

Update

Peace Corps, Community Colleges Roll Out New Recruitment Initiative

The Peace Corps and the American Association of Community Colleges have embarked on a groundbreaking initiative to increase the number of highly skilled community college graduates serving in the Peace Corps. Although almost half the students enrolled in institutions of higher education in the United States are studying at community colleges, until now the Peace Corps has not conducted targeted outreach on community college campuses.

For years, the Peace Corps has received requests for Americans to serve in the areas of information technology, health education, water sanitation,

business development, and agriculture. These are the areas of focus for the community college recruitment initiative. Most of the licensing, certification, and technical training to prepare U.S. students for the workplace occurs at community colleges, so the effort will help the Peace Corps fill host country requests in these sectors.

In February, Peace Corps Director Gaddi H. Vasquez and AACC representatives introduced the new recruitment initiative in Washington, D.C.; in the Colorado Community College System; and at Santa Ana College, in California. Other rollout events took place at

Rochester Community and Technical College, in Minnesota; at Tidewater Community College, in Virginia; in the Maricopa Community College District, in Arizona; and at Miami Dade College, in Florida.

Returned Peace Corps Volunteers throughout the nation have enthusiastically embraced this initiative. More than 90 RPCVs have agreed to serve as points of contact on community college campuses, assisting the 11 regional Peace Corps recruitment offices with outreach.

For more information, visit peacecorps.gov/comcol/



Far left: At a February ceremony in California, Director Vasquez joins President Rita Cepeda of Santa Ana College, who pledged to support Peace Corps efforts to recruit more community college graduates.

Left: With Director Vasquez after a Peace Corps headquarters ceremony are (left to right) Ambassador Salvador Stadthagen of Nicaragua; Dr. George R. Boggs, AACC; Dr. Jesus Carreon, Dallas Community College District; and Dr. Clarence A. Porter, Montgomery College, Maryland.

SEEKING RPCVS ON COMMUNITY COLLEGE CAMPUSES!

The Peace Corps is seeking RPCV educators, administrators, and board members who are affiliated with a community college to help recruit community college graduates for Volunteer service. RPCVs can help by encouraging college staff to act as Peace Corps advocates; publicizing opportunities to serve; making presentations in classes or at special events; or staffing a Peace Corps table at a career fair. **The Peace Corps is also looking for RPCVs with associate degrees who would be willing to share their Peace Corps experience through testimonials or presentations to community college students and graduates.**

For more information, e-mail Elizabeth Demarest at edemarest@peacecorps.gov

Director's Corner

Our numbers — and prospects — are up

At a time when President Bush has submitted to Congress a record request for a Peace Corps budget for fiscal year 2005, our agency is offering a vastly expanded Web presence, and, perhaps most important, we have the highest number of Volunteers in the field since 1974.

Let's take a quick look at the numbers and what they mean. The FY 2005 budget request for \$401 million follows on our current budget of \$308 million for FY 2004. Furthermore, we hope to receive additional monies from the Global HIV/AIDS Initiative over the coming five years through field-based initiatives in nine eligible countries. The Peace Corps will continue to train all Volunteers who serve in Africa, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia as advocates and educators for HIV/AIDS prevention and care. Last year, more than 2,300 Volunteers, in more than 55 posts, worked on HIV/AIDS projects and programs.

Not only is our number of Volunteers—7,533—the highest it's been in 28 years, but demand for Volunteers overseas continues to grow. More than 20 additional countries have requested our programs. In the past year, we have begun new programs by sending Volunteers to Fiji, Albania, Chad, and Azerbaijan. We have returned to Jordan and Morocco and have plans to return to China this summer. Also this fall, we will send a group of Volunteers to Mexico—a historic first with one of our closest neighbors.

The redesigned Peace Corps website has been attracting attention in ever increasing numbers. We are finding that more applicants are turning to technology to research the Peace Corps before applying. We're eager to provide as much information as possible when potential volunteers are considering the opportunity.

