

ACTION UPDATE

March 19, 1979

VISTA Volunteers to Work for Nursing Home Reform

The National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform estimates there are more than 1.2 million people in nursing homes in the United States, and that nearly half of them live in sub-standard conditions. The Coalition, established in 1975, exists to improve conditions in nursing homes at the local and state levels through 32 member groups. Thirteen of these member groups throughout the country are now sponsoring a total of 37 VISTA volunteers through a one-year national grant of \$241,138 awarded the Coalition on September 30, 1978.

The 37 locally recruited VISTA volunteers who attended a five-day training session in Marriotsville, Md., in January, range in age from 21 to 76. According to Patrick Ahern, Coalition VISTA

project director, "For many of these volunteers, this is their first involvement in this field. Others, particularly some of the older VISTAs, have been active in some kind of aging programs or nursing home reform before."

Mark Cosimini, 27, a 1978 graduate of the William Mitchell College of Law in St. Paul, Minn., joined VISTA in December and was assigned to the Nursing Home Residents, Advisory Council in Minneapolis. "Many of these nursing home residents are Medicare or Medicaid recipients," said Cosimini. "I had taken many poverty law courses and consumer classes in law school. I really wanted to be involved in representing poor and under-represented people. This VISTA service is giving me the opportunity to do so."



On the other hand, Eleanor Hoag, 68, of Ft. Collins, Colo., had been working to improve nursing home conditions for years prior to joining VISTA in December. "I began by forming a relatives' council for a local nursing home. The relatives of the residents had a long list of complaints," explained Ms. Hoag. "They were concerned about food, nursing care, administration and patients' rights."

"There's so much to be done"

The council has become a strong, effective organization that has successfully addressed the problems. Ms. Hoag credits the hard work of the council members for this success. "The organization will live and grow even if I drop dead tomorrow," said Ms. Hoag.

Through her VISTA sponsoring organization, the Nursing Home Task Force, she hopes to form relatives' councils in the other nine nursing homes in the area. "But educating the entire community about nursing home reform will be my first priority."

The volunteers' diverse experiences in nursing home reform and their geographical and cultural backgrounds made for "a creative and substantive exchange of information," said VISTA trainee Kris Kuhn, 23, of Nashville, Tenn. Ms. Kuhn worked for several years as a part-time volunteer with the Social Action Group on Aging (SAGA) during her undergraduate years at Vanderbilt University.

"SAGA is still my sponsoring agency," explained Ms. Kuhn, "but now, thanks to VISTA, I can do this full time. And I'm particularly glad we're all part of a national effort. There's so much to be done."

According to Elma Griesel, executive director of the Coalition, there is considerable discrimination against Medicaid patients - an estimated 60 percent of the nursing home population, in favor of private-pay patients. "What this means," said Ms. Griesel, "is that unless a

patient has money, he gets only room and board in many nursing homes. That's all. No therapy, no recreation, no attention, no real possibility of getting out, no say in how he's treated. Just insensitivity."

However, Ms. Griesel also stressed that all nursing homes do not operate in this manner. "We're encouraging our volunteers to work with providers doing good jobs, and to pull in as allies the administrators of good nursing homes."

The training was carried out by the Washington staff of the National Coalition for Nursing Home Reform and included a range of training activities such as workshops, role playing, and guest lecturers. During one of the best-received sessions, three Coalition members staged a one-act play, based on a real-life situation in which the wife of a nursing home patient met with the home's administrator along with a VISTA volunteer as her spokesperson and advocate.

The patient's wife was concerned about some of the supplies provided for her husband and about his not being fed if she were not there at lunchtime. After several fruitless attempts to work out the problems directly with the administrator, she asked that the VISTA accompany her as a knowledgeable and impartial arbitrator, to discuss her concerns, which were eventually resolved to the satisfaction of both parties.

"We wanted to show our trainees that as VISTA volunteers they can play an effective role in seeing that patients' rights are met," explained Ahern. "We also hoped to show that threats and accusations are counterproductive, and that the interests of both the patient and the family are best served by setting a cooperative tone with nursing home officials."

Ahern feels that solid information is the best ammunition that the VISTAs can have. "To be able to bring about reform, to get the best for the patients, advocates must be fully aware of local legislation, Medicare and Medicaid regulations, legal rights of patients, nursing home standards," noted Ahern. "We feel we gave them a good foundation in these areas through this five-day training session."

