

Peace Corps Times

Summer 2000

Dear Volunteers,

When my wife, Susan, and I joined the Peace Corps in 1966 and headed for El Salvador, the Peace Corps was just celebrating its fifth birthday. Now, on the eve of the agency's 40th, it's inspiring to reflect on the progress of international development and the continued enthusiasm of our nation's most energetic and creative men and women. The world is a better place today, in part because of the positive contributions that you and 155,000 other Volunteers have made.

Since I became Director last December, I have had the pleasure of meeting many of you at your sites in thirteen countries and seeing some of those changes. I am reminded of your many contributions to grass-roots development and cross-cultural understanding when I meet with leaders of these countries—they convey their respect and praise for the Peace Corps and usually ask if I can send more Volunteers to build upon your work.

Many of you are working on projects that have been at the heart of the Peace Corps' presence in the developing world—teaching in schools, promoting health, working with farmers, and spurring community development. But the Peace Corps also has changed to meet contemporary needs of the people you serve. For instance, during my visits with Volunteers in Africa, I heard about the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS on the social and economic development of entire communities. In response, we launched a new initiative in June that will increase Volunteers' participation in helping prevent the spread of this deadly pandemic in Africa.

In addition, many of you bring to the Peace Corps a strong set of computer and technology skills that not only can help reduce poverty, but also can enhance the impact that you have on the development of your overseas communities. So we have launched the agency's first "e-initiative," which will strengthen the process for recruiting and placing Volunteers to work on information technology projects.

It is a privilege for me to be a part of the Peace Corps as we enter the new millennium. I look forward to meeting many more of you and hearing your thoughts about how we can strengthen the agency in the years ahead.

Mark Schneider



Director Schneider
(second from right)
visits Volunteers
in Kazakhstan

Peace Corps' First IT Volunteers Head to Belize

Country Director Costas Christ Works
With Prime Minister Said Musa to
Launch National Computer Literacy Project

Leaders in Peace Corps countries are asking Volunteers now more than ever to share computer and Internet skills with their communities. The agency is responding to these requests with a new project assignment specifically for computer specialists who can teach computer literacy, Internet usage, and Web site development.

"The Peace Corps is taking a proactive stance on globalization by getting out in the forefront and launching its own 21st century e-initiative," said Director Mark Schneider. While Volunteers in all project sectors continue to incorporate information technology projects into their primary assignments, the Peace Corps sent the first nine technology trainers into the field in June to Belize.

Belize has always participated in traditional Peace Corps project areas, but Country Director Costas Christ said the new information technology project addresses a burning need in the country to bring computer literacy training in the primary and secondary schools. "We are



Prime Minister Said Musa (back row, left), preparing for the Peace Corps' new technology program in Belize, distributes computers at the Mary Hill Roman Catholic School.

See Technology,
page 8

VOLUNTEERS CELEBRATE PEACE CORPS DAY

BY PHONING WORLD WISE SCHOOLS CLASSROOMS

On March 7, as RPCVs visited classrooms around the United States, 43 Volunteers in the field celebrated Peace Corps Day by calling their American World Wise Schools (WWS) classrooms for a 30-minute chat about their lives abroad. Many Volunteers brought students along to participate in the conversations, leading to some interesting cultural exchanges.

Philip Peredo is a TEFL instructor who works at a teachers' college in the Sichuan Province in China. He has two WWS classes in his hometown of Saddle Brook, N.J. One of those classes, Joseph Stapleton's 50 middle school science and math students, was waiting by the phone in Saddle Brook on March 7 for the conference call that would connect them to Peredo and his students on the other side of the world. The classes had been corresponding through letters for a year and a half. "In light of recent political situations in China, such as troubles between mainland China and Taiwan, and the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia last year, this phone call helped strengthen Sino-U.S. relations," says Peredo. "The students learned there is a common desire for peace and friendship between the two nations."

One of the advantages of the program is it helps to strengthen American school children's understanding of people different from themselves. The following are some examples of things the students learned from this unique opportunity:

Elementary school children in Baltimore learned that Cote d'Ivoire PCV Patrick Heller has to take a two-hour bus ride to get to the nearest telephone and to check his mail. The Volunteer also answered a question about whether or not the people are happy with the new military government after the recent coup in his country.

Elementary children in Hampton, Va., learned that Ecuador PCV Natalie Bryant eats guinea pigs sometimes, and kids in Pembroke Pines, Fla., learned that people in Gabon eat vipers.

See Teleconferencing, page 8

In This Issue

First IT Volunteers Head to Belize	1
Volunteers Celebrate Peace Corps Day	1
Letter From the Editor	2
Send in Your IT Stories!	2
Peace Corps News	3
Volunteers to Get More Support in the Battle Against HIV/AIDS, Crisis Corps Launches New Programs in Venezuela, Mozambique and Madagascar	
Notes From Around the World	4-5
Raising Butterflies in Bolivia, Teaching Jazz in Ukraine, Frolicking with Gorillas in Gabon, Organic Gardening in Honduras, and Building Homes in Romania	
Remembrances	6
Water in Africa Comes to the U.S.	6
RPCV Profile	7
RPCV Tina Singleton finds the Signs of Success in Africa	
Off the Beaten Path	8
Read about the quirker moments of Peace Corps life	
Photos From the Field	8

Peace Corps Times

A publication
for Peace Corps Volunteers
serving worldwide.

EDITOR
Susan Buchanan

The *Peace Corps Times* is a publication of the Peace Corps. Views expressed in the *Peace Corps Times* are those of the individual writers and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Peace Corps. Use of funds for printing this periodical has been approved by the Office of Management and Budget, U.S. Government.

