

# Friends of Fiji

## News

Winter 2005 Vol. 14 Issue 2

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A NEWSLETTER FOR RETURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS, STAFF & ALL FRIENDS OF FIJI

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### Peace Corps Volunteer Service In Fiji

The Peace Corps in Fiji has direction. Learn about how it fits into the Pacific Wide initiative on Page 9. The effort is lead by a new Country Director, Oghale Oddo. Learn about him and read his letter to the Friends of Fiji on Page 8. Several volunteers have taken the time to discuss their projects and plans. Read about the work by Lien Finau at the Colonial War Memorial on Page 2. Chrissie Ingle tells us about teaching in Droveuni, and finally, Heather Shell tells us of a computer project at Ro Camaisala Memorial on Page 9.

### In Other News

#### The Fiji Ambassador

His Excellency, Jesoni Vitusagavulu has arrived in Washington D.C. A biography is presented on Page 5. He has taken time to address Friends of Fiji. He presents us a first hand view of the principal concerns and challenges confronting Fiji on Page 5.

#### Reception For the Fiji Ambassador

The arrival of the ambassador was marked by celebration. Read about the reception held in his honor on Page 7.

#### Reel Paradise

Some of you probably saw the movie 'Reel Paradise'. It tells of a man in the movie business who moves to Taveuni island with his family. He runs the Meridian Movie Theater. No matter what your opinion of his experience, the movie is absolutely fascinating. Read a review on Page 10.

#### Fiji In the News

India and Fiji Bilateral Cooperation, Seaweed and Pharmaceuticals, Fire in Levuka and the Efforts of the

Global Health Fund in Fiji. All for your review on Page 6.

#### Shocking Failure Of Journalism

Seems the wool was pulled over the eyes of your editorial staff of the Friends of Fiji News. Surprised? Neither are we. Read more on Page 11.

#### Annual General Meeting

The regular meeting of the Friends of Fiji is coming up. The principal business is election of the new board of officers. You are invited. Read more on Page 4.

#### Latest On the Web

Jim Reiersen shares his latest finds, including an improved Fijilive, the Prime Minister's Speech to the United Nations, the United Nation's Human Development Report.

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## Work At the Colonial War Memorial Hospital

**Ms. Lien Finau, MSW Peace Corps Fiji, tells us about her work and treats us to a stunning photomontage to boot**

Letter from PC/Fiji Volunteer Lien Finau & Request for Help

Sometimes when we think of joining the Peace Corps, we picture being in a remote village or living in a grass hut with no electricity. But, since joining Peace Corps (2003) and being posted in Fiji's capital city, Suva, I've come to realize that the community in which I live in is nothing close to that idea of which some previous generations of fellow Peace Corps volunteers have experienced.



My spacious 3 bedroom house has 24-hour running hot water and electricity, a ceiling fan in the living room, and an air conditioner for cooling on those hot days.

Volunteers are placed in many different areas here in Fiji, some working and living in the rural villages and some on the outer islands of Fiji where they don't have water or electricity most of the time.

Although I may not live in a village where one can witness the communal closeness of experiencing the Fijian familial loloma (compassions) or see and learn about the true traditional styles of living (teitei (farming), talitali (weaving), fishing), I can still say that I share in the same way in the meals and the talanoas (stories).

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My community is with The Colonial War Memorial Hospital, its staffs, inpatients and outpatients. Colonial War Memorial Hospital is Fiji's largest hospital serving as the National referral and health training hospital for Fiji and the South Pacific Island countries. It has more than 400 beds and over 1,000 staff. The hospital has 4 major wards, which consist of an Accident/Emergency unit, Maternity unit, Children's unit, and the Old West side of the hospital (pharmacy, eye department, diabetic center).

In addition to working with CWM Hospital, I also work in collaboration with patients who are referred or discharged from St. Giles Hospital, which is Fiji's only Psychiatric Hospital.

Since taking on my post, I have been deemed as the Mental Health Officer for Colonial War Memorial, which ideally means, hospital "counselor".