In 2003, about 5.7 million people visited our website—a 32 percent increase over the year before. The redesigned site is part of the national recruitment and awareness campaign, titled "Life is calling. How far will you go?" We designed the site to ease the application process, to appeal to a more diverse Peace Corps audience, and to educate Americans about our goals and accomplishments. Since the new website was launched last September, we've had a 49 percent increase in online inquiries about Peace Corps service. And more applicants are using the site to apply. Last year, we received 70 percent of our applications electronically.

All of these positive indications say one thing to me: After 43 years, the Peace Corps is as viable and important an idea as it was when Sargent Shriver recruited the first Volunteer groups back in 1961. I am deeply proud of our organization and recognize that the Peace Corps is more than a great idea: It is a legacy of truly significant work that rests on the shoulders not only of today's Volunteers and staff, but of the more than 170,000 of you who have already served.

Partnership Program

An Easy Way to Support Grass-Roots Development

Help celebrate the Peace Corps Partnership Program's 40 years of success by donating funds to community projects in Peace Corps countries. One hundred percent of your tax-deductible contribution goes toward the project of your choice. All projects are community initiated and require a 25 percent contribution from the host community.

Since 1967, more than 4,500 Peace Corps Partnership projects have been implemented worldwide in the areas of education, health, business, agriculture, and the environment.

For more information or a list of Volunteer projects in need of funding:

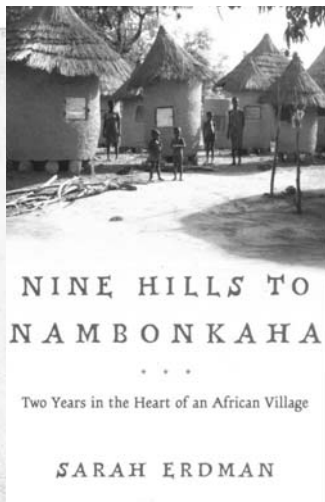
Visit peacecorps.gov/contribute
Call 800.424.8580, ext. 2170
E-mail pcpp@peacecorps.gov

Peace Corps Partnership Contributions Make a Difference

- Today, residents of Dhunche, Nepal, have an English-Nepali language library at their local school due to the efforts of Volunteer **Zach Pusch** and the generosity of schools, churches, businesses, and service organizations in several Connecticut communities.
- In El Regadillo, El Salvador, a community that gets by on subsistence farming, residents celebrated Christmas this year for the first time with recorded salsa music and electric lights. Partnership funds helped Volunteer **Randall Blair** bring electricity to El Regadillo, a dream of community members for many years.

Villagers lay one of several posts for the Ban Phra Da Tree Nursery in Thailand, made possible with Peace Corps Partnership contributions.





New Star Shines Among Peace Corps Writers

Old women walk single file along the road, hips rocking under the weight of stacked firewood. Boys in smudged rags dangle their latest catch by its tail, hoping to lure a buyer from the cars that hurtle by. They are my neighbors. I know them by name.

Usually, blackness permeates the village by seven and life retreats behind closed doors soon after the evening meal. But tonight the moon is full, and it's like someone left the hall light on. The village reappears after dusk like a black-and-white photograph—all silvers and shades of gray.

If you'd like to immerse yourself in rural northern Côte d'Ivoire in an out-of-the-way mud-hut village and experience exuberance and disappointment, joy and fury, love and frustration while learning vividly what it's like to introduce a host of compelling individuals to health practices as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Africa, read Sarah Erdman's recent book, *Nine Hills to Nambonkaha*.

There are nine hills to Nambonkaha. They are faint, rolling, deceiving, long. I know each rise, each rut from pedaling into town several times a month. I have biked them with eggs and watermelons wobbling on my bike rack, colossal planks of wood listing over my head, chickens dangling from my handlebars. For each torturous climb, there is always a short breath of ecstasy. Nine moments that are worth it for the wind buffeting my face, ringing in my ears, filling my shirt, for the brilliant streak of rice fields beside me.

