



# RPCVupdate

NEWS FOR RPCVS AND FRIENDS OF THE PEACE CORPS

## Crisis Corps Rushed Aid to Gulf Coast



Crisis Corps Volunteer Kerry Robarge (PCV, Kenya 2001–2003) surveys salvaged goods in New Orleans. She trained FEMA staff and locally hired workers at hurricane disaster recovery centers in Baton Rouge.

### Seasoned RPCVs First To Serve Corps Within U.S.

By Keri Buscaglia  
(PCV, Romania 1996–1998)

Never in a million years did I imagine myself carrying out the ideals and principles of the Peace Corps here in my own country, and yet what an amazing opportunity it has been to serve and assist with Hurricane Katrina rescue and relief efforts. I have been out of the Peace Corps loop for nearly eight years now, but as soon as my plane touched down in Orlando on September 10, I realized how much I missed its culture and all the amazing people on these chosen journeys.

I was among the first Volunteers to respond to the Crisis Corps after Hurricane Katrina and was quickly deployed, along with 13 others, to Baton Rouge. With next to no infor-

(continued inside, center)

### Peace Corps Founding Director Sargent Shriver, at 90, writes:

“I don’t think any of us who were there at the beginning could have imagined the lasting impact the Peace Corps has brought to the world. I am grateful to all the Peace Corps Volunteers and Peace Corps staff who have given so much of themselves over the past 45 years to keep the Peace Corps spirit alive.” —Letter to Peace Corps Director Gaddi H. Vasquez



### PC/Mongolia Staff Meets Bush

On his return from attending the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Korea in November, after which he also visited Japan and China, President George W. Bush became the first sitting U.S. president to visit Mongolia. At Buyant Ukhua International Airport, in Ulaanbaatar, the capital, Mr. Bush attended a

meeting with U.S. Embassy staff, at which he met Peace Corps/Mongolia administrative officer Enkhtuya (at right) and Peace Corps/Mongolia cashier Khishigtuul (center). (Mongolians go by one name only.) President Bush praised the cooperation between the United States and Mongolia.





# 45 Years of Vision, Mission—and Change

On a rainy early morning 45 years ago, then Senator John F. Kennedy challenged students at the University of Michigan to serve their country by living and working abroad. Since then, countless lives have been touched and changed by more than 182,000 Volunteers who have answered that call and served in the Peace Corps.

March 1, 2006, marks the 45th anniversary of President Kennedy's signing of the executive order authorizing the Peace Corps. Throughout the year, returned Volunteers will be honoring their service and sharing stories, beginning with Peace Corps Week, February 27–March 5. The schedule for some of the first events is shown below.

The Peace Corps has always honored its mission and goals while responding to new requests from countries and changing profiles of Americans who serve.

We are in 77 countries today, having served in 138 countries during our history. Currently, 7,810 Volunteers are serving—a 30-year high.

In the 1960s, more than 60 percent of Volunteers were male, but today the ratio is reversed. The extraordinary older Volunteers who served in the first decade represented just one percent of those serving; today that percentage is almost seven, many of whom bring advanced

education, business, and other technical experiences and skills to their service.

Volunteers reflect America's diversity, with 16½ percent composed of minorities, some of whom are first-generation Americans. We have Volunteers whose own parents have stories of Peace Corps Volunteers in their villages from India to Nigeria.

Today, host governments request a wider range of skills than in our first years. In addition to traditional skill areas, today Volunteers are working in information technology, business, engineering, and targeted health areas. All Volunteers in Africa and most Volunteers in the other regions have training in HIV/AIDS-related services, and more than 2,600 serve in HIV/AIDS projects, from helping form village-based NGOs to supporting programs for orphans to developing HIV/AIDS education programs for students.

Immediate communication brings new kinds of Volunteer experiences. More and more communities where Volunteers serve have access to the Web, e-mail, and cell-phones. Many Volunteers now use phones to manage logistics and to stay in touch with their host-country counterparts. They can also stay in close touch with other Volunteers, staff, and family and friends at home. Families are now part of the Volunteer experience. The third goal—

helping Americans better understand other peoples—today begins when the Volunteer arrives at the start of service. Volunteers stay in touch with U.S. schools and community groups. The Peace Corps, through the Coverdell World Wise Schools program, facilitates connections between 4,000 U.S. teachers and currently serving Volunteers.

The Crisis Corps, which offers opportunities for returned Peace Corps Volunteers to serve again, began 10 years ago this June. More than 900 Crisis Corps Volunteers have served—over 50 of them in Thailand and Sri Lanka, in tsunami relief. The U.S. Gulf Coast catastrophe marks the first time the Peace Corps has served in the United States. The 272 Crisis Corps Volunteers who went to Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas talk of their profound experience, and have even begun an alumni group called “Friends of the United States.”