Although my title carries the idea that I am the counselor for the hospital, there is much more to it than just that of a counselor. Once a week, I conduct in-service trainings for CWM and St. Giles hospital staff on Mental Health topics, which have included "Suicide Prevention", "Clinical Depression", "Identifying Child Abuse Cases", "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder" and "Managing Stress in the

Workplace". Recently, I traveled to the Northern Isles of Fiji (Labasa and Savusavu) to conduct mental health trainings for those hospitals and lately to the western side of Vitu Levu (Sigatoka) to perform the same. In the coming months I will be accepting another invitation to visit Kadavu Island's hospital and conduct a training on HIV/AIDS pre and post test counseling skills.

Conducting trainings and workshops for the hospitals has only been a small aspect of my project. You see, when I say that I can still relate to the community and lifestyles of my fellow Peace Corps friends in the villages or remote places, it is because in my work, I witness those "talanoas" with the patients at the hospital.

My "talanoas" may be a little more different because they have included teenage pregnancy (a taboo topic in the village), grieving of an unsuccessful pregnancy (stillbirth), domestic violence, attempted suicide, depression and illness, to surviving a trauma (rape/incest). And, even though it may not seem like I experience that type of community in which my fellow PCVs live, the talanoas I share still reflect the same loloma of a family who still supports the mistakes of their daughter and the talitali of a family that is suffering from violence.



Since the inception of Peace Corps in Fiji there have been some good changes. The capital city of Suva is ever growing in the number of tourists it receives and there are now several new shopping centers (Suva Central) including an excellent movie theatre. More exciting, of course, is the return of Peace Corps Volunteers (2003) in the country who are working in the Youth, Environment/Agriculture and Health sectors.

With the issues of teenage pregnancy, HIV-AIDS, and domestic violence, there is some change in these areas because more awareness programs are being put out and there are counseling centers available (one in Lautoka and one in Suva, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre) and the Adolescent Reproductive Center which offers HIV/AIDS testing and counseling services for young women and children. There are some changes in the health sector but it is happening very slowly.



Suva city and some areas of Fiji are greatly developing especially in tourism with the increased numbers of resorts and vacation spots but despite this, there is still a growing need for development not only in rural areas but also within the capital city itself.



Urban poverty is still existent with the living conditions of the local people. Squatter areas surround certain parts of the city and the lack of basic needs (food, clothing) for children and families are apparent. Better healthcare services are still needed especially with the lack of appropriate medical equipment and types of hospital services Fiji provides including mental health.

I think my role as a PCV in Fiji is not one where I can be specific. I hope that my role as a PCV in Fiji is not only aspiring to be a PCV that can provide and facilitate a safe, adequate environment for the community and hospital patients that I am working with for counseling and mental health services, but a role in which the community and the people I have worked with in Fiji, will feel that we worked together and in our cultural exchanges and experiences and in our "talanoas" we created something that was good and worthwhile.

Ms. Lien Finau, MSW Peace Corps Fiji

*Lien Finau applied to Peace Corp Partnership for money to establish a counseling center at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital. CWM has identified one small building to use with inpatients and outpatients who need ongoing educational supportive counseling. However the building needs to have some renovation work done so it can be up to code. US\$3,000 is needed to fund this project and to send one local staff to become a certified counselor who can continue the operation of counseling services for the hospital when Lien's volunteer term ends in April 2006.*

*From money raised at our last fundraiser, Friends of Fiji is donating \$1000 toward this project. If you would like to help, visit the Peace Corps Partnership web site at <http://www.peacecorps.gov> and click on Donate Now, then Pacific Islands, then Fiji Counseling Center or call 800-424-8580 ext. 2170.*



## Annual General Meeting

### Annual General Meeting & Potluck Dinner / Call for Nominations

The Annual General Meeting and Potluck Dinner of the Friends of Fiji will be held on Saturday, January 21 (snow-date January 28), 2006 at 6 p.m. at the home of Jim and Polly Reiersen, 3311 N George Mason Dr, Arlington, VA 22207-1859.

The principal business of the meeting will be having fun and electing next year's Board of Directors. Nominations will be accepted up until the time of the election and all those receiving at least one vote will be elected.