PEACE CORPS TO REMAIN IN ACTION

On February 15, 1979, the Carter administration called for reorganizing major elements of U.S. development assistance programs to Third World countries under the management of a new International Development Cooperation Administration (IDCA). If approved by the Congress, this plan would consolidate approximately \$2.7 billion in U.S. nonmilitary assistance programs now administered by the Agency for International Development (AID) and several other federal departments.

In his announcement, the President supported ACTION's recommendation that Peace Corps continue its current relationship within ACTION and the domestic volunteer service programs. Top administration officials agreed with ACTION that Peace Corps' merger with AID and other grant-oriented assistance programs by a government reorganization plan would seriously narrow Peace Corps' legislative mandate, limit Peace Corps' program autonomy overseas, and diminish its unique image as a humanitarian volunteer program.

ACTION supported the original foreign aid reorganization proposal that became commonly known as the Humphrey Bill (S.2420). (See ACTION Update issues 3-1-78 and 5-25-78). This proposal was introduced by the late Senator Hubert Humphrey in 1977, and would have comprehensively reformed the Foreign Assistance Act, consolidating the major elements of U.S. assistance programs.

The administration's reorganization plan is not as comprehensive as originally envisioned in the Humphrey Bill. ACTION felt that the revised plan would not provide Peace Corps with adequate statutory protections for its program

autonomy nor could operational flexibility be guaranteed.

By remaining in ACTION, Peace Corps has the opportunity to enhance its program links and sharing of anti-poverty experience with VISTA and other agency volunteer programs. A number of Third World leaders have expressed significant appreciation for the fact that Peace Corps is not part of an aid agency that operates on the traditional donor-recipient model, but is instead part of a global volunteer effort that fights poverty and injustice at home as well as abroad.

According to Mary King, who spearheaded ACTION negotiations with the administration, "The President's decision not to include Peace Corps in IDCA is a vote of confidence for ACTION."

President Carter has proposed that the IDCA Administrator report both to the President and the Secretary of State, and serve as the principal development advisor to each. The new Administration would be charged with coordinating, providing policy guidance and evaluating the development activities of:

- The Agency for International Development;
- The Overseas Private Investment Corporation, which insures and guarantees U.S. private investments in developing countries;
- The proposed new Institute for Technological Cooperation, which will support research and technological innovation to reduce obstacles to economic development.

Survey Gauges Public Awareness of Peace Corps/VISTA

Public awareness of the Peace Corps and VISTA dropped dramatically during the five years between 1973 and 1978, according to a recent survey conducted in 1978 among the general public and college students by the Opinion Research Corporation of Princeton, N.J., although the number of phone inquiries for these programs nearly doubled during the past year.

There was strong general approval for the full-time volunteer programs among survey participants who had some familiarity with them; however, the same persons were generally hard pressed to accurately describe just what it is that Peace Corps, VISTA and ACTION do. Opinion Research concluded that the sharp declines in familiarity were the major factors in the participants' inability to describe ACTION and its programs.

The survey showed a 16 percent decline in knowledge of the Peace Corps among the general public and a 20 percent drop among students since 1973, when a similar survey was conducted. Only 32 percent of the 2,114 citizens reached by the survey and 52 percent of the 334 college students interviewed in 1978 knew "a good deal or a fair amount" about the Peace Corps in 1978.

VISTA's loss of recognition, particularly among the students, has been far more serious. In 1973, 56 percent of the students and 30 percent of the general public had at least a fair amount of knowledge about VISTA. These figures dropped to 24 and 13 percent, respectively, in 1978.

Knowledge of ACTION as a whole decreased from 16 to five percent among the general public and 24 to 10 percent among students over the five-year period.

"Certainly, a major cause of the slippage in public awareness of the Peace Corps and VISTA was the decision by the previous administration not to advertise individual ACTION programs," maintains Larry Brown, director of recruitment and communications. "For about six years, the Peace Corps and VISTA were rarely mentioned on radio and television, or in newspapers and magazines. Naturally, the public would start to forget."

From 1962 to 1971, the Peace Corps conducted extensive national advertising campaigns. VISTA did the same every year from 1966 until 1971. Except for one minor Peace Corps campaign, there was no national advertising effort on behalf of either program in the six years from 1972 through 1977.

PC/VISTA Awareness Campaigns

ACTION staff, under the current administration, recognized the problem of declining VISTA and Peace Corps program awareness and began

addressing the issue in early 1978 with a major nationwide Peace Corps advertising campaign and the launching of an annual Peace Corps/VISTA month.