The *Peace Corps Times* welcomes Volunteer submissions. Accounts of Volunteer experiences, news on projects, adventures, or general perceptions of life overseas will also be considered. Submissions cannot be returned. We reserve the right to edit for style, clarity, and length. Black and white and color photos are acceptable. We regret, however, that we cannot return them. Please identify all photos clearly. Peace Corps reserves the right to use any writing, photos, and artwork in other publications.

Inquiries and letters should be sent to:
Peace Corps Times
1111 20th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20526

You can also send an e-mail to
pctimes@peacecorps.gov

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

When asked about their most interesting or unusual experiences in the Peace Corps, many Volunteers offer general accounts of learning a different language and living in another culture. Thousands have adjusted amazingly well to life without running water and electricity. Most have questioned the validity of their work and the power of their ability to bring about change. And almost everyone has, at one time or another, shared transportation with a bleating or clucking domestic animal. A growing number of Volunteers often express amazement at the modern conveniences at their disposal. "Not only do I have water and electricity," marvels Bolivia PCV Daniel Baker, "but I live next to a supermarket and have daily access to the Internet."

A common sentiment among Volunteers is frustration and wonderment of the physical and mental adaptations required for success in the Peace Corps. As another Bolivia PCV Julian Medina writes: "I reached a point of low tolerance toward work adversity and toward daily obstacles, which wore heavily on my spirit and my motivation." But, like the majority of Volunteers, Julian found inner strength to work through these issues and adapt his expectations to attain modest goals, having learned how to "navigate through Bolivia's reality."

It's common for Volunteers to experience a spiritual awakening of sorts, as they experience the first real solitude of their lives. "Peace can come from open spaces," writes Namibia PCV Therese Mendez. "I knew my life in a city of 3.3 million people was cramped, but watching the sun rise and set from the door of my sleeping room each day is evidence enough that there is a lot I can miss in a day in Los Angeles." In the words of Ukraine PCV Elizabeth Gilligand, "Even though I've only been

here a little more than a year, it seems like I've lived much more deeply than I did in the States."

Sometimes the biggest challenge one faces in the Peace Corps is realizing that your main priorities in the States are irrelevant in your overseas communities. "After finding out how hard it is to get water where I live in Namibia, I asked myself, 'how often is it really necessary to bathe and wash clothes?'" writes PCV Michele Pierson-Finol Barbosa. And then there is that moment of truth during everyone's service when we realize that we have more to learn from our hosts than we have to teach. Malawi PCV Crystal Poirier shares a story about her experience collecting flower seeds for her garden. After watching her pick seeds one by one from a dried flower, her eight-year-old neighbor, Maggie, asked if she could help. Incredulously, Crystal watched as Maggie crumbled 20 dried flowers into a basket, shook the mixture, then extracted a large handful of seeds from the bottom to add to the collection. "The more I thought about the method Maggie used to obtain seeds, the more I began to realize that this is the same method Malawian women use to husk maize and rice. The heavier matter falls to the bottom and the lighter floats to the top. It would have taken me all day to gather as many seeds as Maggie the way I was going about it!" she writes.

Along with the philosophical explorations, the achievements, and the adventures, PCVs share other common experiences: cultural blunders and unique ways of life. This edition of the *Peace Corps Times* includes a new venue dedicated to the quirky things we do to get by, the cultural faux pas, and the funnier, albeit embarrassing, moments of Peace Corps life. Check out the new column Off the Beaten Path on page 8, then tell us about your offbeat moments!



Thanks to PCV Allison Irland, students and teachers like this woman in Papua New Guinea are learning how to use the Internet and maintain their 25 new Pentium computers.

HEY, VOLUNTEERS!

In light of the growing use of information technology in development work over the last few years, we're planning a special feature for the next edition of the *Peace Corps Times* about Volunteers' use of modern technology in their assignments.

Have you introduced the Internet to your community? Do you e-mail your parents or children on a daily basis? Granted, many Volunteers still live light years away from the nearest electrical outlet, and even further from the World Wide Web. But if you find yourself at the cusp of a technological revolution in your Peace Corps community, where old meets new and dot com is not just another foreign term, we'd like to hear your story.

Think about how access to computers is changing the field of development. How would your Volunteer experience be different if you didn't have access to the Web? What are the advantages and disadvantages of technology in development work? How has technology helped or hindered your social adaptation to your new environment? Are there broader impacts of technology on your community, on your country of service? Is there a trend in your country of service among the Volunteers who opt to bring laptops overseas?

This promises to be an eye-opening look at the ever-evolving Peace Corps experience, so boot up those laptops and start typing!

PEACE CORPS NEWS



...HOT OFF THE WIRE...

Volunteers to Get More Support in Battle Against HIV and AIDS

The Peace Corps has stepped up its effort to address health, social, and economic problems related to the global HIV/AIDS epidemic with a new initiative. The initiative will include activities worldwide, but the primary focus will be in Africa, which has seen the worst devastation of this international epidemic.

The initiative builds upon the Peace Corps' strengths of wide-reaching local community presence, intimate knowledge of local customs and language, and demonstrated success at grassroots development. It will include both new HIV/AIDS-specific programs, and HIV/AIDS training for all Volunteers in every field of service. The initiative also calls for an additional 50 Volunteers to work solely on HIV/AIDS projects, including helping community groups that work with children affected by AIDS to strengthen leadership and improve their ability to fight this disease through organization and education. Volunteers will also work with families affected by HIV on micro-enterprise and small business activities to increase income, and train local teachers to integrate AIDS awareness and prevention into their curriculums. The Peace Corps is distributing a life skills manual to help Volunteers working with youth to address social issues such as risky behavior, healthy lifestyles, peer pressure, peer counseling, STDs, and planning for the future. HIV and AIDS educational materials are being translated into more languages as part of this initiative, and will help Volunteers address the sensitive nature of this disease with appropriate vocabulary and culturally-sensitive approaches.

