

YOUR INVESTMENT YIELD IN THE WOMEN OF TIPITAPA

I'm on my way to a sales and marketing training with the John XXIII Institute requested by the COOFEMAR, (Cooperative of Faith on the Move) the cooperative formed by the women entrepreneurs we supported in Nicaragua. But first we stop to meet one of the women who received equipment to launch her business.



Sra. Claudia and Her Pizza Oven

Doña Claudia is a go-getter with big plans. She began a pizza business using her oven, baking one pizza at a time which meant she could only manage about 4 pizzas during the dinner hour. After she completed the microfinance small business training, she received a second-hand pizza oven. She proudly showed me a hand-bill advertising her wares. She sells an average of 18 pizzas a day and even makes specialized orders on the weekends. She's somehow found a way to make deliveries on a bike if needed.

But she's impatient, this energetic woman. She was among the first to join COOFEMAR, and after it joined an association of cooperatives, it began to hold discussions with the government to have its members qualify for a small business program to buy bigger equipment as the cooperative only can make loans of about \$30. The government would pay 80%, the business owner 20%. Doña Claudia was the first to sign up.

Her dream is to also make pastries and she's found exactly what she needs to be able to do so at bargain prices. She's saved up her 20%, filled out the paperwork, government inspectors have visited her to verify her data. The first thing she hits us with is: Why is it taking so long? Luckily we have the director of the cooperative with us, who explains it can be a year-long process to get approval and make a purchase. The agreement between the cooperative and the government was signed in January and it is only May. I marvel at what has happened in the short space of time

since we made our investment 3 years ago: from a group of women supported by John XXIII, to an independent cooperative, to an association of cooperatives, to an agreement with the government. Clearly not fast enough for Doña Claudia.

About thirty owners of "pulperias," corner stands or shops run from home, are here for the training supplied by John XXIII.

Tomorrow another thirty, food preparers: tortillas, bread, pastries, pizzas, etc. The training is



Learning Sales Techniques

professional and extensive, the participants deeply engrossed—this is their livelihood. They learn profiles of customers and of vendors, techniques for dealing with each kind, how never to lose a sale, how to increase sales, the necessity of understanding their products. Everyone loves to play the customer during role play, especially the difficult one. Suggestions pour out on how to handle them, all of these vendors eager to share their experience. Lunch is bought from one of the coop members and they decide to extend the training to get all their questions answered.



As they mingle at the end, Alexandra pulls out her newest products: sparkly barrettes and earrings and I think of my granddaughters. So we agree I'll play the timid customer and she draws on the day's experience to bring me out of my shell. I ask all the hard questions I can remember from the training. She's a real pro: I leave with 4 rhinestone barrettes made in China.

~Marie Keefe