With a musical ear for nuances of events and feelings and personalities and cultural surprises, Erdman weaves the story of her two years as a health-care worker. We experience births and deaths—sometimes one and the same. Islam and animism co-exist in a careful and convenient mix. Protocol and privilege, hopelessness and determination vie in precarious balance. The author reveals intricacies of an unfamiliar culture through deeply personal storytelling and powerful prose that grips unflinchingly.

He is not a large man, yet his hands are mammoth. He rubs them together, slowly. I can hear the scrape of his callused skin. His palms are cracked and wide; it looks like he could knock down a hut with one blow. The nail of one thumb is a broad, yellowed square, flat and smooth like an ancient tablet. He studies it as if wisdom were etched there.

Erdman's Ivorian friends become our friends. Their challenges become ours, as they became Erdman's. We embrace the villagers, one by one, but we also share the author's rare dismay. In the present tense, we live story after story and learn and grow along with Erdman. And after 300-plus pages, we have become part of the community—closing the volume inspired and emotionally captivated, as Erdman was.

Reviewed by

Roger B. Hirschland
Sierra Leone (1965–67)
Writer/Editor,
Paul D. Coverdell
World Wise Schools



Write On!

Returned Peace Corps Volunteers have distinguished themselves in writing for decades. Perhaps the best known is Moritz Thomsen, who embroidered his experiences in Ecuador in *Living Poor: A Peace Corps Chronicle*.

Later this year, the Peace Corps' World Wise Schools program is publishing a new volume of Peace Corps stories, *Uncommon Journeys: Peace Corps Adventures Across Cultures*. Included will be Mark Brazaitis (Guatemala), Kimberly Ross Camara (Guinea), John Deever (Ukraine), Peter Hessler (China), Leita Kaldi (Senegal), Robin Solomon (Kazakhstan), Craig Storti (Morocco), Mike Tidwell (Zaire), Jim Toner (Sri Lanka), and Carrie Young (Mali). *Uncommon Journeys* will be available in print and on the Peace Corps website.

In Sarah Erdman's View

When did you decide to write the book—during your service or afterward? What inspired you to write it?

Before I left, I had an idea I might write about my experience, but it dissipated as soon as I got there because the realities of my life there forced me to focus on the present much more than the future. I wrote religiously in my journal in Nambonkaha, not because I was working on a manuscript, but because I found that I needed to write—it was the only way to share the amazing or difficult or heartbreaking experience I was having. So instead of coming home after a particularly interesting conversation and calling a friend about it, I wrote a letter home or wrote in my journal. It wasn't until after I completed my service, when I was traveling in East Africa, and nostalgic for West Africa, that I realized that I had to write the book. It wasn't a decision really—more of a realization that it was what I needed to do. There were too many important things to be said, too many stories to be told. I couldn't just leave them to get dusty in my head. When I got back to the States, I moved immediately to an isolated house in

Montana and transcribed much of my journal and letters, and then worked on memories to flesh out and organize the stories.

Have you received any feedback from other Peace Corps Volunteers?

The feedback I've received from PCVs has been unforgettable. I guess I wasn't expecting such a warm reception—or that reading the book would compel strangers to get in touch with me just to tell me how they enjoyed it. I've heard from Volunteers' family members, who tell me that they finally understand what their sister or father went through. I've heard from Volunteers from every decade and every continent we serve on—they tell me that somehow my experiences in this forgotten African village mirror theirs, even though they served in urban Eastern Europe or Paraguay. I feel extremely privileged and moved that I was somehow able, through telling my stories, to usher RPCVs back into their own Peace Corps experiences.



Local children gather in PCV Sarah Erdman's courtyard to show designs they've made on the back of health-education notices.

Is there anything, above all else, that you'd like to comment upon for RPCVs—regarding writing, your service, your return?