New radio and T.V. advertising campaigns for VISTA and Peace Corps will begin this month. And, later this year, VISTA T.V. announcements featuring National Basketball Association players will be broadcast during the 1979 NBA playoffs. Such advertising emphasizes each separate ACTION program rather than the agency as a whole, as did previous advertising.

Other promotional efforts for ACTION programs begun last year include the production of individual periodicals for the Peace Corps, VISTA and the Older American Volunteer Programs; increased public speaking by senior staff members on the major programs; active participation by the agency in conferences and

conventions concerning poverty and international development, and the use of more former volunteers to describe their programs to the public.

After the new awareness efforts had been in operation for several months, the number of Peace Corps and VISTA phone inquiries began to increase. ACTION received 16,107 phone inquiries about Peace Corps and VISTA during the last four months in 1978 as opposed to 8,100 such inquiries during the same four months in 1977.

"It will take more than one year or even two to get people thinking and talking about the Peace Corps and VISTA the way they did in the late 60s and early 70s," says Brown. "However, if twice as many people are curious about the program in a year's time, public awareness has to be on the upswing. I look forward to the results of a similar survey in 1980!"

VISTA Grant Awarded to Indian School Board Coalition

ACTION has awarded \$243,224 to the Coalition of Indian Controlled School Boards to train and support 40 VISTA volunteers who will help American Indian communities determine the direction of their own schools and participate fully in educational decisions that affect their children.

Incorporated in 1971, the Coalition of Indian Controlled School Boards is a non-profit educational organization with a national membership of more than 160 schools in predominantly Indian communities. Its goal is to improve the education of American Indian children by helping Indian people gain and maintain an active voice in their educational programs.

The Coalition is recruiting VISTA volunteers now from Indian communities and national VISTA applicants to start 10 days of pre-service training at the Coalition's headquarters in Denver, Colo. in early April. The Coalition also will conduct two sessions of in-service training for the volunteers and supervise them during

their one year of service at sites in seven western states.

Teams of five volunteers each will be assigned to work with American Indians on educational issues on six reservations and two non-reservation Indian community. One team will help the Indian ACTION Council in Eureka, Calif. establish a new school to meet the needs of Indian children in a predominately Indian community. Two other teams assigned to the Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation in Montana and the Navaho Reservation in New Mexico will work on redistricting school boundaries so that the reservations can have their own schools.

Four VISTA teams will help Indians to participate directly in school program and educational decisions regarding their children in Seminole, Okla. and on the following reservations: Rosebud, S.C., Pine Ridge, S.D., and Sho Ban, Idaho. The eighth team will help set up an educational radio station on Wind River Reservation in Wyoming.

Civil Service Reform

NEW AGENCIES ESTABLISHED

On October 13, 1978, President Carter signed the Civil Service Reform Act, designed to improve government efficiency. Among the Act's major features are new appeals procedures, protections against abuse of the merit system, and incentives and rewards for superior work and management. Most of the Act's provisions took effect in January.

Beginning with this issue, ACTION Update will periodically publish portions of the new provisions and their effect on agency employees.

Along with the Civil Service reforms, Congress approved a government reorganization plan, also effective in January, to divide the functions of the former U.S. Civil Service Commission between two new agencies—an Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and an independent Merit systems Protection Board (MSPB).

OPM handles many responsibilities of the former CSC including staffing services, position classification and qualification standards, employment operations, personnel investigations, personnel program evaluation, executive development, and training. It also administers the retirement, insurance and health benefits programs for federal employees.

MSPB hears and decides employee appeals and orders corrective and disciplinary actions against

employees or agencies when appropriate. A Special Counsel within MSPB investigates and handles charges of unfair personnel practices.

The reorganization also establishes a new Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA) to administer federal labor-management policies. A General Counsel within FLRA investigates alleged unfair labor practices before the FLRA.

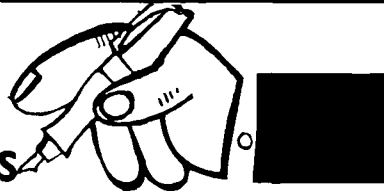
OPM is currently drafting and issuing implementation guidelines to all federal agencies concerning details of the Reform Act. The personnel management division at ACTION is reviewing the new guidelines as they are received from OPM and formulating plans for their implementation in ACTION.

