



## Old Brains, New Staff, New Dreams: My First 60 days with RPM

Joel B Groat, Exec. Dir.

Jon Carlos\* looked uncomfortable and uncertain standing in our foyer area waiting for someone to help him. We had just finished our morning round of English and Spanish classes with the usual flurry of activity. People were hurrying to leave, others lingering with questions, some just hanging around to chat because they enjoy being here. As soon as we were free, Jacky (RPM's Director of Operations) and I greeted him in Spanish and asked how we could help. He said he was new to the area and wanted to take English classes. He brought his bike into the foyer, and we sat down to talk about our programs.

We found out Jon Carlos was a medical student from Cuba and had only been in the States for three weeks. He wanted to learn English so he could continue his medical studies here in the USA. My ten years of adjunct teaching in Cuba allowed me to quickly connect with him, since I know first-hand the challenges of living in this island nation. For now, he is living with his brother who took English classes here at RPM several years ago. His brother told him to come see us.

Jon Carlos is the reason we are ministering in this neighborhood. Each month we serve hundreds of people like him who need our help. They aren't looking for handouts, they need education and resources so they can improve their lives and those of their children.

80% of the people we serve speak Spanish as their first language and many struggle to communicate fluently in English. Over half the people in our neighborhood live below the poverty level and many of those are unemployed. The ESL and computer classes we offer are key to their escape from poverty.

### Want to Hold a Brain?

In my first 60 days as RPM's new Executive Director, I've taught classes for students learning English as a second language, taught adults learning Spanish as a second language, and helped students in our bi-lingual computer skills classes.

I've sat in on our workshops on trauma, grief, and loss, and assisted in an English class for Spanish speakers on medical terminology and brain health.

Our guest lecturer was Dr. Irving Vega, a professor of Translational Neuroscience from Michigan State University. He brought in a couple of human brains and let us handle them. Human brains are firm and squishy all at the same time (in case you wondered).



*Dr. Vega hands a human brain to our new RPM Family Worker, Ruth Gutierrez-VanBeek*

## New Staff

In my brief time with RPM we've also interviewed and hired two new staff members.

Lluvia is our bilingual receptionist, and her cheerful greeting is usually the first thing our students and clients encounter when they arrive at our office.

Ruth (pictured with Dr. Vega) has her MSW and is our bilingual Family Worker. She is passionate about connecting our neighbors to the assistance they need and providing them with counsel, guidance, and translation services. She will also coordinate and oversee our workshops and annual coat drive.



*RPM Receptionist, Lluvia Morales*

## New Dream: Turn an eyesore into an icon

Now God has suddenly opened a door that would allow us to move our mission forward. Just last week I met and spoke with one of the owners of the property directly to the south of RPM. It includes a large building and ample parking which we desperately need. When I asked about the property, the owner told me he was putting it up for sale. While we toured the empty building, I shared RPM's mission and work in the community. As we talked, he mentioned two other people had already expressed interest despite the need for extensive repairs.



*Front view of 1538 building and side view of 1538 building as viewed from RPM property*

Now, our RPM board of directors has had their eye on this adjacent property for years, hoping, at the very least, to borrow the parking lot for additional space for our students. I mentioned our interest in the property, acknowledging that we were now third in line. The owner quickly replied, *"No, you are first in line to buy it! I very much appreciate what you are doing for the people of this neighborhood and my first choice is for you to have this property for your ministry."*

So, will you please pray with us and for us, as we consider our next steps? The property includes the 6,800 sq ft two-story building, and another smaller storage building. While it appears structurally sound, it will need a lot of work. Our dream is to turn this eyesore into an icon of hope for our Roosevelt Park community. It would allow us to strengthen and expand our mission of reaching our neighborhood with the Christ-centered services and support that they need for every aspect of their lives.

We so appreciate all you who pray for us, volunteer your time, and share your financial resources with us. Your partnership helps us spread the love of Jesus and the hope of a better tomorrow to those looking for a fresh infusion of both.

May the presence of Jesus be your peace,



Would you like to get involved as a volunteer? Want to become a financial partner? Please contact us and let us know. We can help you with your next steps toward joining our team!

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