



MNRPCV News

Minnesota Returned Peace Corps Volunteers
Serving RPCVs and the Community

Winter 2007

2006-2007 MNRPCV Board

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Mission Statement

To serve Returned Peace Corps Volunteers and the community by providing service to others and fostering appreciation of cultural diversity.

Their Mottos and My Nicaragua

by Tessa Coons

When I joined the PC, the motto was “The toughest job you’ll ever love.” While working in Nicaragua 2000 to 2002, this motto didn’t fit my own experience. Working as a burn intensive care nurse was the toughest job I ever loved. I didn’t love my PC job.

During my PC trial and error, my personal motto became “the toughest job I ever tried to figure out.” I never had such an unstructured work environment in my life. Being a former health promoter helped me get started with my projects. I worked in the schools giving health education classes for K-12th graders – it improved my Spanish and eased me into my community. But other experiments just evolved, the successes, like the week-long teen day camps and the new library, and the string of failures, too.

During my two years, the PC motto changed to “How far are you willing to go to make a difference”? I thought, yeah, this new one fits me. Many times I would ask myself this question, like when riding in a crowded bus and playing the count-the-number-of-people-touching-me game. The highest number was seven, when the floor room only allowed for one foot on the floor and one foot just the toes touching (I really did not mind riding like this, so long as the person spooning me from behind was somebody’s grandmother). I didn’t appreciate riding alongside the chickens though, with their heads sticking out of a bag, eyeball to eyeball with me. I kept thinking about those pointy beaks.

Once, flagging down a taxi in Managua, I decided to try to help one of the poorer drivers. I flagged down a truly run-down taxi. The price he quoted was fine, so I jumped in. The beater of a car was oven hot and the exhaust fumes in the cabin were painfully strong. The driver had one arm and was cross-eyed. As we drove wildly to my destination, light-headed from the fumes, I again asked myself, how far am I willing to go to make that difference? Further than that. Further than the scorpion bites, further than the sexual harassment, further than the shovel-killed snake, further than the failed garden projects, further than the intestinal bacteria.

Since my PC experience, I have been back to Nicaragua three times, most recently in January. It’s all the same and it’s all not. In Managua, the Masaya highway strip is built up with new clubs and casinos, all shiny and bright.

But in my community, the grim realities are the same – the grinding poverty, the roadside trash, the lack of jobs, the skinny dogs. I have a big extended adopted family I keep in close contact with, nearly 40 people living off intermittent used clothing sales, selling tortillas, doing maid work, and the single job in a two-hour-away meat plant. Three of the parents and their kids share a new project home, but without a lock, someone has to always be home. So when my husband and I took 25 family members to a nearby hot springs for a day vacation, grandma stayed to watch the house. We later bought them a \$4.55 door lock. Is that the difference I made?

When we go back, we take groups of three to explore their country together. They normally cannot travel. On our first two trips, we took teenagers along. This time, we took two adult sisters and their mother. For them, it was three days of wonderment. Was that my difference?

After seven years, I’m still trying to figure out how far I am willing to go to make a difference. I continue to work on the third goal of PC, the part about bringing the world to Americans. I try to stay informed and educate others about global issues. I work with MNRPCV. I will also try to continue working on helping my Nicaraguan families by collecting for them from family and friends. That, all that, is my difference – my own little hill of beans and rice.



Tessa and friends in January

Tessa Coons, RPCV-Nicaragua, 2000-02
Tessa is MNRPCV Membership Co-Chair



Peace Corps Update

The 2007 Peace Corps year started with the exciting opening of the Peace Corps program in Cambodia. On January 31, 2007, thirty volunteers headed for Cambodia, where they comprise the first group of Peace Corps volunteers to serve in that country. The Volunteers will teach English at the upper secondary level and support teachers in Cambodian provinces and districts to improve their English language and English teaching skills.

Also, on January 28, 2007, the Peace Corps Guinea program consolidated all 11 volunteers in Mali, as a precautionary measure due to the on-going strikes and demonstrations. The Peace Corps office in Conakry remains open and hopes that the volunteers will be able to return to post shortly. Since the initial opening of the program in 1962, more than 1,200 volunteers have served in Guinea. The current Guinea volunteers serve in business development, education, environment, health, and HIV/AIDS projects.