By working together with host countries, carefully designing and implementing prevention and care programs, and effectively mobilizing communities, the threat to the well-being of peoples and nations posed by HIV/AIDS can be curbed. With its new, multi-faceted HIV/AIDS initiative, the Peace Corps will contribute to relief and prevention efforts in nations most in need around the globe.

Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced more devastation from HIV/AIDS than any other region of the world. Out of 13 million AIDS deaths, 11 million have been in sub-Saharan Africa, where 23 million people are now infected with HIV. For the first time, AIDS has outpaced malaria, diarrheal diseases, and war fatalities as the leading cause of death in the region.

Peace Corps Volunteers Gear Up to Celebrate 40 Years of Service

The Peace Corps is gearing up for a world-wide celebration in honor of the agency's 40th birthday next year, with a kick-off event on October 14, 2000, at the University of Michigan. This event commemorates one of the seminal events in the Peace Corps' history—a middle-of-the-night rally at U-M on October 14, 1960.

During the rally, then-Senator John F. Kennedy articulated the need for a new type of international service and issued a call for the students to serve, a concept that was translated into the Peace Corps.

Volunteers, RPCVs, and friends of the Peace Corps will be participating in anniversary activities throughout 2001, so wherever you'll be in the world, there will be a way for you to join in the festivities. Check our Web site in the coming months to find out how you can join the celebration!

March 1, 2001, will mark the 40th anniversary of President Kennedy's signing of the Executive Order creating the Peace Corps.



'Today' Show Features Grandmother-Granddaughter Team

NBC's Today Show Features Peace Corps-Bound Grandmother-Granddaughter Team

Phyllis Lichenstein and her granddaughter, Sophie Hill, weren't just two faces in the window outside studio 1-A in Rockefeller Plaza on March 22, when they made a guest appearance on NBC's *Today* show.

Today co-host Matt Lauer interviewed the pair live to talk about why they both applied to serve in the Peace Corps at the same time. They became trainees in May—Lichenstein, age 73, is in Lithuania, where she will work with NGO development after training, and Hill, age 22, will teach environmental education in Panama. Lichenstein said she and her husband thought of joining the Peace Corps back in the 60s, but postponed their plan because they were raising a family. "You thought about the Peace Corps way back in the 1960s when it was founded, and you said, 'I'd love to do that,' but were you beginning to think your someday would never come?" asked Lauer. In true Peace Corps fashion Lichenstein replied, "Oh, someday always comes...it seemed to be postponed and postponed, but I didn't think it would *never* come."

New Crisis Corps Programs in Venezuela, Mozambique and Madagascar

Volunteers Still Working to Restore Central American Countries Since 1998 Hurricanes

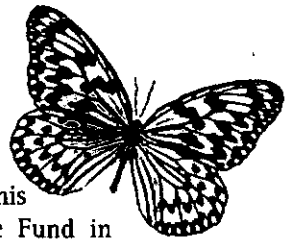
If you are nearing your COS date and are wondering what to do after the Peace Corps, you might consider extending your time overseas by signing up with the Peace Corps' Crisis Corps program. Crisis Corps Volunteers work on disaster relief and humanitarian projects from three to six months in countries that have requested temporary help while recovering from natural disasters and humanitarian crises.

The Crisis Corps has a new program in Venezuela, where flooding and mudslides in December left tens of thousands of Venezuelans living in temporary shelters. COSing PCVs who have strong Spanish language skills and backgrounds in community organization, construction management, water sanitation, health, or youth development are urgently needed for these assignments. The Crisis Corps also anticipates sending Crisis Corps Volunteers to Mozambique and Madagascar in response to recent flooding, which has left thousands of people homeless in these countries. COSing PCVs who have work experience in Africa and speak Portuguese, French, or Malagasy are encouraged to submit an application.

There is ongoing need for Volunteers to work in the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, with post-hurricane reconstruction activities. If you would like to help, talk to your country director.



BOLIVIA Butterfly Farming



Albert Liu had never intended become a Volunteer. But that was until his RPCV supervisor at the World Wildlife Fund in Washington, D.C., suggested he join the Peace Corps as a way to get overseas experience in the conservation field. As a regional enterprise development Volunteer, Liu is now helping citizens of a rural community bordering Amoro National Park in Bolivia to become entrepreneurs while learning about the ecological importance of their region of the world. "The people in this region live near one of the most biodiverse protected areas in the Western Hemisphere," he says. "But they lack economic opportunities and therefore have no alternative to clearing the forests and farming the land."

Liu's project is allowing the community to improve its standard of living while giving the people incentive to conserve and protect their natural resources. He is establishing a butterfly farm so community members can raise exotic butterflies to the pupa stage and then export them to live butterfly houses in North America and Europe. "The butterfly species found in this region are spectacular and will help to showcase the diversity of plant and animal life in Amoro," Liu says.

UKRAINE Teaching Jazz

Last year, sixty-year-old PCV Marlene Thorn Taber taught an impromptu jazz dance class at the Ukrainian school where she teaches English. What started out as a favor to the dance department soon became so popular that it developed into a secondary project for Taber, who started a new dance program in the community.