Requests for directions or for other information should be sent to Jim Reiersen at the address above or by email to [jim-reiersen@comcast.net](mailto:jim-reiersen@comcast.net) or by phone at 703-534-7113. If inclement weather on the 21<sup>st</sup> has you wondering about the status of this event, please first consult our Website: [www.FoFiji.org](http://www.FoFiji.org)

Nominations should be addressed to the Nominations Committee c/o FoF President, Beth Shearer, at 1200 N Nash St, Arlington, VA 22209-3625 or by email to [beth.shearer@comcast.net](mailto:beth.shearer@comcast.net) or by phone at 703-248-6993.

## Fiji Ambassador

Here is a short biography of the newly appointed Fiji ambassador to the United States



### H.E. Jesoni Vitusagavulu Ambassador

Jesoni Vitusagavulu or Vitu, as he is commonly known, took up his new appointment in August 2005. He joined the Foreign Service from the private sector. He was managing director of TOPtier Management Consultancy, an investment & management consulting firm, which he founded in 2003. The firm provides investment facilitation to local and foreign

investors particularly in tourism, ICT, and audiovisual industries. He also lectured at the University of the South Pacific in its MBA program.

He was the chief executive of the Fiji Trade & Investment Bureau for 7 years from 1996-2003. Before that he held senior management positions in Air Pacific, Fiji Development Bank, Unit Trust of Fiji, Suva Stock Exchange, and Fijian Property Trust.

He was a trustee of the Fijians Trust Fund, chairman of Food Processors (Fiji) Limited, chairman of Agricultural Marketing Authority, chairman of Kontiki Growth Fund and director of Kadavu Development Company. He was also a member of the PM's Think Tank Advisory Group.

He holds a bachelors degree in economics & politics from the University of the South Pacific, Masters of Philosophy in development studies from the University of Sussex UK, diploma in airline management from the University of Bar Ilan Israel, and a graduate certificate in management from the Australian Graduate School of Management of the University of New South Wales.

He is married to Silina and they have three daughters.

## Letter from the Fiji Ambassador

His Excellency, Jesoni Vitusagavulu sends these words to the Friends of Fiji:



EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE FIJI ISLANDS  
Washington, DC

I take up my post at a time when Fiji's exports to the United States are falling. Figures for the first seven months of this year show that they declined by 19%. The year-end figure should see total exports drop well below \$213m, the record achieved in 2004, reversing the good growth trend of 17% per year recorded since 2001.

Clearly one of my important tasks is to work to reverse this trend. It will not be easy as the cause of the decline is, to some extent, due to conditions beyond our control.

The drop in export is due largely to a significant reduction in apparel exports which dropped by \$32.5m or 67% in the first seven months of this year. It stems from the expiration in December 2004 of the bilateral agreement with the US covering apparels. Under the agreement most of the garments exported to the US from Fiji enjoyed preferential access. Without the preferences, Fiji apparels are unable to compete successfully with garments imported from more efficient and low cost countries like China.

I expect the removal of preferences will create a gap of no less than \$50m a year to plug. There is very little that can

be done to reverse this decline in apparel exports as it will be very difficult, if not impossible, for the US to reinstate the preferences Fiji once enjoyed.

My attention will focus on encouraging the expansion of other products currently exported to the US. In the main they include: tuna loins from the Levuka-based Pacific Fishing Company sold to Bumble Bee, fresh fish, Fiji Water, palmwood furniture from Pacific Green Industries, Pure Fiji products, roots crops like taro and cassava, and vegetables. Exports of these comprised close to 55% of total exports to the US in 2004. Earnings from them particularly, Fiji Water, palmwood furniture, and Pure Fiji products, have grown remarkably in the last 4 years.

The success of these products confirms that Fiji products can be successfully exported to the US without the support of trade preferences. They demonstrate the power of branding and clever marketing to create increased demand for the products. This power has catapulted Fiji Water to be the second most popular imported natural water in the US, second only to Avian.

The success of tuna loins export proves the value of Fiji companies, e.g. PAFCO, forming alliances with large multinational companies like Bumble Bee.

