



rpcv/w

Returned Peace Corps Volunteers
of Washington, DC

2005 – 2006 ANNUAL REPORT

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President
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RPCV: Tonga, 99-01

Vice President
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Niger, 65-67

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JEFFREY LOVELACE
Bolivia 95-97

Secretary
DAWN CITRON
RPCV: Malawi, 98-00

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Zambia 94-96

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Zambia 94-96

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Guatemala 95-97

Programs co-Chair
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Morocco 93-96
MARISSA LARSON
Morocco 95-97

Communications Chair
JAMES CRITCHFIELD
Bolivia 95-97

Community Service Chair
ERICA NAVARRO
Nicaragua 01-03

New Members Chair
MOLLY MATTESSICH
Mali 02-04

Letter from the President

Dear RPCV/W Members,

Serving the membership of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Washington, DC — an organization with long traditions and a reputation for leadership — is the challenge and honor that has passed each year to a volunteer board of directors since 1979 when the organization formed.

This annual report summarizes the efforts of the 2005-2006 board of directors to meet this challenge and lead RPCV/W in service to its membership and the community.

After serving three years on the RPCV/W board — and as president during this past year — I am heartened by the dedication of the volunteers who make this organization a success. I want to warmly thank all of you.

I am also encouraged by the enthusiasm of our members. The energy you bring to our events keeps the board of directors energized, and the suggestions you offer keep us focused. Thank you for your continued support.

I am very excited for RPCV/W going forward. The incoming board of directors offers a mix of people providing continuity from previous years and new members providing fresh perspectives. This new team will also be able to use our new web site and online membership management system to improve operations and offer better service and more benefits to RPCV/W members.

Thanks again to all of the volunteers and members. I am looking forward to seeing you at upcoming events.

Respectfully,

Alan Smith, Tonga 99-01
RPCV/W President

NPCA Liaison
KEN HILL
Turkey 65-67

2005-2006 Overview

The 2003-2004 year ends with our Annual Meeting and Picnic. Traditionally, past board members are recognized for their efforts and new board members are announced. Outgoing board members continue to assist the incoming board with the transition as new board members adjust to their newly-acquired roles and responsibilities leading RPCV/W.

Speakers Bureau

Speakers Bureau Chair **Amy Kunz** matched RPCV speakers with a variety of local public schools, youth groups, and non-profit organizations throughout the 2005-06 academic year. RPCVs who served in countries such as Mali, Benin, Kenya, Guatemala, Guinea, Panama, and Bolivia, among others, spoke to groups of all ages about their work and cultural experiences while serving overseas. The speakers also gave valuable insight on the political and economic situations in their host countries as well as the general opinions held by host country nationals about the United States.

In November 2005, Amy attended a Global TeachNet (GTN), training session for District of Columbia teachers; GTN's purpose is to define and create prototypical global elementary schools by creating comprehensive school-based global education plans to support educators in bringing a more global perspective into the classroom and the school, to develop elementary students' global awareness. Inviting RPCVs to speak in these classrooms is an obvious way to enhance the atmosphere for students—to hear about the real-life experiences of RPCVs in the countries they are studying. This training session proved to be a good way for RPCV/W to connect with DC teachers and coordinate future speakers' events at local schools.

Also in November 2005, the Speakers Bureau sent an RPCV to serve as a panelist for a session on international development opportunities and issues during the National Young Leaders Conference in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

In March 2006 and in coordination with the New Members Chair, the Speakers Bureau Chair also helped recruit panelists and selected the venue for “The Road Less Traveled” panel/networking event in March 2006. This event featured three panelists whose work experiences were not the typical international development/government jobs held by many RPCVs. RPCV/W members came and asked questions about different career paths, found out techniques for networking in D.C., and learned more about these unique individuals and their post-Peace Corps paths.

For these events, Amy coordinated with Returned Volunteer Services, Meridian International, Latin American Youth Center, National Peace Corps Association, public and private school teachers and administrators, and Peace Corps headquarters, which provided help in matching RPCVs to audiences and vice versa as well as offering videos and other visual aids materials for the speakers' presentations.

Finally, based on her experience as Speakers Bureau Chair during the 2005-06 RPCV/W Board of Directors term, Amy worked on a special ad hoc committee of the Board of RPCV/W to refine the duties associated with each of the Board positions; she and her other committee members agreed that in the coming year speaking engagements for RPCVs would be better coordinated as part of an umbrella of services overseen by the Community Services Director, formerly known as Community Service Chair.