Community members of all ages attend her classes to socialize and meet new friends. Taber says her dance students enjoy learning jazz, a dance style that originated in Africa and evolved to its present form in America over the last three centuries, and they also get the opportunity to improve their English skills during the lessons. "Ukrainians enjoy my classes because I depart from the strict, non-emotional, Soviet way of teaching and emphasize feelings and fun," she says. With a professional theater background as an entertainer, Taber earned a Ph.D. in drama from the University of Georgia and taught theater and dance to high school and college students in the States before she joined the Peace Corps.



Notes



Say...banana! PCV Jill Welch and friend take a moment to pose for the camera during an afternoon of tree climbing in Gabon.

QUOTE FROM THE FIELD

"To feel empathy in the Peace Corps you have to walk a mile in no shoes at all."

PCV Julie Ann Rehwinkel, Guyana

GABON

Gorillas in the Mist

Not many Volunteers can say they've had the privilege of sleeping in a tent with an endangered species by their side, but Jill Welch did just that in Gabon. Welch spent a month volunteering with a gorilla protection project to reintroduce orphaned baby gorillas into the wild. "I was in charge of four babies, all under age 3. They teased, tested, played, laughed, and loved me," Welch says. "They really became like children!"

All three subspecies of gorilla are endangered.

*Scientists estimate that there may be 30-35,000 western lowland gorillas (the species found in Gabon), 3,000 eastern lowland gorillas, and 450 mountain gorillas alive in what is left of their natural habitat in Africa. Increased logging has led to severe habitat destruction, and poaching has caused the populations to dwindle in recent years. A hunter can fetch a lot of money for the carcass of an adult gorilla. The meat, known as bush meat, is destined for markets in cities and towns where it is considered a delicacy. The good news is that rescue and protection operations like the one where Welch volunteered, are saving baby gorillas whose parents have been killed, and many zoos in North America are racing to breed these awesome animals as a hedge against extinction in the world.

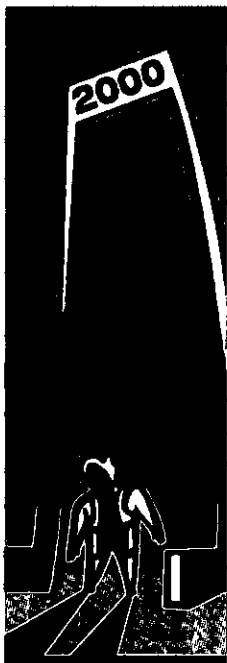
*Source: the Los Angeles Zoo Web site

DAME MARIE IS A JEWEL OF A TOWN ON Haiti's rough, undeveloped, southwestern coast, skirting the Windward Passage in one of the country's most isolated areas. Caroline Weathers feels fortunate to work there as an agriculture-extension Volunteer. "I call Dame Marie my playground. A 10-minute walk one way takes me high into the cacao-forest hills, while another direction lands me on a beach where 20 men tug at expansive, hand-woven seines, hauling in parrot fish, Caribbean lobsters, and eels," she says.

Caroline works with a 40-member women's group called Asosyasyon Fanm Kanpe (A.F.K.), which is Haitian Creole for "Women Standing Up." The group is busy with small business enterprise activities—raising livestock, growing vegetables, and farming ginger for export. Since Caroline arrived in Dame Marie in 1998, the group has planted 11 large ginger gardens, bought and raised several pigs, and tended two vegetable gardens which continuously produce fresh food for the community. Members have also

participated in business and gardening workshops and planted and distributed trees for a reforestation project. "The ginger gardens are our most important project," Caroline says. "One sack of planted ginger can yield five sacks of the harvested root." She explains the crop is ideal for export to Port-au-Prince and nearby countries because it lasts for up to five months in burlap sacks and can withstand rough handling. "It is possible that through this project, ginger can become as lucrative for Dame Marie as coffee and cacao," she says.

Caroline is counting her success in Haiti by small measures. Under her direction, A.F.K. has learned to grow carrots successfully in the unpredictable Haitian climate. In nine months their ginger crops will explode, and the female pigs in the group's swine herd are pregnant. A.F.K. is turning a profit on the vegetable gardens, and in celebration of International Women's Day in March, group members peacefully demonstrated for women's rights.



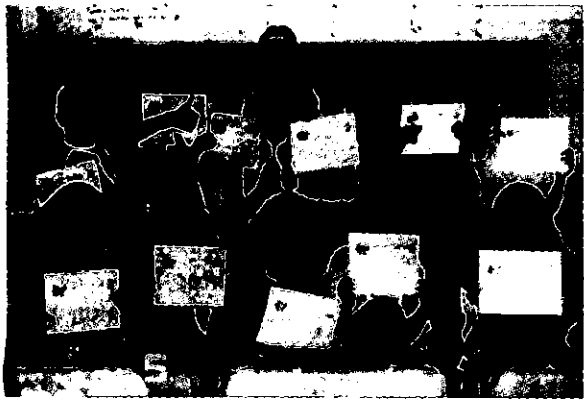
MILLENNIUM MAGIC

When all the hype surrounding the feared 'millennium bug' fades to a distant memory for most Americans, a small group of Volunteers in the Pacific island nation of Kiribati will still be talking about where they were when the first sunrise appeared over the horizon in the year 2000.

At 6:34 a.m. on January 1, the 26th group of Kiribati trainees gathered at a secluded cove on Abaing Island to witness the world's first dawn of the new millennium. A few hours later, they celebrated not only the New Year—but also their new status as Peace Corps Volunteers at a swear-in ceremony in the village of Koinawa. "The countdown to midnight the night before their swearing in was a very special moment that these Volunteers will never forget," reported Country Director Bill Benjamin. "There were no fireworks or special effects, other than the bright night sky filled with stars and planets over the glimmering surf and swaying palms."