Dear Returned Peace Corps Volunteer,

We have posted the latest RPCV Update newsletter for you on the agency website. We invite you to visit the link <http://www.peacecorps.gov/rpcvupdate?cid=rpcvupdate2006winter> to read about the latest developments here at the Peace Corps—along with four stories reflecting ways in which RPCVs demonstrate a lifelong dedication to a continuation of service.

Please stay in touch with us. If you would like to learn about particular aspects of the Peace Corps today, e-mail the editor of RPCV Update at rpcvupdate@peacecorps.gov with questions. We also especially invite your suggestions for the newsletter.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Warmly,

RPCV Update Staff
Office of Domestic Programs
Peace Corps

NPCA News

Peace Corps “Entrepreneurs on the Edge” Set to Launch

Several months ago NPCA put out a call for nominations of Peace Corps alumni who are “social entrepreneurs.”

NPCA is pleased to report that our collaboration with [Social Edge](#), a project of the Skoll Foundation, to produce 50 brief podcast profiles of Peace Corps social entrepreneurs is moving along nicely. The new Social Edge website, featuring the podcasts, launched on January 19. To date, seven interviews have been completed with RPCVs such as Dave Schweidenback (founder of Pedals for Progress), Jerr Boschee (founder of the Institute for Social Entrepreneurs) and Pat Christen (President of HopeLab). More profiles will debut throughout the year...stay tuned!

The NPCA Shop at CaféPress.com Is Open for Business

Just in time for the holidays...NPCA opened a “shop” at [CaféPress.com](#) featuring a selection of Peace Corps-related apparel and merchandise. Let the world know what an “RPCV” is or pass the Peace Corps message on to the next generation with one of our very cute baby onesies or kid t-shirts. Visit www.cafepress.com/pcorpsconnect

Every purchase you make supports the NPCA’s advocacy, global education and Peace Corps community building efforts. This is our maiden voyage with CaféPress and a “work in progress.” So if there is merchandise or are messages you’d like to see in the future, let our [News Director](#) know.

Kids Around the World Web site

Have you seen NPCA’s Kids Around the World website? This site will introduce students to the lives, customs, and cultures of children in countries throughout the developing world. There are a lot of ways teachers can use *Kids Around the World* in the classroom! <http://www.katw.org>



NPCA Membership Changes in '07

To: NPCA Affiliate Group Leaders
 From: Anne Baker, NPCA Staff
 Re: NPCA Membership Changes
 Date: November 7, 2006

In order to simplify processes and enable us all to focus more on issues to benefit and expand our Peace Corps community, the NPCA Board adopted changes to simplify membership. As passed by the NPCA Board of Directors at its September 15 meeting and as reported by Group Leaders Forum Coordinator Trina Janes via the GroupLeaders listserv, there are essentially **two immediate changes in NPCA membership which impact affiliate groups:**

- **Membership Category Simplification:** Membership in NPCA will be available to Individuals on an annual basis only.
- **“A la carte” Membership:** Members are encouraged but not required to join both NPCA and an affiliated group.

What does this mean ? As of January 1, 2007

1. NPCA no longer accepts new three-year memberships and family memberships.
2. NPCA will process individual one-year memberships in affiliate groups only as specifically requested and paid for by the member (e.g., \$50 for NPCA and Affiliate A; \$65 for NPCA and Affiliates A and B).

What should you do to join or renew your MNRPCV and/or NPCA membership?

- NPCA membership is \$35/individual for one year.
- Membership in MNRPCV is \$15/individual for one year.

You may join either group, or both groups.

The easiest way is on the web at <http://www.peacecorpsconnect.org>. Click “join/renew” and be sure to specify MNRPCV as your affiliate group.

You may also send a check to either NPCA (see their new address at right), or to MNRPCV, P.O. Box 6413, Minneapolis MN, 55406 Attn: Membership.