Obviously the lesson from these success stories will guide the steps we will take at the embassy to reverse the decline in exports.

If the export of kava can be revived to pre-1999 levels, it can also assist in our efforts. Increasing kava exports is particularly appealing, as it would have a direct salutary impact on rural income. I'll want to see some of our energies

at the embassy directed at this. This will immediately involve persuading the FDA to lift the trade advisory on kava.

Because of the tyranny of distance, Fiji will always be disadvantaged when it comes to export of goods. Therefore we will also direct our attention and efforts to the promotion of the export of services.

Tourism is top of mind at the mention of service industries. We will work closely with the Fiji Visitors Bureau and Air Paacific to build on the success they have achieved to make the US Fiji's third largest source market.

Other service industries that I see us promoting to increase foreign exchange earnings from the US are ICT (information, communication, technology) - industries like call centers, data processing, even software development, and audio-visual industries particularly movie productions.

Fiji has developed world-class financial and legal frameworks to encourage the growth of these industries which are already yielding positive results.

The encouragement of service industries means that the embassy will devote more of its time and resources to investment promotion – pounding the streets to meet with investors. In this regard, we will work closely with the Trade Commission based in Los Angeles and the two honorary consuls we have. I intend to appoint three more honorary consuls in strategic centres to broaden our reach.

Remittances have grown to be Fiji's second largest source of foreign exchange behind tourism. A significant portion of these come from the US. We need to nurture and stabilise this handy source of income by helping Fiji people in the US secure legal status. This yet is another matter we will be pursuing.

It's going to be a challenging three years, of this I have no illusions. But I'm certain that with the help of God and friends like the members of the Friends of Fiji, my time here will be profitable and rewarding.

## Peace Corps Volunteers In the News

**The Fiji Times, Suva, Fiji August 13, 2005**

### **32 New Volunteers Raring To Help Out**

Rural dwellers find it easier to integrate than people living in urban areas because the environment is less pressured, politically, Senate President, Taito Waqavakatoga says.

Mr. Waqavakatoga said rural dwellers spoke each other's languages, welcomed each other in their homes and found it easier to socialize.

He made the comments while addressing 32 new Peace Corps volunteers who were sworn in at the Forum Secretariat in Suva yesterday.

Mr. Waqavakatoga said the Peace Corps volunteer service had become an important part of the community.

"Volunteers have managed to master the local dialects of Fijian and Hindustani and have learned the culture of the two major races," he said.

The volunteers will provide their expertise in environmental education and resource management, health education and promotion, youth development and improving skills in information technology.

Mr. Waqavakatoga said these were important areas Fiji was venturing undertaking to improve.

## Fiji In The News

### **India and Fiji Bilateral Cooperation**

New Delhi: India and Fiji have strengthened their bilateral ties by signing four agreements for cooperation. Following discussions in October between visiting Fijian Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase and Indian leaders, the two countries agreed to work together in tourism, health, information technology, and medicine and to establish a joint trade commission. Qarase, accompanied by his wife Leba, came to India with a 50-member delegation of officials and prominent businessmen. The memoranda of understanding were signed by representatives of India and Fiji.

### **Seaweed from Fiji Yields New Molecular Structures with Pharmaceutical Potential**

Researchers at Georgia Institute of Technology have discovered 10 new molecular structures with pharmaceutical potential in a species of red seaweed that lives in the shallow coral reef along the coastline of Fiji. Some of these natural compounds showed the potential to kill cancer cells, bacteria and the HIV virus. But it might take at least a decade before any seaweed-based drugs are available, if indeed any are possible.

The findings on three of these compounds – called diterpene-benzoate natural products – are reported in the Oct. 12 online issue of the American Chemical Society journal Organic Letters. The compound that was isolated in the greatest abundance – named bromophycolide A by the researchers – killed human tumor cells by inducing programmed cell death (called apoptosis), a mechanism that is promising for development of new anti-cancer drugs.