Social Activities

As usual, there were numerous RPCV/W Social Activities that RPCV/W Social [co]-chairs **Jodi Hammer** and **Corey Quinlan Taylor** worked to organize for this, the largest and most active RPCV group in the U.S. In addition to the traditional monthly happy hours, which were held at

diverse locations throughout the DC metro area, the social chairs worked hard, along with other board members, to organize several family friendly outings including a cherry blossom picnic at the Tidal Basin, a Tea Party in DC, and ice skating at the sculpture gardens.

Happy Hours:

Happy hours are one of the most popular events organized by RPCV/W, regularly drawing attendance of 50-100 members. The Social Chairs worked hard to vary the location of the monthly happy hours in an attempt to draw additional folks out and/or make it conveniently located at some point to almost everyone. As well, this allowed RPCV/W to reach out to most all regions within the DC metro area.

Happy Hour destinations during the 2005-2006 year included: Local 16 (U Street/Cardoza); Sonoma (Capitol Hill, DC); Dr. Dremo's (Arlington, VA); The Reef (Adams Morgan); Tallula Wine Bar (Arlington, VA); Haydee's (Mt. Pleasant); 18th St. Lounge (Dupont Circle); RFB (7th Street NW, China Town); Chi-Cha Lounge, and Banana Café (Eastern Market).

Annual Holiday Party:

This, the biggest and most popular event of the year, was held at a new and most beautiful venue, the historic Josephine Butler mansion in the heart of DC, And in spite of some unexpected challenges, including the awful weather (windy and bitter cold) and a bit of a parking fiasco (with our "emergency/special event—no parking" signs being removed by outside personnel before the event started!), we still ended up with a larger than ever attendance—approx. 300 members—who all came to partake in the holiday food and drink we offered!

A new caterer was used for the holiday party this year, Fresh Start Catering, a unique non-profit catering company that employs graduates from a specialized culinary job skills training program which reaches out to and trains people in need. This organization is so in line with the development/non-profit orientation that we former Peace Corps Volunteers still embrace. [See <http://www.dccentralkitchen.org/program.php?id=6> for more details.]

We certainly learned some valuable lessons from this holiday party event, i.e. the planning process and food count/reservations, but overall it was a successful event due to the ENTIRE board coming together and chipping in to make it so. Board members pitched in to man the door and entrance fee collection points, as well as assist with the food and silent auction, etc. The holiday party silent auction brought in \$_____ this year, and was developed and implemented by the Development Director position on the board.

It has been decided that next year, the board will elect a new position called "Social Events Chair" which will be responsible for coordinating the large group activities, which is an excellent idea as they are too much work for the social chair(s) as is. However, that new position will still need to seek out the collaboration of the entire board to make these events successful.

Programs

Programming co-chairs, Michelle Ghiselli and Marisa Larson, worked to have a variety of programs for this year including lectures, social programs, and community service.

RPCV Film Festival

In November 2005, RPCV/W assisted the Returned Peace Corps Film Festival board members in promoting and running their two-day event. More than a hundred RPCVs and non-Peace Corps people came to watch about a dozen films which explored cultures from all over the world.

HIV/AIDS lecture

Dr. Luis Montaner of the Wistar Institute in Philadelphia spoke to an attentive and curious audience at Shriver Hall, Peace Corps Headquarters in December 2005. His lecture, "HIV-1 Infection: Are we at the end of the beginning or the beginning of the end?" discussed the various roadblocks HIV researchers are encountering and how they are adapting their work to succeed both scientifically and politically. This topic was of great interest to many RPCVs who have worked and continue to work on HIV education and treatment. This event was also open to the public in the form of employees of various NGOs in the field. Approximately 25% of attendees were non-members/non-Peace Corps.

Afternoon Tea and lecture

In February 2006, RPCV/W hosted an afternoon tea at the Mayflower Hotel. Nancy Novak, the Virginia Tea Maven, taught the RPCVs about where tea comes from, what makes the various teas unique, how tea was involved in politics and economies of all tea producing countries (especially Great Britain), and how to properly enjoy afternoon tea. This event was particularly popular with members not interested in happy hour-type events. There were a number of older RPCVs and some families in attendance as well as the younger more traditional demographic.

Politics & Prose book readings

RPCV/W promoted a few book readings at Politics and Prose – mostly promoting RPCV authors. We'd hoped to include after lecture discussions but discovered that most RPCVs were only interested in continuing the discussion if the author could join us. However, they did appreciate learning about the lectures through our listserve.