The founding wisdom behind the Peace Corps and its three goals has sustained the clarity of purpose for the Volunteers and the countries and communities in which they serve, and yet enables us to respond to changing country needs and to the changing profile of those who wish to serve. I am proud to be associated with the more than 182,000 of you, as together we celebrate 45 years of service.



## 45th Anniversary Events

[www.peacecorps.gov/45](http://www.peacecorps.gov/45)

- Feb. 3 —PC/NPCA\* open house, Austin, TX
- Feb. 12—PC/NPCA open house, Omaha, NE
- Feb. 22—Office of Private Sector Initiatives school visit, St. Andrews-Sewanee School, TN
- Feb. 25—PC/NPCA open house, Miami, FL
- Mar.\*\* —Office of Private Sector Initiatives school visit, Kuna Middle School, Kuna, ID
- Mar. 1—Brooklyn Public Library event with NY regional office
- Mar. 3—Denver regional office open house
- Mar. 4—Uganda staging event at JFK Library, Boston\*\*\*
- Mar. 5—PC/NPCA open house, Portland, OR
- Mar. 13—UN school event with NY regional office
- Mar. 15—Mid-Atlantic recruiting event, University of Virginia
- Mar. 22—Philippines staging event w/ Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor
- Mar. 29—Mid-Atlantic recruiting event, University of Maryland
- April\*\* —Midtown Manhattan library book reading with NY regional office
- April\*\* —Office of Private Sector Initiatives school visit, Santa Margarita Intermediate, Rancho Santa Margarita, CA
- Apr. 30 —PC/NPCA open house, Dearborn, MI

\*Peace Corps/National Peace Corps Association \*\*Check [www.peacecorps.gov/45](http://www.peacecorps.gov/45) for details on final date

\*\*\*Ghana I, Tanganyika I, and JFK Service Award recipients to be featured

# Tales of Service in Nicaragua Enlighten, Inspire Audiences of RPCV Speaker

By Juanita Limas (PCV, Nicaragua 2000–2002)



When I returned to the United States in 2002 after finishing my service as a community health Volunteer in Nicaragua, it was post-9/11 and things were very different from when I left. I was eager to share with all my friends and family my experiences and all my wonderful “Aha!”

moments, but I often found people’s attention span lasted about 10 minutes and then it was back to work. The comments were always, “Did you feel safe?” or “I couldn’t have done what you did.” Wanting to continue to talk about Nicaragua and how it changed me, I asked a friend who had just become a high school teacher for permission to talk to her class about the Peace Corps. It was my first formal presentation about my Peace Corps experience. I had an hour to speak and to field questions from the students, who truly were interested and curious. I left exhilarated and energized, realizing my mission in the United States had become to promote the Peace Corps.

Since my return, I have made it a point to give a presentation to students about the Peace Corps at least during Peace Corps Week. However, this past year, some unique opportunities presented themselves. Asked to speak about my career at a forum for minority professionals at a local high school, I inquired whether I could do the talk during Peace Corps Week and focus on being a

returned Volunteer—in particular, a minority Peace Corps Volunteer. It was a great opportunity to talk to students about the Peace Corps and, at the same time, about being a minority.

During that week, a local radio station affiliated with the University of Iowa was hosting a radio talk show that featured local returned Peace Corps Volunteers. I was asked to participate. We spoke about our experiences and answered questions from the audience. Reaching more than 30,000 listeners across Iowa, it was a terrific way to get the word out about how important the role of the Peace Corps is—more so today than ever.

In doing these and other activities, I have learned a great deal about presenting the Peace Corps concept. First and foremost, although each returned Volunteer could go on for days about a particular site, host country, job assignment, and so forth, I have found that people here in the United States are more interested in how I can use what I learned overseas in my post-Peace Corps life. Second, I learned to select which parts of my experience would be most applicable and helpful to my audience. For example, minority high school students were less interested in all my vaccination campaigns than in how Nicaraguan students their age looked and

*(continued outside, left)*

**Speak up. Speak out. Speak often.**

For ideas and materials to help you make a presentation, go to

[www.peacecorps.gov/www/rpcv](http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/rpcv)

## Crisis Corps

*(continued)*

mation about what was happening in the field, I had no idea how I would or could be of service to the victims of this horrific disaster. Within days, however, I found myself once again in sync with the others. It was a tangible reminder of how much I missed the inherent spirit of Peace Corps Volunteers. It felt like home. And that shared sense of experience and ready-made understanding is an incredible bond that boosted us in our mission to do something—anything—to help these people feel

safe and begin the process of healing.