"We're only at the test-tube level so far," explained Julia Kubanek, a Georgia Tech assistant professor of biology, chemistry and biochemistry, who is the lead author of the paper. "The next step is to discover how these compounds work and then to study them in a more complex model system."

The research, which is part of an environmental conservation, economic development and drug discovery project in Fiji, was primarily funded by the National Institutes of Health. It involves Georgia Tech, the University of the South Pacific, and Fijians from several coastal villages.

## Levuka fire destroys classrooms

In October, a fire destroyed several classrooms and a teacher quarters at Levuka Public Primary School on Ovalau. The fire started on the top floor of one of the buildings and spread through the classrooms. The fire also destroyed an adjoining classroom in the high school and a teacher's quarters. Investigations are underway to determine the cause of the fire.

## Fiji to Benefit from Global Health Fund

Fiji is among eleven Pacific Island countries that will benefit from a US\$13 million fund created to help in the fight against HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Health Minister, Solomoni Naivalu chaired a meeting in Thailand that discussed the use of the Global Health Fund initiative.

## Friends of Fiji Welcome New Fiji Ambassador

By David Downes

The Friends of Fiji welcomed the new Fiji ambassador to the United States at a reception in Arlington, VA on Saturday, October 1, 2005. Held at the home of Friends of Fiji President Beth Shearer, the reception honored the Honorable Jelsoni Vitusagavulu and his wife, Mrs. Silini Vitusagavulu. In addition to the Friends of Fiji Board of Directors and Friends of Fiji members from the metropolitan Washington area, others attending included Kevin Quigley, President of the National Peace Corps Association, members of the staff at the Embassy of Fiji and their families, as well as other members of the Fiji community in the Washington area.



(Left to right) Peceli Vocea (World Bank advisor from Fiji Gov't.), Ambassador Vitusagavulu, his wife Silina, and Alesi Cooke



Kele Catanasiga, Jr. & Sr., playing guitars

Going around the room, all of the nearly 60 people present were asked to introduce themselves and say a few words about their connection to Fiji. Among those present was Fiji RPCV Robert Reid, now chief of operations for the Peace Corps's Eastern Mediterranean and Asia region; Peceli Vocea, advisor from Fiji to the World Bank; Fiji RPCV Jim Fitzsimmons who had attended graduate school with the Ambassador (and knew him as "Vitu"); and Amelia Catanasiga, former PC/Fiji Administrative Officer, who with her husband Kele, has recently become a United States citizen. Following introductions, Kele and their son, Kele, Jr., provided guitar music to accompany the singing and dancing.

The Ambassador was the last to introduce himself and his wife. He spoke of his admiration for the work of the Peace Corps and recalled warmly that he had had a Peace Corps Volunteer teacher when he had been in secondary school. The Ambassador spoke about how he hoped to be able to build trade between Fiji and the United States during his time here. More about the Ambassador's background and his plans for his time in the States are included elsewhere in this newsletter.

Thanks to Beth Shearer for hosting this wonderful reception at her spectacular apartment, which overlooks the Potomac River (as well as the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument and the U.S. Capital)! What a fitting location to welcome Fiji's new representative to the United States!

## Flat Stanley Sited in Dravuni

### Chrissie Ingle is working with students and Flat Stanley

Bula! I am a PCV (FRE2) serving on Dravuni Island in Kadavu. I have a request for Friends of Fiji. Dravuni is about 200 acres in size with just one village. We have the smallest school in Fiji – 15 students in classes 1-4. The school is fairly new, before the children had to go to boarding school on Ono starting at class 1. Due to the distance and cost of fuel, parents could only visit on Saturdays. Recently it was decided that class 1 kids were a little too young to be taking care of themselves so they started a school on the island. I try to go to school about once a week and do some type of activity with the kids. Right now we've just started a Flat Stanley project.

If you've never heard of Flat Stanley, here's a brief description: He's a little paper doll that kids color and then send through the mail to places far off. Whoever receives Stanley then takes pictures of him in their city and sends the pictures and Stanley back to the owner. Then Stanley goes on

another trip. For Fiji, we renamed him Siti Rabaraba. Round 1 has been sent to my family and friends in the US, and unfortunately I have run out of addresses. For Round 2 I've been asking other volunteers for addresses in the US and throughout the rest of the world. If any of you would like to participate, please email your address to me, [chrissie\\_ingle@yahoo.com](mailto:chrissie_ingle@yahoo.com). We'd really appreciate it.