Hands on DC

Saturday, April 29, 2006, 25 RPCV/W members and friends came together for a one-day work-a-thon to improve conditions in the public schools and raise money for college scholarships. Hands On DC is an all-volunteer project that creates better schools and brighter futures for students in the District of Columbia and this was the second year that RPCV/W fielded a team formally. The RPCV/W team worked alongside a team from Accenture at Amidon Elementary School in SW Washington, DC. Focusing on painting in the classrooms, team members enjoyed another RPCV/W community service event as part of the larger 2006 Hands On DC event. Most of the RPCV/W team went out for margaritas on the Waterfront following the event.

New Members

It was a busy year for New Members Chair **Molly Mattessich**, who started it off in October by organizing a New Members Brunch that was held at the Holiday Inn in Rosslyn and attended by 35 new members.

One of Molly's goals was to help define the values that being a member of RPCV/W provided, so in the fall she worked with an ad hoc committee to revise the mission and vision statements of RPCV/W. The ideas came from the August Board Retreat, and the new statements were put up on the website to help solidify the objectives of RPCV/W for current and potential members.

In March, Molly coordinated a panel discussion called, "*The Road Less Traveled*" at which RPCV/W members **Jim Gore**, **Valerie Whiting**, and **Carrie Regan** all contributed their impressions of job-seeking and networking in the D.C. area to a group of 20 RPCV's of all ages and backgrounds. The event was held at the Latin American Youth Center in Columbia Heights and a small reception with desserts and appetizers was held before and after the panel presentation.

Throughout the year, Molly wrote weekly emails to welcome new members and new subscribers to the RPCV/W Listserve. She told new folks about the upcoming events, website features, and other pertinent information about being a member and also answered questions about being a member and what it entails. She believes it is vital for some form of contact to be made with new members when they first join the organization.

Molly also participated in the MemberClicks training so that she can help to ensure during the coming year that the website is user-friendly and updated to serve the needs of members.

Molly organized the Annual Picnic held July 15 at the Capital Yacht Club and will plan the 45th Anniversary NPCA picnic in September of 2006.

Annual Picnic

The RPCV/W Annual Meeting and Picnic was held on the afternoon of July 15 at the Capital Yacht Club. Over 125 people attended the event, at which the 2006-2007 Board was announced and thanks were given to outgoing Board Members. A delicious picnic lunch with burgers, veggie burgers, chicken, and various salads and desserts was catered by **Fresh Start Catering Company** (the same as the Holiday Party) with contact Blaire Cirlin. It was coordinated by **Molly Mattessich** and **Corey Taylor**, with Yacht Club host/member and RPCV/W member **Michael Bouchard**.

Peace Corps Partnership Program

Last year's RPCV/W contribution to the Peace Corps Partnership Program focused on Latin America. This year, we focused on one continent - Africa - and one country - Malawi for project support. Through direct member contributions and general revenues, RPCV/W made a substantial donation of \$2,500 to

the Malawi Camp GLOW (Girls Leading our World) project. The total cost of the camp was over \$5,000 with the balance coming from local village contributions. The Peace Corps Partnership Program provides funding for community-initiated projects being overseen by Peace Corps Volunteers serving around the world. Since its inception in 1964, the Partnership Program has assisted thousands of Peace Corps Volunteers, in every Peace Corps Country, in order to benefit the health and well-being of their host communities. In order to receive funding through the Partnership Program, the local community must make a 25% contribution to the total project cost and outline success indicators for the individual projects. Malawi Camp Glow is a one-week camp for 50 girls throughout Malawi who, through fun and educational activities, are introduced to topics such as reproductive health, setting goals, environmental education, self-esteem and empowerment. In addition, the girls were encouraged to take back what they learned to their schools and communities. Entry to the camp was through an essay competition. The girls had to select one of two topics for the essay. Those topics were : "List two problems facing young girls in Malawi today and what do you see as the solution to these problems?", or "If you had a 10 year old sister, what advice would you give her to become a successful woman in Malawi?" The essays were judged by a committee of PCVS and Malawian counterparts. This is the second year of a GLOW camp in Malawi, the first being held in 2003. Ten girls from the 2003 camp were selected through an essay competition to assume leadership roles for this year's camp by serving as camp counselors.