In the near future a task force will be appointed to assess management's attitudes toward the Civil Service reform and incorporate these attitudes into the final guidelines. Also, before implementing guidelines, the task force will determine the ACTION union's role as exclusive employee representative in grievance arbitration procedures.

Gwen Hoover, Special Assistant to the Director of Personnel, is coordinating all Civil Service reform for the agency. Interested employees may call her at 254-5806.

Civil Service Reform

New Performance Appraisal Systems



Under the Civil Service Reform Act the former government-wide requirement for the adjective ratings—outstanding, satisfactory and unsatisfactory—has been repealed. Accordingly each agency must develop its own appraisal systems.

The new systems must be in operation by 1981. However, ACTION's current system requires the use of four adjective performance ratings: outstanding, above average, satisfactory and unsatisfactory. ACTION had received special approval from the CSC to include the "above average" rating to acknowledge those employees who demonstrated high-quality performance.

The new performance appraisal systems require all federal agencies to:

- Establish written performance standards and critical elements that permit accurate evaluation of job performance on the basis of objective job-related criteria.
- Help employees improve unacceptable performance.

- Reassign, demote or remove those employees whose performance remains unacceptable after they have been given the opportunity to demonstrate improvement and acceptable performance.

"These provisions have been part of the ACTION personnel directives for some time; now they will be implemented government-wide," says Gwen Hoover.

The biggest change for ACTION employees under the new appraisal regulations is the designation of certain elements of every job as "critical." There was no distinction among job elements under the former regulations. Unacceptable performance in one or more of these "critical elements" can now be used as a basis for reassignment, demotion or removal. The supervisor decides which job elements are "critical," based on his or her knowledge of overall organizational objectives.

For additional information or questions, employees should contact Gwen Hoover at Ext. 45806.

VISTA VOLUNTEERS PROVIDE LEGAL SERVICES FOR THE DEAF

Throughout the nation, 14 million people are affected by hearing impairments. An additional two million are profoundly deaf – a condition defined as being unable to hear human speech.

“The deaf are the only group that can’t just go to any old lawyer,” says Katherine Condliffe, a VISTA volunteer attorney at the National Center for Law and the Deaf (NCLD) at Gallaudet College in Washington, D.C. “As a lawyer, you have to be aware all the time of the communication problems.”

Gallaudet is the only liberal arts college for the deaf in a variety of areas. One of these areas – legal services for the deaf – relies heavily upon five VISTA volunteers.

Sy DuBow, the director of the NCLD at Gallaudet, praises the VISTA volunteers assigned to NCLD for “providing us with much of the research capacity to assist the deaf community throughout the country. Their support to the center is essential.”

The volunteers – four attorneys and a deaf paralegal – are equally enthusiastic about their roles with NCLD. Andy Penn, 26, of Baltimore, Md., notes, “It’s very rare that you find a job that works out perfectly. This is as close to perfect as you can get.

“There is a real feeling of excitement, of action here. We’re not just doing research; I’m getting legal experience,” Penn stresses.

“The law center is not very big, so they give responsibility to the VISTA attorneys pretty quickly. You have a feeling of immediacy when you help someone, when you make a phone call and straighten out something for a deaf client who cannot use a phone. And you can educate the other person – you can explain that the deaf have rights too.”

Penn, who received his law degree from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1977, hopes to continue working with the deaf when his VISTA assignment is completed. He has become adept at sign language, as have all the VISTA volunteers, and calls signing “a very expressive, very beautiful language.”

Elaine Gardner, now in her second year as a VISTA attorney, has also become very comfortable with sign language. Ms. Gardner, 25, of Westwood, N.J., did not seek a career working with the deaf nor did she start out to become a lawyer. She received her bachelor’s degree in the classics. “Then I wanted to do something that was a little more relevant. After four years of classics, you get very bored,” she admits.

After graduating in 1976 from Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., with a law degree, she became a private volunteer for four months at NCLD. Finally she asked, “Why don’t you guys have a VISTA program?” Her question resulted in a VISTA project with four volunteers serving last year and five this year.

Among her many activities at NCLD, Gardner gives workshops throughout the country on the legal rights of the deaf, conducts classes on laws regarding education of the handicapped, develops film scripts on the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and designs instruction kits to enable others to teach points of law as they relate to the deaf.