Hurricane Katrina held all the bumps, humps, skips, and jumps of the two-year Peace Corps experience, emotionally and otherwise, but she threw it all at us in just a few short weeks. Six weeks of frustration, unanswered questions, minor triumphs, and major obstacles had us all struggling to put our service here at home into some framework of understanding. I quickly reminded myself of the most important lessons I had learned while serving in Sibiu, Romania: Lower the expectations, continue to reach out, and don’t underestimate the power of helping one person at a time.

The lessons were exhilarating and painful, the sadness and helplessness more pointed because of the reality: This confusion and suffering was happening in America. All of the excuses we used for failed projects or misery abroad didn’t apply here. But what we Volunteers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, weren’t expecting was the pulsating pride of being able to work together, side by side, as an amazing team of motivators, innovators, and go-getters with one important focus: to help those in our own country.

I have never been more proud of my affiliation with the Peace Corps.

# Where Life Is Too Short

By Allison Howard\*  
(PCV, South Africa 2003–2005)



The strangest thing about my adopted home community in South Africa is the number of establishments selling tombstones in town. It seems the shop names are meant to be optimistic: Paradise Tombstones; Eternal Flame Tombstones. The town boasts a three-story building calling itself a mall, and just in the center, on the second floor, is Perpetuity Tombstones. Its window displays are like any other store's, but instead of half-price sneakers or polyester pants, Perpetuity Tombstones displays—what else?—demo tombstones.

Tombstone demand is a grim, need-driven business. I'm an American in South Africa and no matter how long I live here, I'll never grow accustomed to seeing tombstone shops filled with customers, and I'll never find it easy to accept that burials are the most lucrative business in town.

Only recently did I pause outside a shop and note the dates on the sample headstones: 1974–2003, 1969–2002.

Those two invented individuals would have died at ages 29 and 33. Apparently, in the Northern Province of South Africa, we're meant to accept that a human life ending at 30 is normal.

I find myself living in a country with the largest HIV/AIDS population in the world. I'm a Volunteer with the Peace Corps in South Africa, and one in every four people I meet is likely to die of AIDS before the decade is out. Those who don't die will be left behind: children without parents, mothers burying adult children.

In the rural villages, where the disease is spreading like wildfire, people know of AIDS, but they don't speak of it. They don't want to know their status because a positive diagnosis may bring rejection and ostracism. A loved one's death is euphemistically called "natural," and village people attend to the burial ceremonies as though nothing were unusual about a 30-year-old man or woman dying of "natural causes." And that's the crux of the crisis: There's nothing unusual about it anymore.

\*Allison Howard's complete letter, of which this is an excerpt, can be viewed at <http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/cybervol>.

## AIDS Relief Coordinator Ron Campbell



The Peace Corps recently established the position of AIDS relief coordinator, reflecting the commitment of the agency in the global fight

against the AIDS pandemic.

AIDS Relief Coordinator Ron Campbell served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Solomon Islands (1976–1978), as well as country director in South Africa and Tanzania. During the past year, he was policy manager for Peace Corps participation in the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, while also serving as acting deputy chief of staff at the agency.

Ron also has more than 12 years of experience as resident advisor in Africa and Poland on USAID and World Bank projects.

The creation of the coordinator's office places the Peace Corps firmly in the historic effort against the AIDS pandemic. It is the first of several steps the Peace Corps will take to enhance and sustain our involvement in this critical issue over the long term.

**CRISIS  
CORPS**



For information on the Crisis Corps and how to apply, visit the Web at [www.peacecorps.gov/crisiscorps](http://www.peacecorps.gov/crisiscorps) or call 800.424.8580 x2250

### RETURNED VOLUNTEER SERVICES (RVS)

offers free career resources to RPCVs who have ended their service within the past year, including

- **HOTLINE**, a semi-monthly newsletter of job announcements and educational programs. See *HOTLINE* at [www.peacecorps.gov/rpcv/hotline](http://www.peacecorps.gov/rpcv/hotline).
- **Employment bulletins** for international and domestic jobs. E-mail RVS for a free password.
- **Career Information Consultants**, a directory of more than 1,500 professionals who will answer career-related questions. E-mail RVS for a hard copy or CD-ROM.
- **Career events**: For career fairs, workshops, and other career-related events, visit [www.peacecorps.gov/rpcv/events](http://www.peacecorps.gov/rpcv/events).
- **Career and educational publications**, including *Career Resource Manual*. Check [www.peacecorps.gov/rvs/publications](http://www.peacecorps.gov/rvs/publications).
- **Career centers** in the Arlington, Virginia, recruiting office and 10 other regional offices.

For more information, contact RVS at [rvs@peacecorps.gov](mailto:rvs@peacecorps.gov).