Communications

The main responsibilities of this year's Communications Chair can be broken down into the following areas:

1. **Web site:** Develop content, web pages (HTML), maintain the web site, and set up email accounts for the Board
2. **List serve:** Develop content, email layouts, and initialize email campaigns to the membership
3. **Newsletters:** Develop content, layout, and manage the print process and post delivery of the organization's publication
4. **Membership Feedback:** Respond to questions from the membership as a result of Web site or List serve feedback
5. **Management of Board Email Accounts:** Set up and maintain Board email accounts under the @rpcvw.org email domain

The following areas represent the major successes achieved by this Board in the area of communications:

1. Developed an online store that allowed for the *online payment of tickets and merchandise* through the (old) web site – soon to be new web site
2. Developed and *issued 57 timely List serve announcements* to the membership
3. Published *one paper newsletter* and issued *four e-newsletters*
4. Added an *online database of volunteer and service related resources* to the (old) Web site
5. *Developed and implemented online surveys* using SurveyMonkey in order to obtain feedback on events and assess membership preferences

6. ***Successfully migrated RPCVw's IT infrastructure over to the MemberClicks product,*** resulting in improved IT and communications with the following integrated features:
 - a. Fully searchable membership database
 - b. Fully integrated membership communications and contact center
 - c. HTML-lite Web interface, reducing the skills necessary to manage and maintain the organization's web site
 - d. Automatic membership renewal and application system
 - e. Online and in-house event calendar system
 - f. Sponsor organization advertising and recognition (in exchange for membership value services or products)
 - g. Fully functional merchandise and event registration and payment features
 - h. Member-only bulletin board, complete with forums such as job board, housing board, and movie/book club etc..
7. Integrated ***new Web content*** on to the new MemberClicks supported Web site:
 - a. Topical Online videos (Google Video/YouTube)
 - b. RSS feeds from NPR World News and Peace Corps HQ (these feeds self update requiring little maintenance by the Web Director)
 - c. Scrolling banners with click through statistics to highlight and recognize the organization's sponsors
 - d. World weather and local clock on home page (I know, it's dorky)
8. ***Transcribed and posted the organization's Bylaws to the web site*** in a pdf document (they were previously type written or on mimeograph paper)

In past years it had been extremely important that the person in the Communications Chair position have both graphic design skills and HTML knowledge. Without these skills the organization had to outsource these functions, and sometimes at a cost.

The amount of time and work necessary to maintain an up to date Web site, as well as publish newsletters and List serves under time sensitive situations, can be a difficult task for one person to handle. This year, a number of Board Members helped to assist the Communications Chair in these areas, which also led this Board to break the Communications Chair position into two separate Board Director positions going forward: Communications Director and the Web Director.

This year's Board also made some very strategic decisions, after conducting careful analysis, to alter the way that communications will be handled under future Boards. The analysis partly originated from a member survey, which identified a number of key areas where improvement could be made in order to increase the value of the RPCVw membership.

One of the primary areas identified for improvement was in keeping the Web site up to date with current information about upcoming events. Members found an out of date Web site to be of little value. Another major concern of the membership was to have the newsletter arrive to members in a timely fashion. Due to the differences in the planning, development and mailing timelines of the newsletter, members often received it after much of the upcoming events had passed. It is also important to note that the RPCVw newsletter had served as the primary method through which the organization informed members that their membership dues needed to be

renewed. The organization is all about collecting dues in order to provide value to the members. Without effectively collecting dues, it is nearly impossible to provide value to the membership.

As a result of the cost issues associated with publishing and mailing a paper newsletter, this Board decided to opt for issuing an e-newsletter. Each paper newsletter (6 in total) costs hundreds of dollars to produce and mail. In doing away with the paper version, the Board had to make special effort to advise members that their dues needed to be renewed. This was partly accomplished by adding the ability to pay dues online through the RPCVw Web site and then sending email reminders to those members needing to renew their dues. Sending postcards was also considered, however, never done. The email approach was somewhat effective, but also left the door open for improvement, which may have been answered by new online membership service that was later evaluated and then implemented (read further).

The continued challenges associated with renewing member dues led the Board of Directors to take look at how our communications and information technology supported the overall organizations goals. Up until the end of this Board's term, RPCVw had managed its membership roles through a variety of IT solutions including an Access database and online Microsoft-based List serve service. As a result of having the membership database apart from the List serve mailing list, the Board continually encountered the problem of not being able to target its List serve communications to specific subsets of its members. As a result, both members and nonmembers alike received the same communications. Previously members received a higher level of value over nonmembers by receiving the six or so paper newsletters, which are very costly to produce.