None of the children had ever written or received a letter before, and none have any real idea of where their Sitis are going (even though I showed them on the map). When I was younger everyone told me to dream big. I tell the same thing to these kids, but I'm not sure they know how big they can dream. That's what Siti is really about, teaching these kids about the rest of the world to show them just how big they can dream.

Vinaka vakalevu!  
Chrissie Ingle

## New Peace Corps Country Director

### Here is a short biography of the current Fiji Country Director and a note he penned for the Friends of Fiji



#### Oghale Oddo

Prior to his recent appointment to Fiji, Oghale Oddo served as a Peace Corps Administrative Officer in Swaziland and in Jordan. He also worked as part of a team carrying out new country assessment for possible Peace Corps reentry in Africa. He has been involved in development and finance issues for over 15 years in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. His primary focus has been to assist individuals and organizations in improving and maintaining their income-generating capacity.

Mr. Oddo served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Jamaica from 1994-1996. Immediately after his Peace Corps service, he worked as a training consultant in the areas of budget strategy and community development. Prior to his Peace Corps service, he was a development (micro finance) bank officer and estate manager. He also worked as an Election and Voting Booths Administrator, and was actively involved in community development issues in Nigeria. In the U.S., he founded and managed an import/export enterprise, and has experience working in investment as well as retail banking.

Mr. Oddo is married to Sarah Jane, also a RPCV Jamaica. They have 2 children, Uzezi (Zee) and Kai.

Mr. Oddo earned a master's degree in Public Administration with a concentration in Finance and International Comparative Development from Indiana Winter 2005

University, and has a Bachelor's of Science degree in Estate Management from University of Ife, Nigeria.

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Ni sa Bula Vinaka !

I hope this note reaches you well. I have been at post now for only 2 months but it seems like 12 months already- I say this in a good way ☺ . The Volunteers, Staff, Government and people of Fiji have made my family and I feel so welcome.

I was pleasantly surprised and happy to find that we have such an active and supportive RPCV group, which actively supports the program in Fiji. . I recall when I was last in the Washington DC area, Anne, Beth and Cynthia took me out to dinner and told me how so much the Fiji RPCV group wanted to give whatever support we needed here. I cannot say thank you enough to all of you, for your present support and especially for the legacy you left in Fiji. It is upon the very strong foundation you all laid that we continue to build today. Time will fail me to mention how many people I have met here who tell me of how much they learned, gained and or just enjoyed by being connected to one of you Fiji RPCVs. I am working with PCVs in the field now to continue that legacy of mutual respect and dedicated contribution while of course not losing sight of the PCVs need to truly enjoy their experience here.

Again, thank you all so much for your support. I look forward to telling you more about our present program in future newsletters.

Cheers  
Oghale

PS: We celebrated the first COS from Fiji Re-entry Group 1 on September 6, 2005! Most of the PCVs in that group COS in November.

## Peace Corps Pacific Islands Country Desk Officer

### Leah Tafara-Maddox, the Peace Corps Country Desk Officer for the Pacific Islands gives us an overview of Peace Corps in Fiji

Friends of Fiji Members:

I hope this note finds all of you well and enjoying the autumn season in the Washington, D.C. area. I was asked to make a contribution to your quarterly newsletter and update you on all things Peace Corps Fiji and am thrilled to be provided the opportunity.

The past few months have been a period of transition and milestones for our nascent post in Fiji. As many of you may know, the Country Director who manned the helm for the re-entry of Peace Corps to Fiji, Mark Lewis, completed his time with Peace Corps in July and has assumed a position with the University of the South Pacific in Suva. We are extremely appreciative of the leadership and guidance Mark provided at a critical time of importance in the development of the long term goals and objectives for our program. Our new Country Director, Oghale Oddo, continues to work with staff, Volunteers and counterpart organizations to ensure that we have viable and pertinent health, youth and environment projects that are meeting the expressed needs of the communities in which we work and the host country government. Oghale comes to us from previous postings as an Administrative Officer for Peace Corps Jordan and Peace Corps Swaziland.