HONDURAS

Teaching Health Through Organic Gardening



PCV Brooke Soles (back row, center) with graduates of her *Como Planear Mi Vida* (How to Plan My Life) class. The class focused on human sexuality and gender issues, self-esteem, and making healthy life choices.

"Health is not just about good eating habits. It's about community, the environment, animals, women and children, and all the facets that make up the foundation for societies around the world," says Brooke Soles who works with women's groups in Honduras as a health Volunteer. "Since I am vegan and don't eat animals or animal byproducts, it isn't hard to share my beliefs and knowledge about healthy living and respect for all living beings with my community."

Soles teaches soy cooking classes, teaches families to plant and maintain organic gardens, and works with local health care clinics to grow medicinal plants. Her community has taken their new healthy living habits one step further. Two women in her village are successfully selling soy enchiladas to the public, and the health care workers are selling the medicinal plants grown right in the health center. Soles is also busy teaching a class called *Como Planear Mi Vida* (how to plan my life) to a group of adolescents in her community. The class focuses on self-esteem building and making smart choices for their future. "It's satisfying to see young adults voicing their opinions, especially when others disagree with them," she says. "Once we begin to see the true interconnectedness of life, we will realize that we are not just sharing ideas of health, but rather sharing ideas on how to make this world a better place."



TANZANIA

Volunteer Coordinates Bicycle Race Fundraiser with Environmental Club

PCV Lorie Burnett was happy to inherit an environmental club from her predecessor in Tanga, Tanzania, but her excitement turned to concern when she discovered how lack of funding restricted the club's activities. Then her Tanzanian friend came up with a plan to raise funds and bring the community together for a common cause: they would sponsor a bicycle race.

Three months and a lot of preparation later, 25 contestants were racing along ten miles of dirt backwoods around Kongwe in hopes of winning



Contestants gear up at the gate to start the bicycle race fundraiser. Proceeds from the race helped purchase paint for an environmental mural and trees to plant in the community, and the winner rode away on a brand new bike.

the first prize: a shiny new bicycle. "The bicycle is a major means of transportation here, as it is in other Peace Corps countries," says Burnett. "The idea of a race is new though." Students helped by registering the racers and monitoring the finish line. They also displayed posters about the problems of deforestation and the importance of trees. Everyone who finished the race received a tree seedling to plant at home. Entrants each raised a small entry fee, and members of the community helped raise additional money. The event brought in \$100.00 which was used to buy supplies to paint an environmental mural in town and to plant trees on the school grounds. "It was a lot of work and a crazy day, but everyone in town is asking me when we're going to do it again!" says Burnett.

ROMANIA

Extracurricular Fun in Transylvania: Riding the Slopes



What's a young, energetic English teacher in a foreign land to do in his free time? PCV Christopher Leonard in Romania found an interesting pastime. He teaches snowboarding to youngsters on the beautiful slopes of Transylvania. "My town is famous for its skiing and swimming, so I thought I'd make use of my snowboarding skills from California and instruct local Romanians," he says. Leonard even has high hopes of seeing a couple of his students compete for the gold in future Olympics games. "This experience is just as rewarding as teaching English in the classroom," he says. "There are no cultural differences when it comes to snowboarding."

PCV Christopher Leonard's young student displays his new snowboard skills in Transylvania, Romania.

ROMANIA

Building Foundations

PCV Jacob Kirchmer didn't have to search far to find willing Volunteers to help with one of his projects. In fact, when fellow PCVs heard that Kirchmer was working with Habitat for Humanity in Romania, they came to him looking for the opportunity to get involved—so he created a home building project especially for them. Fifteen Volunteers, along with several of their Romanian counterparts and two homeowner families, spent five precious vacation days digging the foundation of a new home, sanding drywall, and pouring cement.

"Because the Peace Corps places a great deal of emphasis on community development and skills transfer, a frequent complaint among Volunteers is that their work fails to produce immediate quantifiable results," Kirchmer says. "The sort of instant gratification that comes from building a house from the ground up is probably the project's greatest asset. Volunteers who helped out walked away with a tangible sense of accomplishment." By including the Volunteers' Romanian counterparts in the project, Kirchmer hopes the collaboration will go a long way toward promoting the concept of volunteerism in Romania.



(From top left) PCVs Mijin Kim, Bridget Humphries, and JJ Martin pose with three Romanian volunteers after five days of building.

R E M E M B R A N C E S



Volunteers Share African Water Issues with U.S. Students

WATER IN AFRICA PROJECT AIMS TO TEACH STUDENTS ABOUT WATER AS A FINITE RESOURCE

"There is no running water in my village," writes Jennifer Goldman, a Peace Corps Volunteer in Sokamalam, Cameroon. "I use one bucket of water each day for all of my household and bathing needs. It has simply become a way of life."

It's easy for people in the United States to take their unlimited supply of clean tap water for granted. Most Americans never experience the eye-opening relationship with water that Peace Corps Volunteers like Goldman come to know, based on the availability and cultural attitudes toward H₂O in their host countries. But Goldman, along with 87 other Volunteers in 26 African countries, is helping to alter Americans' attitudes toward this life-sustaining substance through World Wise Schools' new *Water in Africa* project. They are contributing photos and stories about how they use water to drink, bathe, cook, and do the wash in their villages. Anecdotes also paint a picture of how different cultures use water in cultural and religious celebrations, for transportation, and recreation. Volunteers are teaching about their water collection methods, such as a two-kilometer hike carrying a bucket, and catching rainwater as it falls from the rooftop. The materials provided by the Volunteers will be the basis of several project-based learning units designed for K-12 students across the United States.