# PCVs Bring High-Tech and Business Skills to Mexico

By Byron Battle, Country Director

In 2001, President George W. Bush and Mexican President Vicente Fox signed the Partnership for Prosperity agreement, in which Mexico invited



the Peace Corps to bring in experienced technical and business Volunteers to work with the National Council for Science and Technology, known in Mexico as CONACYT.

In October 2004, the Peace Corps sent its first group of Volunteers to work with several of CONACYT's technical research and development centers in the central region of the country. Our second group arrived in October 2005 to expand into nine of CONACYT's centers in six Mexican cities. The median age of our PCVs in Mexico is 45, with an average work experience of 15 to 20 years. Volunteers are focusing on the institutional strengthening of CONACYT's centers to improve their capacity to transfer technologies to Mexico's private and public sectors, thereby creating jobs and mitigating the negative environmental impacts of the country's rapid industrial and agricultural growth. Technical Volunteers are working in the areas of environmental and water engi-



**Environmental Volunteers Paul Ruesch and Veronica Pesinova, atop a 100-foot-tall sewage-treatment tank in Leon, Mexico, inspect rotors that agitate sludge at the wastewater treatment facility.**

neering, business advising, information technology and knowledge management, and various industrial technologies needed for creating jobs.

How are we doing? Our first year's results have been impressive. Peace Corps Volunteers are making headway in shaping the way CONACYT centers assess the needs of public and private sector groups for new technologies and how they apply those technologies to foster economic and environmental development. Some are working in the field in water and soil remediation, potable water infrastructure, and development of biodegradable plastics for Mexican industries. Several PCVs are concentrating on improving the business process systems of Mexican companies to permit them to achieve greater competitiveness and create jobs

for Mexican workers. Others are helping reshape the internal organization of CONACYT centers to improve their effectiveness as development institutions, including through information technologies and knowledge management.

The current group of 25 Volunteers includes four married couples and seven foreign-born U.S. citizens. Most have either MAs or PhDs. All have integrated fully into their CONACYT organizations and the local Mexican life. Our Peace Corps headquarters is in Queretaro, in the central region of the country, where most Volunteers are concentrated. In the future, Peace Corps/Mexico aims to move increasingly into the areas of environmental protection and natural resource and water development, issues that are critical to the quality of life of all Mexicans.

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## Nicaragua

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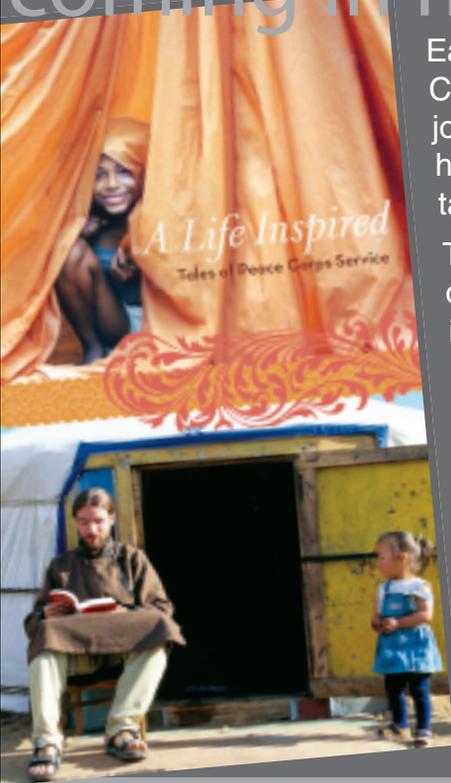
what they did, what their goals and dreams were. In contrast, the adult audience at a radio panel discussion were much more interested in safety issues, my culture shock experiences, and such. It's important to know your audience and tailor your presentation accordingly.

At the same time, I always have a theme or main idea that I try to empha-

size. For example, I stress the importance of having minority Volunteers in the Peace Corps. Most people may not understand that, until I explain the role of the Peace Corps and the importance of having the Peace Corps reflect what our society looks like. It also helps dispel stereotypes and break down barriers.

*Juanita Limas received the Franklin H. Williams Award for RPCVs of color from Peace Corps Director Gaddi H. Vasquez in 2005 for her continued outstanding community service.*

coming in march.



Each Peace Corps Volunteer's journey holds hundreds of tales.

This collection of 30 stories is but a brief sampling of living "a life inspired."

This recruitment book will fascinate RPCVs. Available in March from the Government Printing Office at this address:

[http://bookstore.gpo.gov/collections/a\\_life\\_inspired.html](http://bookstore.gpo.gov/collections/a_life_inspired.html)

## John F. Kennedy Service Awards

honor the hard work and service of Volunteers, returned Volunteers, and staff.

Recipients to be announced March 4, 2006  
John F. Kennedy Library  
Boston, Massachusetts

[www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov)

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