This fall also marks the Close of Service of the first group of re-entry Volunteers. We cannot believe that two years have passed so quickly! A tremendous thank you is owed these Volunteers for reestablishing friendships and working relationships with communities and counterpart organizations and for their efforts in assisting the people of Fiji in reaching their development goals.

With the departure of our COSing Volunteers, Fiji is currently the home of approximately 50 Volunteers and we will welcome our next group of 33 trainees in June, 2006. Volunteers continue to be placed throughout Viti Levu, Vanua Levu and several outer islands and we are making a concerted effort to place more Volunteers in Indian communities.

If you have any questions about Peace Corps Fiji or our operations in the Pacific, please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to opportunities for future communication and correspondence.

Leah Tafara-Maddox  
Country Desk Officer  
Pacific Islands  
ltafaramaddox@peacecorps.gov  
<mailto:ltafaramaddox@peacecorps.gov>  
202-692-2522

## Computer Project At Ro Camaisala Memorial

### Some of us are working very hard. Read about Heather Shell's efforts right now:

Dear Friends of Fiji,

My name is Heather Shell and I have been Peace Corps Volunteer in the Fiji Islands for 2 years now. I live inside a village and work at the Ro Camaisala Memorial, the village school. Since I have been here the school, villagers and I have worked together to build a vocational computer school. We have acquired 15 new computers and a printer. After writing the classroom curriculum we were registered under the Ministry of Education, where we hand out registered computer certificates for Microsoft Office, Microsoft XP, computer fundamentals, and the local accounting programs. We teach our vocational students how to write application letters and Curriculum Vitae's in order to help them get jobs. This has been a tremendous help to the surrounding communities. We also teach classes 6, 7, & 8 during the days on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. They leave the primary school with their certificate in computers and go into secondary school with more computer knowledge than most of their secondary school teachers. So far we have had over 60 vocational graduates and 98 primary school graduates.

Last year the Ministry of Education gave us a grant of \$11,200, to build a new concrete classroom for the computers as our old one was in need of many repairs. The village men have built a 37 X 25 foot concrete classroom complete with a storage room, administration office and seal tight windows. Although the building is almost complete we have run out of money to finish it.

We still owe money for our windows, and the building is without paint, tiles, doors, and electricity to run the 15 computers. We have just completed our Peace Corps Partnership Program Proposal. We are turning to friends of Fiji to help fund our project. I only have 8 weeks left here and am greatly hoping to have the opening ceremony before I leave. After 2 years of hard work I would be greatly saddened to have to leave before the completion and opening of the building.

This is an extremely important mission to me and I would like to be able to see it to its realization before I leave. We need funds as soon as possible in order for the men to be able to complete the building before my COS, which I have extended by one month in order to be able to see the building through to its completion.

There is a new Peace Corps Volunteer, Amy Vogel, who is here to take my place. She will run all classes and add on to the curriculum. We are working together in my last 8 weeks

here to complete the building. We have exhausted our resources here and are now dependant on outside funding.

We would greatly appreciate any help Friends of Fiji could give us, it would mean the world to be able to see the students inside the building they all worked so hard to build. Please find attached to a subsequent email a copy of the proposal and pictures of the new building so far. We are delaying the posting of this proposal through the partnership program in the hopes that you will be able to make a direct

donation to the school in order that we may start work as soon as possible.