MNRPCV January Financial Report

By Christi Williams, RPCV Poland 96-98

Income		
	Postage	\$12.00
	Interest	\$0.35
	Calendars	\$950.00
	NPCA membership refund	\$45.00
Total Income		\$1,007.35
Expenses		
	Newsletter	\$7.02
	Rochester Holiday Party	\$100.00
	Holiday Party	\$9.43
	Calendars	\$35.58
Total Expenses		\$152.05
Beginning Balance		\$8,826.01
Ending Balance		\$9,681.32
Balance at CCFCU		\$5,283.13
Balance at Microenterprise		\$3,091.48

NPCA Has a New Address

National Peace Corps Association
 1900 L Street NW, Suite 404
 Washington, DC 20036
 202-293-7728 (phone)
 202-293-7554 (fax)
<http://www.peacecorpsconnect.org>

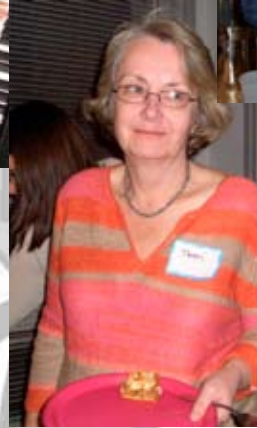




December 2006 Holiday Party

By Sarah Hansen, RPCV Moldova 00-02

With delicious dishes from around the world, good company, and a truly “brain-busting” geography quiz, the 2006 Holiday Party was a great way to celebrate the season. A special thank you to the Standers for, once again, welcoming us into their beautiful home. It was wonderful to gather with old friends and to meet recently returned Peace Corps Volunteers. We were also pleased to talk with two community members interested in serving as Peace Corps Volunteers in the future. We hope our stories, memories, and laughter encouraged you to take the next step in embarking on this great adventure.





Upcoming Social Events, Winter 2007

Wed., 2/7, 6:30 pm **METRO DINNER**

Join us at Kenkeyba's Place for delicious food from Ghana. Location: 864 University Ave., St. Paul, MN. Host: Elsa Frettem, 651-428-1765.

Tues., 2/13, 6:30 pm **METRO DINNER**

Experience the flavors of Kurdistan! Location: Babani's Kurdish Restaurant, 544 St. Peter St., St. Paul, MN 55102. 651-602-9964. Host: Anne Kanyusik. Please RSVP. [an-
nekanyusik@operamail.com](mailto:an-
nekanyusik@operamail.com)/612-822-0331.

Sat., 2/17, 11:00 am **COFFEE SHOP SWAP**

Come spend a cozy afternoon in a funky coffee shop sipping a hot beverage and swapping pictures and stories with fellow Peace Corps Volunteers. Location: Dunn Bros, Linden Hills, 2814 W. 43rd St., Minneapolis, MN 55410. Host: Sarah Hansen, sarah_e_hansen@yahoo.com/ 612-920-0349.

Thurs., 3/1, 5:30 pm **HAPPY HOUR**

Celebrate Peace Corps Day by welcoming back newly returned Peace Corps Volunteers at The Happy Gnome. Location: 498 Selby Ave, St. Paul, MN 55102. Hosts: Joe and Kate Vacek, joevacek@gmail.com.

Sat., 3/3, 6:00 pm **ANNUAL SLIDE SHOW**

Come see the Peace Corps experience on the big screen! Bring your stories, your slides, and a regional dish to share. Please email digital pictures to Sarah Hansen at sarah_e_hansen@yahoo.com. Bring up to five of your favorite slides to share with the group. Location: Padilla Speer Beardsley offices, 1101 West River Parkway, Minneapolis, MN 55415-1256. For directions: <http://www.psbpr.com>.

Thurs., 3/8, 6:00 pm **EVENING AT THE SCIENCE MUSEUM**

Join MNPRCVs in touring the new "Race" exhibit at the Minnesota Science Museum. Location: 120 W. Kellogg Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55102 (651-221-9444). Walk over to the Liffey for a discussion afterward. Host: Deb Most, 651-334-1457.

Wed., 3/14, 6:30 pm **METRO DINNER**

Meet us at Vallarta's for authentic Mexican cuisine. Location: 6000 Shingle Creek Pkwy, Brooklyn Center, MN 55430 (across the street from Brooklyn Center Library/ Service Center and in the same strip mall as Target). Host: Mary Adams, 612-521-0649 (h), 763-549-6120 (w), [mad-
ams@ccfcu.org](mailto:mad-
ams@ccfcu.org).