Billy DiDiego

"Billy was energy, he was life, he was love and goodness. He opened his heart to everyone and was seen as the pillar of support to the other Volunteers around him."

Billy DiDiego's commitment to serving others was prevalent, not only in his decision to become a Peace Corps Volunteer in Cote d'Ivoire, but also by the positive example he set for those around him. Before joining the Peace Corps, Billy worked with Habitat for Humanity in South Carolina, where he helped build houses for the less fortunate. While at the University of South Carolina he volunteered with *Alternative Projects* and served as a YMCA youth soccer coach. Billy dedicated over four years of his life to the Peace Corps, first as a Volunteer for three years in Zorofla, where he built strong relationships by helping his community with sanitation and education projects, then as a Volunteer leader for an additional year. He was 26 years old when he was tragically killed in an auto accident on February 7, 2000, as he traveled to a distant village to check out prospective sites for future health Volunteers.

Characterized by friends as a person with contagious energy and optimism, Billy awoke every morning with the conviction to make that day his best one yet. As a Volunteer leader, he helped incoming Volunteers assimilate. He offered wisdom, experience, and a positive outlook to those in need of a guiding hand, a pep talk, or just a good friend. Billy had an uncanny way of making those around him feel special, important, and cared for. He worked diligently to make the Volunteer leader house a home, open and inviting to all the Volunteers in his region. An avid gardener, Billy surrounded the house with beautiful flowers, herbs, vegetables, and fruit; an Eden, where he predicted future Volunteers would eat papayas off the trees he had planted there.

Jesse Thyne

"With his smiling face, good humor, and devotion to teaching, Jesse understood what the Peace Corps is all about."

At Jesse Thyne's memorial service in California on January 15, his sister Shannon remarked, "The one sad fact in this story is that Jesse died when he was 24 years old. The rest is all about a wonderful boy who became a man and had the courage to figure out who he was, where he belonged in the world, and what he was supposed to do with his life. And he had the courage to live out that vision wherever it took him. This is a story of triumph, with Jesse as the hero."

Jesse's journey through life, his insatiable curiosity, and love of adventure led him around the world to the Peace Corps' education program in Guinea, West Africa, in 1998. He said joining the Peace Corps would put his life on a course that was "all about giving." He was embarking on a spiritual quest for deeper meaning, and wanted to find solitude, to be alone with his thoughts for a while. He had been working as a math teacher in the village of Diountou for a year-and-a-half when his life was tragically cut short by a car accident, along

Justin Bhansali

"Justin was a great conversationalist. Whatever mattered to you, mattered to him."

"From my time in the Peace Corps, I hope to gain a greater appreciation for the intercultural scope of humanity's problems and hopes. I would like very much to enrich the lives of my students, and to make a positive lasting impression on the community," Justin Bhansali wrote in preparation to join the Peace Corps as a teacher of math and physics in 1998. Justin was 24 years old when he died on January 7, 2000, along with fellow Peace Corps Volunteer Jesse Thyne, when the taxi they were riding in collided with another vehicle in Guinea, West Africa.

Fellow Volunteers called Justin a "man of many ideas" who will be remembered for his sharp sense of humor and love for adventure. His innovations in math teaching helped improve his students' interest in the subject by making it fun and tangible to real-life situations. He established a team-teaching program in his school to develop a multidisciplinary approach to learning, so math applications could be taught along with geography and other subjects. Justin was an award-winning chess player who amazed fellow Volunteers with magic tricks and his expert card-playing skills. He graduated from the University of Missouri with a B.S. with honors in chemical engineering, where he co-founded Planet Innovation, an organization that helps U.S. schools integrate computer technology into classrooms. A former volunteer at the university emergency room, Justin had planned to go to medical school to become a pediatrician after his Peace Corps service.

Justin left a legacy in his community of Pilimini—a new school for the children. He had hoped to create a better learning environment for the growing number of students, and succeeded in obtaining a SPA grant to build the school. The Peace Corps is working with the community to complete the project in Justin's name.



with fellow Volunteer Justin Bhansali. Although it ended too soon, Jesse's life had come full circle, defined by the inner peace he found in Africa.

Described as a generous, peacemaking sunbeam, Jesse was not one to take the conventional path at the fork in the road. Upon arrival at his site in Diountou, he took the identity of both tribes in his community instead of choosing one over the other, and was known there as Abdoullaye Diallo-Bah. Jesse is remembered in Guinea as an active citizen of his village, where the people loved and admired him for speaking fluent Pulaar, the local language, and observing Muslim traditions as a gesture of solidarity with his community. He loved to play the harmonica and sunbathe in the Tai Thie waterfall outside of his village. Jesse left behind more than friends and memories in Guinea. He had begun a renovation project for the school in his community. The Peace Corps plans to help the community complete the expansion of the school, which was renamed in Jesse's memory.

Tina Singleton

Finds the Signs of Success in Africa

Tina Singleton's life swerved in a new direction on a bustling street near the open air market in *Bangui*, the capital of Central African Republic. Several months into her Peace Corps service as a child survival health specialist, she was strolling through the city when she spotted a tall, slender, 40-something man dressed in gray pants and a white shirt. Everything about him was nondescript, except his hands. He was communicating in sign language.

"We became fast friends, and before I knew it, I was attending church services for the deaf and learning *Sango* sign language," says Singleton. "It was an amazing experience, and my first introduction to learning about people with disabilities in developing countries."