Please feel free to email Amy or me with any concerns or questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Heather Shell, Amy Vogel  
Peace Corps Volunteers Fiji Islands Peace Corps  
Twotallhs@yahoo.com [rosebud1228@yahoo.com](mailto:rosebud1228@yahoo.com)



## In a Fijian Movie House, 'Reel Paradise' Found

**Love it or hate it, you've got to see it. The only flick we've seen with folks we know. Reel Paradise hit this fall. It was worth the watch, if only to see what could possibly go wrong.**

Adults and teenagers lined up in front of a theater on a Fijian island to watch "Jackass" might seem a bizarre cultural spectacle. But in "Reel Paradise," that's not how indie-film

impresario John Pierson sees it. In 2002, the producer (the driving force behind "She's Gotta Have It," "Roger & Me" and many other indie classics) decided, for a year, to operate "the world's most remote cinema." Bringing his wife, Janet, and two children, he took over the 180 Meridian Cinema, a movie house on the island of Taveuni and showed mainstream -- not indie -- American movies to the locals. ("You can look

around and pretty much know you can't show 'Girl With a Pearl Earring,' " he quips at one point.)

Director Steve James, co-director of "Hoop Dreams" and "Stevie," who was invited to film the Piersons in the final month of their sojourn, uncovers a terrifically complex story. Pierson's vision to bring culture to a faraway place is sorely tested by the vagaries of life in Fiji, which includes a drunken projectionist, a laptop stolen from his home and a hostile rivalry with Christian missionaries for the hearts and minds of the islanders. While he gets increasingly frustrated with theater management ("Don't run!"), his 16-year-old daughter,

Georgia, and 13-year-old son, Wyatt, become far more immersed in the culture than either of their parents. What we have, in the end, is not the tale of a noble experiment gone slightly awry but a deeper story about family relationships and cultural differences in the suddenly less-distant Pacific.

-- Desson Thomson

<http://www.reelparadise.com/>

## Cutting Down on Kava

### Say it ain't so:

ABC Radio Australia  
Last Updated 24/08/2005, 16:59:01

Fiji's Methodist Church plans to limit the consumption of kava by its members.

Fiji Times says all members, including senior ministers and lay preachers, will face disciplinary action if they drink too much kava.

A special committee will be formed to map out disciplinary measures for kava abuse.

It follows concerns raised about neglected pastoral responsibilities after heavy bouts of kava drinking.

## Joke's On Us

### Our depths of journalist credulity have been tested and found wanting. This in from Oghale A. Oddo Country Director / Fiji

Just saw the Summer 2005 Vol. 14 Friends of Fiji Newsletter. Wanted you to know that the Environmental Education for Dummies piece ( page 5), which was originally written in the

PCV coconut wireless newsletter, was supposed to be a practical joke on and about PCV Ryan Peseckas and it is not a true story, in case anyone thought it was. Would be something to have a PCV who raised FJD3.2 million using his ventriloquist skills though : )

Cheers and thanks once again.

## Notes From the Web Master

### Jim Reierson manages the Friends of Fiji web page at <http://www.fofiji.org> Here are some of his recent discoveries.

Fijilive at <http://www.fijilive.com> has an improved website. It has news, weather, top Fijian & Indian music, Fijian jokes, etc.

The Prime Minister's speech at the United Nations in September can be found at [http://www.fijilive.com/news/PM\\_UN.pdf](http://www.fijilive.com/news/PM_UN.pdf) and at [http://www.fiji.gov.fj/publish/page\\_5420.shtml](http://www.fiji.gov.fj/publish/page_5420.shtml)

If you like numbers: Transparency International, a global non-governmental organization devoted to combating

corruption has published the TI Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), which ranks countries in terms of experts' perception of corruption. The US ranks 17<sup>th</sup>, Fiji is 55<sup>th</sup> of 158 countries. At

<http://www.transparency.org/cpi/2005/2005.10.18.cpi.en.html>

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has issued its Human Development Report 2005, which contains national comparisons of human development. In addition to statistics, it highlights the human costs of missed targets and broken promises. Extreme inequality between countries and within countries is identified as one of the main barriers to human development. At

<http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/>

*Friends of Fiji News* is published by Friends of Fiji, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose goals are to keep Fiji RPCV's, staff, and friends in touch and informed about current affairs in Fiji and to raise funds for worthy projects in Fiji. Our general correspondence address is: Friends of Fiji, 10413 Kinloch Road, Silver Spring, MD 20903. Email us at femosher@erols.com, or visit our website at www.fofiji.org.

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