Peace Corps Week - Feb 26-Mar 4

Hats off to Colleen O'Dell from the Peace Corps Office for hosting a Peace Corps training. Over 20 RPCV's came on a cold Wednesday evening on Jan 31 at Roseville Public Library to learn what Peace Corps is doing today and to work on their presentation skills. This was the first training ever done to help RPCV's prepare for Peace Corps Week, which this year is February 26 to March 4. If you weren't able to make this training, look for another one in the summer.

If you speak during Peace Corps Week or another time, please let Mike McDonald, Speakers Bureau Chair, know when and where you spoke (mrmacpc@yahoo.com or 952.201.2845).

If you are interested in speaking during Peace Corps week, but are unsure who could best use your special skills and experience, call the Peace Corps office at 612-348-1480.





Ski Weekend 2007

By Anne Kanyusik, RPCV Bangladesh 98-00

On the weekend of January 19-21, over 30 Minnesota RPCVs and their guests headed to Edgewood Lodge near Itasca State Park for three days of outdoor sports, beautiful scenery and great fellowship. Lois Braun led a brave group of cross-country skiers in sub-zero temperatures at the nationally renowned Maplelag resort. Others planned hiking adventures in Itasca, and a few stayed indoors to enjoy a cup of hot cocoa and a book while looking at the great outdoors from the comfort of our heated cabins.

The RPCV group filled two cabins with laughter, games and tales of days in our host countries. When we were not out enjoying our Minnesota winter, we also had wonderful food – capped by a Vietnamese feast on Saturday night and innovative, but delicious, sweet potato breakfast burritos as we left on Sunday morning.

We are not sure whether we will be able to return to Edgewood next year, as it may be closing for the winter (unless – as the owners suggested -- it opens especially for us!). So, if you have ideas of where RPCVs can enjoy next year's ski weekend, please contact Curt Rahman. Regardless of where we go, we hope that you will be able to join us in 2008 for a fabulous weekend the winter wonderland of Minnesota's great north woods.



MNRPCV P.O. Box 6413, I

Fundraiser Dinner: Flavors of Africa!

By Sarah Hansen, RPCV Moldova 00-02

On January 13, mingling aromas of injera, peanut soup, red beans, rice dishes, roasted goat, and sweet chai beckoned over 35 Minnesota Returned Peace Corps Volunteers to step in from the Midwest cold to warm themselves with the regional flavors of Africa. Thanks to our gracious hosts, Elsa and Bernard, and to the many volunteer cooks, our Fundraiser Dinner was a huge success.

We raised \$410! This money will be used to fund grant projects supported by the MNRPCV group.

In addition to helping us raise funds, our regional



dinner helped us connect as an MNRPCV community. Members gathered to catch up, to swap



stories (and great books!), and to partake in an

evening of lively conversation. We even welcomed two new prospec-



tive volunteers. Thank you to all of you who shared your stories and encouraging words with them.

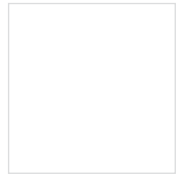
As MNRPCV president Mary Adams noted, we want to create a sense of community for prospective volunteers before they even begin their service. That way, when they return, they will already have a "home" with us. The hard work that volunteers put into organizing and hosting events, such as our Africa Dinner, and the support that members show



by attending these events is truly appreciated. They create opportunities for all of us to "come home," to connect with friends who truly understand our experiences. Thank you!



MNRPCV
P.O. Box 6413
Minneapolis, MN 55406



How do you say "Welcome!" in your host country?

Whether it's *Wilkommen*, *marhaba*, *huan ying*, *swagatum*, *vitalje*, *na aia*, *sannu da zuwa* or something else, we welcome you to submit it to us at www.mnrpcv.org and we'll add it to our list. Check it out!



Annual Slide Show

Saturday, March 3, 2007, 6 pm in Minneapolis

Come see the Peace Corps experience on the big screen!

Bring your stories, your slides (up to five only, please), and a regional dish to share.

Please email your digital pictures to Sarah Hansen (sarah_e_hansen@yahoo.com) a couple days before the slide show and she will have them ready for you to tell us about at the party. Real slides are welcome, also; bring them with you.

Location: Padilla Speer Beardsley offices - same place as last year.



1101 West River Parkway

Minneapolis, MN 55415-1256

For directions: <http://www.psbpr.com>.

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All events are announced via email on the mnrpcvEmailList. Join this listserv from

www.mnrpcv.org/ContactUs.html