This interest didn't happen out of a vacuum. Hard of hearing in her right ear since infancy, Singleton studied sign language twice before joining the Peace Corps in 1992. But that seemingly insignificant moment when she happened upon a stranger speaking sign language on the streets in Africa—and her remaining volunteer service—guided her into a career she'd never thought of before.

Because of political instability in C.A.R., Singleton was reassigned as a rural community development Volunteer in Benin after one year. Upon arriving, she expressed interest in working with people with disabilities to the country director, and soon became the Peace Corps' first disability business specialist in Cotonou, Benin's capital. She eventually extended her tour, serving in the Peace Corps a total of four years. "Once people in the disability community heard there was a Volunteer working with people with disabilities, people came out of the woodwork," she says. "They weren't receiving the information and resources necessary for developing community projects, like funding information, support for proposal writing, and technical assistance. That was when I realized how much people with disabilities were left out of humanitarian assistance programs." Singleton's first project was to research and publish a resource guide of organizations and services for people with disabilities in Benin. She went on to work with people with physical, sensory (deaf and blind), and

cognitive disabilities through nongovernmental organizations, including the Beninese Association for the Deaf and a local Special Olympics team.

Singleton's fervor didn't end with her close of service. She earned a master's degree in community disability studies for developing countries in 1997 from the Centre for International Child Health in London. The following year, she landed her current job as international development and disability program manager at Mobility International USA (MIUSA), an Oregon-based nonprofit organization that promotes the empowerment, equal opportunities, and human rights of people with disabilities around the globe.

The World Health Organization estimates that up to 10 percent of the world's population has a disability. An estimated 80 percent of these live in developing countries, but less than one percent of overseas development assistance supports disability-

Singleton was looking for a change in her life, but she got more than she bargained for.

specific programs. It's one of the reasons Singleton remains committed to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the development process.

"Whatever their assignment, Peace Corps Volunteers can have a major impact by ensuring that people with disabilities are included in development programs and activities," says Singleton. People often believe such work is expensive or requires special training. "Not true," she says. "The experts are people with disabilities themselves." Singleton credits the Peace Corps with having an extraordinary impact on her career path, goals, and values. She says, "The Peace Corps gave me the practical experience, cross-cultural, and interpersonal skills that are vital to my current work."

Before becoming a Volunteer, Singleton enjoyed the quintessential urban professional life in San Francisco's historic Haight-Ashbury district.

After 10 years as a fashion merchandiser, Singleton was looking for a change in her life, but she got more than she bargained for. Not only was her Peace Corps service an avenue to a new career, but along the way she was forced to confront her own identity in ways she never would have in San Francisco. When asked why she wanted to work with people with disabilities, the disclosure of her own hearing loss often elicited acceptance. "I used to be uncomfortable about that because I didn't want people to think I was using my hearing loss to gain acceptance in the disability community," she explains. "Growing up, I never identified myself as a person with a disability and had no knowledge of disability culture. I think I found my connection to people with disabilities more through the shared experiences of knowing first-hand about prejudice and discrimination, me as a black woman in the U.S., and them as people with disabilities.



In Benin... As a Volunteer in 1992, Singleton helped a group of disabled people learn how to start and run a small business.

And colonialism's legacy left complex interpersonal dynamics in Africa for her to contend with as a black American female. She found the dynamics of her relationships with Beninese colleagues and neighbors changed when white people were present. "There was an assumption that whites knew more and had more influence than I did, and I was often ignored when white friends and colleagues were around," she recalls. Singleton said being an African American woman in black Africa was the most challenging aspect of her service—something she continues processing today. She says, "When I was in graduate school, I wrote my thesis on experiences of Volunteers of color in Africa. It was the best thing I could have done for myself." Despite frustrations and challenges, Singleton says the good outpaced the bad. "Having grown up in predominately white neighborhoods and attended predominately white schools, living in Africa was the first time I lived anywhere where everyone looked like me," says Singleton. "It was amazing. It was like heaven."

A self-described ally to people with disabilities, most importantly, the Peace Corps led her to her life's purpose. "It's hard to say why I do what I do," says Singleton. "I just know that I love my job and I am passionate about my work."



Tina poses in September 1998 with Meenu Sikand after MIUSA sponsored a symposium on how women with disabilities can gain access to small business microcredit opportunities.



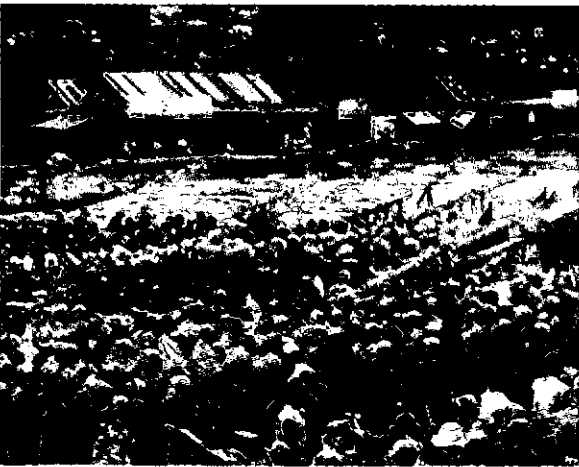
Singleton (second from left), poses with MIUSA staff members and violinist Itzhak Perlman at a fundraiser in February, 2000.



PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD



PCV Suzanne LeBlanc snaps a shot of Tanya and Lelia, who pose in traditional Ukrainian dress before their performance in the Icanna Kupala celebration in their town, Kopychyntsi.



