TV appearances that we turned down. It seemed that the continued focus would be on me and not

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on the colonias, the people of the colonias and the wonderful response of the American people.

We were also filmed in the colonias by several national television companies that hoped to use us as an episode in various television series. Those series were never picked up. (I mention this because several Americans have asked about those shows).

All in all, the media treated us very fair. We were impressed with the amount of research the media did about Paper Houses to ensure our story was accurate and that we were truly using all of our donations to help the people. None of the material was scripted and we had no idea what we might be asked. When the film crews came with us to the colonias we stuck to our normal routine as they requested. We were never asked to do anything out of the ordinary, except to let the camera crew set up before we exited our vehicles.

The media also hired local people in the colonias to handle their paperwork and to obtain authorization to use the film from the various people. They paid those workers the standard American wages, without any prompting from us.

Ms. Feldman of the Houston Chronicle was especially sensitive to the dignity of the people and made a point of interviewing some of the people in total privacy from us.

Although the stories often focused on Bob Decker, they depicted the people of the colonias fairly. Try watching the video footage without the sound. There is the story!