“It’s frustrating not to be able to change some things,” she observes. “There are some kinds of discrimination we can’t do anything about. For example, car insurance is higher for the deaf in some states – and that’s legal,” she reports. Katherine Condliffe, a 30-year-old Washington, D.C. resident and a 1977 graduate of the Columbus School of Law at Washington’s

Catholic University, focuses on "administrative action. We initiate and participate in agency role-making procedures when they concern deafness. Before the NCLD, there was no representation for the deaf. Most lawyers didn't know how to communicate with the deaf. With the blind, it's their mobility that's affected. With the deaf, it's their communication."

NCLD's paralegal, Nomi Sklaire, 28, is a graduate of Gallaudet. According to Nancy Connors, NCLD program coordinator, "Nomi learns about our operation and takes the information into the deaf community. We have a videotape about crime called 'What To Do As The Victim Or Witness Of A Crime' which she invites the police and other groups such as the deaf congregation of the Congress Church or the deaf Boy Scout troop to see. They sit down together and learn more about each other. The tape is a bridge."

Ms. Sklaire keeps in touch with police stations to make sure that their teletypewriters (TTYs) are in working order and solicits comments for the deaf community about the TTYs for the

Federal Communications Commission, which will use the information to make recommendations on new federal legislation.

TTYs are teletypewriter machines attached to an acoustical coupler. Users type their message over regular phone connections.

All the VISTA volunteers are part of NCLD's counseling clinic, which they are quick to say they truly enjoy. "That's what I like best," says Ms. Gardner, "--dealing directly with clients." The NCLD legal services and counseling clinic opened in October 1975. It provides free legal assistance to hearing-impaired individuals in the Washington Metropolitan area. The clinic is staffed by law students from area law schools and the VISTA attorneys

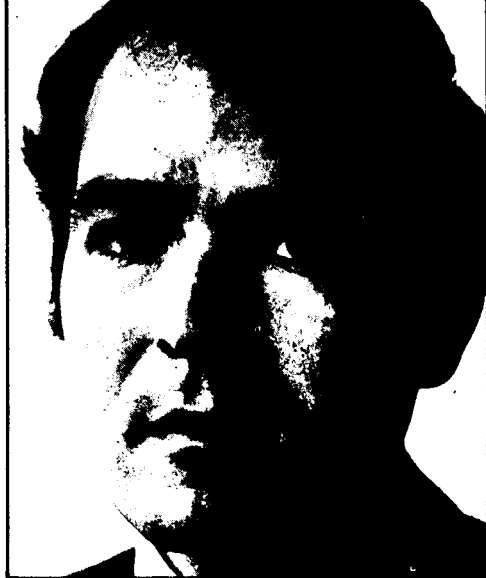
"We couldn't be more satisfied," DuBow says, "-- not only with the kind of work the VISTA attorneys do but with their attitude. They work long hours and they are fine with clients. They are simply excellent."



*VISTA Katherine Condliffe
signs with Antioch
Law School student
at Gallaudet's NCLD.*

Staff Spotlight:

Guido Del Prado



Ask 32-year-old Guido Del Prado of Santa Rosa, Calif. about his life's journey from a little mountain town in Peru to his current role as director of the Peace Corps in Costa Rica, and he will smile and credit it to "a Peace Corps volunteer in Peru who made me an offer I couldn't refuse."

Del Prado met his future wife, Sandy Goode, in 1963, while she was assigned to a Peace Corps nutrition program in Calca, Del Prado's hometown in Cuzco, Peru. He has been interested in the Peace Corps ever since.

"One of the goals of my life was to serve in the Peace Corps," Del Prado says. "Peace Corps has had a tremendous impact on social change in the United States. Returned volunteers can actually relate to the frustration and lack of services in the ghettos here. And the benefits of the Peace Corps abroad have been very healthy."

Since July, 1978, Del Prado has supervised the activities of 137 Peace Corps volunteers in Costa Rica serving in the areas of nutrition, health, water and sanitation, housing and agriculture.

Following Ms. Goode's two-year Peace Corps tour, she and Del Prado were married and moved to the United States, where Del Prado earned his FAA (Federal Aeronautics Administration) pilot's license in 1967 from Big Bend Community College in Moses Lake, Wash.

Del Prado was the third person in a class of 85 to earn his license. "That really showed his determination because he was just learning to read and write in English at that time," Mrs. Del Prado reports. "Anybody who knows FAA rules and regulations knows how hard that must have been," she says proudly.