I think it's never too late to write about your experiences—even writing down memories as they occur to you just to have for yourself. I feel so lucky to have so much of my time there recorded—in the book, but also in journals. It's comforting to know that later on, when my memories of Nambonkaha dim, I can always dive back into my treasure trove of words to relive them.



Sarah Erdman served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Côte d'Ivoire from 1998 to 2000.

STAY connected!

To update your contact information, including e-mail address, please complete this reply card and drop it in the mail. If you provide your e-mail address, you will also receive the *RPCV Update* in an electronic format.

You may also update your information online:
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CRISIS CORPS

A Chance to Serve Again—Short Term

Returned Volunteers can put their skills and experience to good use and gain additional international experience by serving overseas in short-term assignments with the Crisis Corps. Crisis Corps Volunteers work in five broad program areas—humanitarian response, natural disaster relief and reconstruction, HIV/AIDS care and prevention, disaster preparedness and mitigation, and post-conflict relief and reconstruction.

A Good Move Anytime

... **Jason Crooks** took an unpaid leave of absence from his job with Pfizer to work with Africare in Tanzania as a behavioral change specialist on an HIV/AIDS assignment. “Pfizer has a large HIV/AIDS initiative in Africa,” he said. “They were happy to let me take an unpaid ‘civic leave of absence.’”

... The Crisis Corps helped **Rebecca Coolidge** focus her professional goals. After serving in Namibia in program development and management as an HIV/AIDS youth coordinator, Rebecca returned to graduate school to complete a master’s program in development and conflict management. “Being connected to a specific NGO gave me the opportunity...

to see the ins and outs of how a development organization functions. It gave me program management experience from beginning to end,” said Coolidge.

Visit peacecorps.gov/rpcv/crisiscorps

Call 800.424.8580, ext. 2250

E-mail crisiscorps@peacecorps.gov



Maryland Governor Ehrlich Honors Volunteers and Returned Volunteers During Peace Corps Week

Governor Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (*center, with plaque*) presented Peace Corps Director Vasquez and Maryland RPCVs with a State of Maryland proclamation commemorating Peace Corps’ 43rd anniversary on March 1, 2004, at the Maryland State Capitol, in Annapolis. The proclamation declared, “Maryland is proud to recognize the achievements of the Peace Corps and to honor its Volunteers, past and present, and reaffirm our country’s commitment to helping people help themselves throughout the world.” Since 1961, almost 4,900 men and women from Maryland have served in the Peace Corps.

The Maryland RPCVs participating in the ceremony were **Mary Nasibi, Henry Mulzac, Richard Kimball, Brian Payne, Jim Cuffe, Shaun Watson, and Joby Taylor.**

Forty state governors and numerous mayors and county boards issued proclamations commemorating Peace Corps’ 43rd anniversary, celebrated during Peace Corps Week (March 1–7). Thousands of RPCVs nationwide participated in classroom and community presentations, which will be featured in the summer issue of the *RPCV Update*.

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For more information, visit www.rpcv2004.org or www.rpcv.org

Peace Match

Looking for an audience for your Peace Corps stories?

Check out PeaceMatch.org, a new website linking RPCVs with teachers requesting Peace Corps speakers.

The site also provides materials and resources to help you with your classroom presentations.

The Peace Match program is administered by the National Peace Corps Association under a cooperative agreement with the Peace Corps.



Serve Overseas as a Peace Corps Country Director

Applications are due August 13 and 27, 2004.

Apply now at www.peacecorps.gov/employment/countrydirector.cfm

Learn More About...

- Crisis Corps
- Fellows/USA
- Paul D. Coverdell World Wise Schools
- Outreach opportunities with the Peace Corps' 11 regional recruiting offices
- Peace Corps Partnership Program

Friday August 6 CAREER FAIR

More than 100 exhibitors will attend this career fair co-sponsored by the Peace Corps:

Employers from the private and public sectors; nonprofit organizations working domestically and overseas; graduate schools, including the Peace Corps' partner institutions in Fellows/USA

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