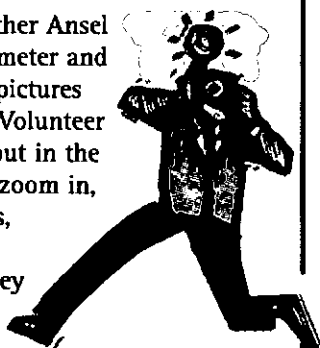
PCV Ingrid Anderson captures the colorful opening ceremony of a boat race in Phitsanuloke Province, Thailand. Teams from across the country competed in the event on the Nam river.



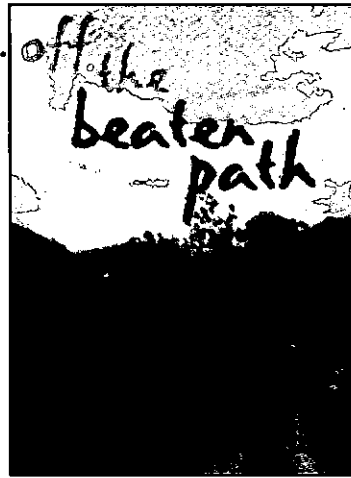
PCV Donald Phillips samples vin de casa (the house wine) with his Moldovan friend in their cellar.

CALLING ALL

You don't have to be another Ansel Adams with a good light meter and sturdy tripod to see your pictures in print. We love sharing Volunteer photographs with others out in the field, so load that 35mm, zoom in, and start shooting! Photos, negatives, and slides are accepted, but we regret they cannot be returned.



SNAP SHOOTERS ...



"Upon returning to my homestead after walking three miles through sand under the hot African sun to collect water, I was charged by an aggressive chicken looking to mate. I ran for my life! Some days all I can do is laugh..."

PCV Michele Pierson-Finol Barbosa (Namibia)

"Upon arrival at my host family's house, which is a great deal more plush than I had anticipated (toilet seat, cable T.V., no live-stock-in-the-house policy), I decided to have a bath. In the bathroom I found a large marble bathtub half-filled with water, so I jumped right in up to my knees. After my bath, I drained the dirty water. Little did I know, the tub had contained the family's water supply for several days! One is supposed to stand next to the tub and dip water with a bucket to bathe. Promptly, everyone in town learned of my blunder and had a good laugh at my expense."

PCV Mike Clark (Philippines)

"A while back I was planning chili beans for dinner and wanted to make corn bread. I looked all over for corn meal, with no luck. When I checked at the bazaar, I found a big bag of what was the closest I'd seen to corn meal. It smelled about right and, though the texture wasn't quite the same, I figured they had probably ground it by hand instead of a machine. I bought some and

made corn bread. My host mother thought it was delicious and was very curious about where I had found the mystery grain to make the bread. I told her it didn't exactly look like what I was used to, but it smelled okay. She examined it carefully, smelled it and asked where in the bazaar had I found it. When I told her, she got a big smile on her face and said, "I know what this is. We feed it to the animals!" We both had a good laugh, making animal noises and vowing never to tell anyone about our secret ingredient."

PCV Ruby Long (Uzbekistan)

TECHNOLOGY, from page 1

addressing an important issue for Belize's successful development as a country in a world changed by the information technology revolution," he said.

Belize has a growing tourism industry, good infrastructure, including telephones and electricity, and interest from investors in establishing businesses, including data processing centers. So the country is well-suited to take advantage of information technology. The Belizean government has announced its commitment to implementing a national computer literacy campaign in partnership with the Peace Corps and it has begun distributing donated computers to primary and secondary schools.

The new Volunteer project aims to help Belize address the urgent problems of unemployment and

youth at risk. The first group of Volunteers will work in district education offices to train teachers in basic computer literacy and teach them how to integrate computers into their curriculums. "By the end of 2001, more than half of all Volunteers in Belize will be working in the IT program," Christ said. "For a small country like Belize, this initiative is big, and we are all enthusiastic about it." Volunteers will also use information technology in Belize to develop an environmental resources data base for the Ministry of Natural Resources, bring vocational training in computer repairs to disadvantaged youth, help citrus growers create business plans for marketing their products, and market community-based ecotourism enterprises.

TELECONFERENCING, from page 1

Ghana PCV Mark Whitlock asked one of his students to address a difficult question from middle school students in Kentucky regarding the judicial system of Ghana. The student talked about "instant justice," and how in their culture, criminals are sometimes attacked by mobs.

PCV Kristen Tiles taught elementary students in Madison, Wisconsin, about voodoo practices in Haiti, and PCV Christopher Wallis told students in Ohio about his experience living in Honduras when Hurricane Mitch passed through.

Middle school kids in East Hampton, Massachusetts, learned from PCV Scott Friel that Mongolian people do not like cats, while PCV Allison Knaup taught kids in St. Louis, Missouri, that girls in Morocco usually quit school at age 9 or 10 to enter the work force.

There was a serious moment during the conversation with a junior high school class in Colorado

Springs, when Panamanian students asked the Americans what they thought of the transfer of the Panama Canal. PCV Ted Lanzano was pleased to hear the American students rally in support of the transfer, telling the Panamanian children they thought it would strengthen their economy.

Middle school kids in Buffalo, New York learned from PCV John Anderson that the Philippines has no legal driving age.

Kids in Middle Island, New York, were astounded to learn from PCV Tasha Hacker that Russian students in Siberia happily dedicate two to three weeks of their summer vacation to cleaning their school.

Middle school students in Boulder, Colorado talked openly with students in PCV Anna Domenico's class in South Africa about policies and attitudes towards AIDS, while students in Chicago learned that one of their Gambian peer's father has two wives.