For the next year and a half, Del Prado was a charter pilot for Green Airlines in Moses Lake, Wash. The Del Prados then moved to Santa Rosa, Calif. where he became the director of community development for the Napa County Council for Economic Opportunity. He was responsible for a staff of 30 and 18 VISTA volunteers.

Concurrently, Del Prado attended California State College, Sonoma, in Rohnert Park, where he received a 1971 bachelor's degree in psychology and a 1972 master's degree in social and humanistic psychology.

Del Prado then came to the attention of the Robert F. Kennedy Foundation, which sponsored a project they asked Del Prado to design and operate - the first bilingual and bicultural noncommercial educational radio station in the United States.

As a result, Del Prado received a scholarship which led to his Ph.D. degree in administration, planning and social policy from Harvard University.

"KBBF in Santa Rosa was conceived as the prime vehicle through which a basic educational program could be directed to the rural population in Northern California," Del Prado explains. "The station was created primarily to provide meaningful alternative programming in community development, nutrition and health, job opportunities, etc. Harvard was looking at the integration of media for social development." Today, the station has 350,000 regular Spanish-speaking listeners.

In 1975, Del Prado joined the staff of the Latin American Teaching Fellowships (LAFT) program at the Fletcher School of Law and Dip-

lomacy, Tufts University, in Medford, Mass. Working out of Guatemala City, Guatemala, Del Prado was responsible for 40 American scholars in six Central American countries. He also recruited and selected mid-career professionals from Central American government agencies for one year of advanced study at Fletcher.

In spring, 1978, he was offered the Peace Corps directorship in Costa Rica. Costa Rica is the second smallest Central American republic, about the size of West Virginia, located between Nicaragua and Panama. The Del Prados, including Bonnie, 13, Shannon, 9, and Marcel, 4, live in San Jose, the capital city.

Senator Tsongas Tapes PC/VISTA Radio Spots

Paul Tsongas, the new Democratic Senator from Massachusetts and the highest ranking elected U.S. official ever to have served as a Peace Corps volunteer, referred to his Peace Corps service on two radio public service announcements which he recently taped for VISTA and Peace Corps.

The announcements—running 10 and 30 seconds each—are part of ACTION's efforts to increase public awareness and assist recruitment efforts for the two volunteer programs. They are currently being run nationwide and also ran throughout February, which was designated as Peace Corps/VISTA month.

Tsongas has often called his Peace Corps term "a

profound experience that formed my view of the world." He says it was also the most influential factor in his decision to enter public life.

While in the U.S. House of Representatives, where he served from 1975 until January, 1979, Tsongas traveled to Ethiopia on a fact finding mission in December, 1977. When a group of students with whom he had worked as a volunteer learned of his visit, they went to the capital at Addis Abbaba to greet him.

In speaking of the reunion with his former students, the Senator noted, "the love was still there."



Classification Specialist Joins ACTION Staff

Effective December 18, Anastasia Johnson assumed the responsibility of Chief, Position Classification and Salary Administration Branch of the personnel management division. Prior to joining ACTION, Ms. Johnson was a supervisory position classification specialist in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

In addition to her varied classification background, she also has experience in staffing and labor-management relations, and while serving as a management intern in the Office of Education, she monitored education projects. A native Washingtonian, Ms. Johnson attended the District of Columbia Teachers College.



William Strieter, Longtime ACTION Employee, Dies

William L. Strieter, 56, chief property manager in ACTION's overseas administrative support branch, Office of Administration and Finance, died January 7, following a heart attack.

Since joining ACTION in 1974, Strieter was responsible for all Peace Corps property. This included the purchase and control functions for the PC vehicle fleet and the management of all overseas equipment inventories. He frequently traveled overseas to give technical assistance in setting up office records and inventories and to dispose of unusable Peace Corps property.

According to Jack Nolan, director of the administrative services division of A&F, "Bill was not only efficient, he had a heart. I remember the time he was able to cut through government red tape and get a compressor from GSA that a Peace Corps volunteer in Fiji needed desperately for a freezer to be used in a fisheries project. Not only that, he, at his own expense, located and sent him a gas engine to run the compressor!"

In addition to his many friends at ACTION, Strieter leaves his wife, Sharon, and a daughter, Danielle.

The staff of ACTION Update would like to hear from its readers. If you have any suggestions or comments, please contact writer/editors Patita McEvoy or Judy Kusheloff on Ext.

48373.