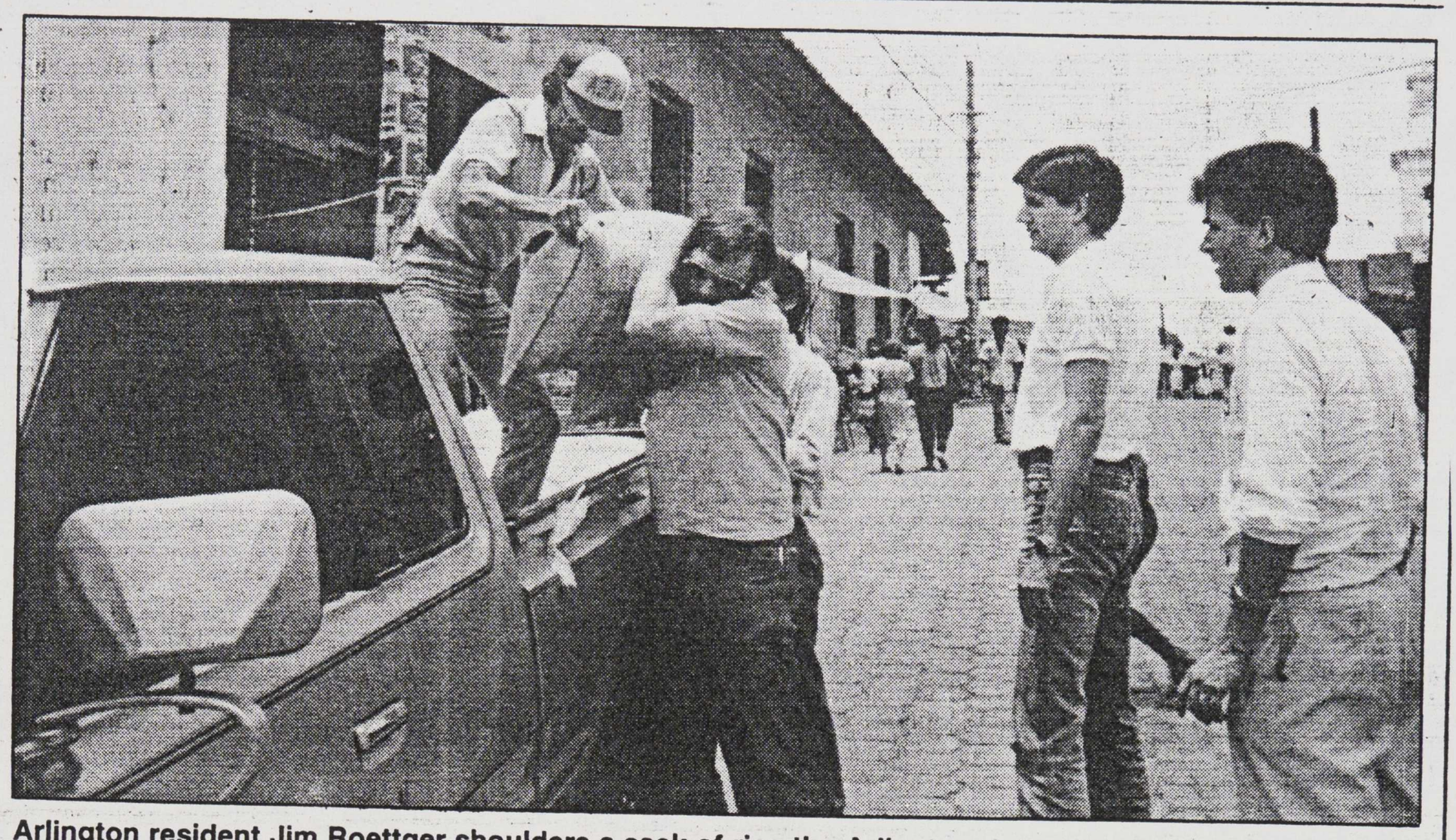
5/18/89 Advocate

SISTER CITY NEWS



Arlington resident Jim Roettger shoulders a sack of rice the Arlington delegation brought for Teosinte as Paul Lessin and Paul Davis wait to help unload the truck.

Reflections on Tesinte visit

By NINA BREW
Special to The Advocate

The Arlington delegation to Teosinte has been back just about a month now; time enough to absorb the trip and events following our return, and to reflect on the value of the Sister City Project.

The events of the trip-negotiations with the military for permission to go to Teosinte; meetings with human, labor, religious and political organizations; the attempt to get to the village; and the night spent with 15 of the villagers in the Chalatenango convent — were described in the last column (April 20).

While we learned a great deal about the situation in El Salvador from our meetings, the most memorable experiences are those with the people from Teosinte. Several things worked to heighten the intensity of those encounters: the great distance (geographic, economic, cultural) between Arlington and Teosinte, the extended anticipation of our arrival in the village, and the disappointment on both sides when we were stopped by the army.

We gave them the proclamation from the Board of Selectmen extending greetings and expressing support for the village's endeavors. They presented us with letters of welcome from their town council, the school teachers and children. We listened to their stories about fleeing El Salvador in the early 1980s.

One grandmother recounted her village being driven on foot by the army through the mountains for seven days without food, and then having to swim across a swollen river in the rain.

We heard the story of their return from the refugee camps last August. They were stopped two days at the border and the international observers were not allowed into the country. They were stopped again for 3 days at Tejutla, the town nearest to Teosinte while they waited for repairs to the road to be completed. They had to do most of the work themselves and carry their supplies and belongings into Teosinte on foot.

We also listened to the vice president of the town council relate her capture and torture in February by the Army, while she and four others were bringing supplies into the village from Chalatenango. She was separated from her companions and held for 3 days, blindfolded, interrogated, threatened and beaten — accused of being one of the guerillas. She is 22 years old and the mother of a five month old baby.

The villagers also told us about their efforts to rebuild Teosinte. Since September, they have rebuilt enough houses for the approximately 70 families in the village. They have brought water to the town — a project that required them to carry 50-foot lengths of pipe 6 kilometers up the mountain while the Army carried out "military exercises" close by. They have planted vegetable crops for the rainy season which has just begun. Four teachers are holding school for kindergarten through third grade, and for adult literacy.

We asked them what they needed most, and they told us they want to complete repairs to the road, including a small bridge over a river that can't be crossed during heavy rains; and to buy a truck to carry supplies and people in and out of the village. The Bishop of Chalatenango, Eduardo Alas requested our help in obtaining documentation for people in the repopulations. They were supposed to be given documents when they came back from Honduras but weren't; and without identification they can be detained by the army and have difficulty travelling, getting medical care, or other forms of assistance.

These requests will be the basis of our upcoming activities here in Arlington. We are also beginning to plan for the next delegation, and are considering ways to bring some one from Teosinte to Arlington. If you'd like to get involved with any of these efforts, please call Judi Paradis at 646-4283.