

The San Manuel Pharmacy Warehouse Project
Emiliano Zapata, San Manuel Autonomous County
Chiapas, Mexico



Pharmacy Warehouse under construction.

In a March 10, 2001 interview by Julio Scherer of *Proceso Magazine*, Marcos was asked: “how do you picture misery?” Marcos responded: “A girl that died in my arms; not even five years old, she had a very high fever; this was in Las Tazas, a community where not a single *mejoral* [common antipyretic medicine in Mexico, similar to aspirin] was found to reduce the fever; I had her in my hands when I lost her. We tried to lower her temperature using water, moist clothes, we bathed her and all, her father and I. We lost her. She needed no surgical intervention, no hospital. She needed a little tablet, a *mejoralito*... [like baby aspirin]. It is ironic, because that girl had not even been born, she had no birth certificate. What is more miserable than to be born, to die, not having been known by anyone?”

Las Tazas is a community in what is now San Manuel Autonomous Municipality, the Chiapas Support Committee’s partner municipality. Before the January 1, 1994 Zapatista Uprising, there were centuries without life-saving medicines in San Manuel and the entire region of the Cañadas (Canyons) east of Ocosingo, the nearest city. The estate owners, or *finqueros*, did not make medicines and clinics available to indigenous people; nor did the government provide clinics with medicine. Lack of health care was an important factor in the Uprising and is now a top priority in the construction of autonomy.

The goal of the San Manuel Pharmacy and Warehouse Project is to provide a source of medicine to 60 communities in the Cañadas. There is currently almost a complete absence of medicine in San Manuel. While this is not a new problem in this part of the state, it was temporarily alleviated by the presence of an International Red Cross Clinic. That clinic pulled out of the region almost three years ago, as did Doctors Without Borders and Doctors of the World, leaving indigenous communities to fend for themselves. It became clear that the communities

in the Cañadas had to become self-sufficient with respect to their supply of medicine. They could not continue to be dependent on international NGOs. How does a county of subsistence farmers living below the poverty line begin to accomplish this?

The Zapatista autonomous council of San Manuel County got together with its health care promoters and came up with a solution: a Pharmacy and Warehouse in one building. Included in the cost of the project are: 1) construction costs; 2) training in the handling and management of medicines; 3) training in warehouse management; and 4) the cost of the initial purchase of medicine. Land and labor are donated by the residents of San Manuel. The pharmacy workers will donate their labor to their autonomous county and, therefore, will not be paid. They will sell medicine over the counter in the front part of the building and will keep a large supply in the warehouse for use by local health promoters. Buying medicine in large quantities saves money. Having a pharmacy in the county saves its residents the cost of transportation into town. They can pass on these savings to people in the region. It is anticipated that the stock can be replenished from sales and that the small profits will help to supply the municipality's micro-clinics.

The site selected is Emiliano Zapata, the municipal headquarters. Emiliano Zapata is located at the entrance to the Las Tazas Canyon, the valley of the mighty Jataté River. This location is at the geographical center of the county and is adjacent to the site where a full-scale clinic is under construction. The project is designed by San Manuel's municipal council and its assembly of health promoters, with economic support from the Chiapas Support Committee.