

School in Dominican Republic named in memory of murdered Chelsea youth

BY ABBY JORDAN

It all began five years ago when Anne Post was vacationing in the Dominican Republic. As she sat on the white sand beaches near the edge of the turquoise water, she realized something was amiss. It was a school day, but many children in the small coastal town weren't in class—they were out on the beaches and in the streets, earning money for their families.

What followed was a five-year journey as Post sought to help the poorest Dominican children attain an education. In October, her dream was realized with the opening of Colegio Los Ninos de Leonardo y Meredith, a two-room schoolhouse in Las Terrenas in the northeastern province of Samana.

"It never sat right with me," Post said, referring to seeing the children working. "The reason the kids weren't in school was because they had to help their families. They're at a different level of functioning—they're the poorest of the poor, and I knew I had to help."

Help came in the form of a two-room schoolhouse, two teachers, a cook to provide hot meals, crisp uniforms, backpacks, books, pencils, and crayons. Post, an East Boston resident formerly of Chelsea, funded her efforts out of her own pocket until starting a nonprofit organization last year. In September, Los Ninos de Leonardo y Meredith, Inc., was granted nonprofit status and is focusing its efforts on raising the \$25,000 a year it costs to run the school.

The Leonardo in the school's name is Chelsea's Leonardo Lopez, who was murdered in 2004. Post and her daughter knew Lopez, and were deeply saddened when the Suffolk University student was shot to death outside a Charlestown party.

"The investigation into Leonardo's death remains active and ongoing," said Suffolk County District Attorney's Office press secretary, Jake Wark. "The investigators from the Boston Police Department Ho-

micide Unit and the Suffolk District Attorney's Office continue their investigation. At this time, no suspect has been identified."

The other person Post named the school after is Meredith Quinn of Cape Cod, who was killed in a car accident in 1991. Quinn, 22, was killed just three months after graduating from University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth. Post said she named the school after Lopez, who was 20, and Quinn, who was 22, as a way to keep the memory of both alive. "Education was so important to both of them," she said.

Meredith Quinn's mother, Ms. Millard, traveled to the Dominican Republic recently to see the school. "One of the worst feelings when you lose a child is that over time people will forget," she said. "I was heart struck when Anne mentioned naming it after Meredith. It's a beautiful legacy for my daughter because she was planning to get her master's degree in education."

Fifteen children, split into two classes, spend six hours a day in the white and bright-blue schoolhouse, located just down an alley from the center of Las Terrenas. Some children are provided with transportation to and from school. All get uniforms, backpacks, and the school supplies necessary for learning. "Anything I know that will keep a kid from going to school, we pay for," said Post.

That includes providing the children with two meals a day, including a large lunch of spaghetti, rice, beans, or plantains. "That was my thing, to get them educated, but also to get their needs met," said Post. "Besides an education, they're getting meals and learning how to interact socially."

Before opening the school, Post began helping poorer Dominican students by buying their school uniforms. She then began a pilot school program to send 15 children to private school free of charge. Last January, Post decided that Los Ninos de Leonardo y Meredith would open its own school. All of the donations collected by the non-

profit are spent on the children's education.

Post said she lives modestly in order to provide for the school. Her sleep-study business in Boston has enough flexibility where she is able to spend time visiting the Dominican Republic—and eventually she plans to live there part-time. "I don't need a lot to get by," Post said. "It's well worth it to keep things simple."

Keeping life simple means Post can help kids like Adrean. He has no last name and his age is unknown. Abandoned by his father and uncared for by his mother, he lives with his grandmother in Las Terrenas. Post met Adrean when he was working outside a grocery store, and she estimates that he is 10 or 11 years old. Adrean had never been to school until October when he became a student at Colegio Los Ninos de Leonardo y Meredith.

Each student at the school faces his or her own grim life in Las Terrenas. Not far from the gleaming tourist hotels and attractions are the realities of growing up in poverty. "The kids are going home to all different situations," said Post. "They live on dirt floors, with no bathrooms and self-made kitchens."

Los Ninos de Leonardo y Meredith has plans for the school's future. It wants to expand to five classrooms, either by adding onto the current building being rented, or by finding and purchasing a larger location. The students will prepare to move on to a sister school, Colegio Nuevo Despertar, after the fifth grade. Post said she also hopes to get a physician to visit the school once a year to tend to the children's health.

Los Ninos de Leonardo y Meredith, Inc. is seeking board members, especially those with backgrounds in education. Donations are also being accepted. More information may be obtained by contacting Anne Post at 617-695-0090, or Los Ninos de Leonardo y Meredith Inc., P.O. Box 196, East Boston, MA 02128-0002.