As a result of this analysis, the Board checked out a number of IT-based solutions, both off the shelf and online. The MemberClicks online product soon became a leading contender as a solution for the organization's IT and communications challenges. The next hurdle was to determine if RPCVw could in fact pay for a monthly service such as MemberClicks (@ ~\$160 to \$175 per month in comparison to \$65 plus paper newsletter costs).

In looking at the numbers, RPCVw found that by making the commitment to do away with the costly paper newsletter in favor of an e-newsletter that the Board could in fact rationalize the increased cost of the MemberClicks product on a monthly basis. MemberClicks also provided the ability to self automate the membership application and dues renewal process, which had consumed the efforts of this Board's Membership Chair. MemberClicks would also offer the organization's membership a complete menu of value added and customizable features, which are completely integrated into a single product, thus lessening many of the problems encountered with RPCVw's previously existing and disjointed IT solutions.

The next board will want to keep a close eye on the organization's cash flow, ensuring that the monthly costs involved in having MemberClicks can be met. At a minimum, RPCVw must bring in nearly 20 members each month in order to pay for the following month's MemberClicks bill. Any additional membership dues taken over the initial 20 can be used for other activities. Because membership dues are not consistent month in and month out, the organization should maintain, or save, enough cash to get through the short months. Overall, the organization should

be able to spend more time recruiting new members and less time maintaining its current membership as a result of this service.

The new Communications Director will primarily be responsible for developing content for the Web site, List serves, and e-newsletters. The Web director will be responsible for taking that content and integrating it into the Web site, and e-newsletter layout. The organization may want to consider having the individual chair positions manage the posting of events without the help of the Communication or Web Directors. The process is easy and requires no knowledge of HTML or graphic design, once set up. The Web Director will be in charge of developing forms for events, which is no small task given the complicated nature of developing forms.

Community Service Programs

Erica Navarro provided a diverse range of creative events and activities to engage the membership in worthwhile efforts helping to make our community better for everyone.

Database of Organizations looking for Volunteers

In September, a database of organizations looking for volunteers was published on RPCV/W's website. Organized by interest, the database has enabled returned volunteers to find individual volunteer opportunities in which they can provide their expertise.

Growing Native Partnership

In October, RPCV/W Community Service partnered with the Potomac Conservancy, a regional non-profit organization that works toward preserving the health of the Potomac River Basin. As part of the Growing Native project, volunteers collected native tree seeds in Arlington National Cemetery. The seeds were delivered to nurseries where they are now growing into saplings to be planted throughout the watershed. Erica contacted the superintendent of Arlington Cemetery, John C. Metzler to obtain permission. The Growing Native Coordinator, Colleen Langdon who is also a RPCV would like to organize a larger group. She can be reached at 301-608-1188, ext. 211.

So Others Might Eat (SOME)

On March 11, RPCV/W volunteers worked at SOME. Volunteers cleaned and helped build a tranquility garden used by low-income individuals suffering from depression and mental illness. Volunteers also painted the building used and gardened around it. Marco Murcillo, the Coordinator, provided breakfast for the volunteers.

RPCV/W Hands On DC 2006 Event

Saturday, April 29th, RPCV/W members and friends came together for a one-day work-a-thon to improve conditions in the public schools and raise money for college scholarships. *Hands On DC* is an all-volunteer project that creates better schools and brighter futures for students in the District of Columbia. The RPCV/W team worked alongside a team from Accenture at Amidon Elementary School in SW, Washington, DC. Focusing on painting inside, team members enjoyed another RPCV/W community service event as part of the larger 2006 *Hands On DC* event. The Team Captain of this effort was **Michelle Ghiselli**.

Membership

Special Projects & Events

Annual Cherry Blossom Picnic

For the third year in a row, RPCV/W held its highly successful Cherry Blossom Picnic at the Tidal Basin. Over 75 members and friends gathered during the Cherry Blossom Festival to share a picnic and a lovely view under a canopy of pink blossoms.

JFK Wreath-Laying

RPCV/W continued its annual tradition of laying a wreath in commemoration of the birthday of the founding President of the Peace Corps, **President John F. Kennedy**. Over 30 members and friends gathered to lay the wreath as well as place a rose in honor of the first 13 Peace Corps countries.

Annual Meeting & Picnic

The Annual Meeting and Picnic was held July 9th at the Capital Yacht Club. Members voted in a new board and enjoyed a tasty gourmet BBQ, fresh salads, sides and drinks prepared by **Chef Kyle Vermeulen**. For the 2005 Annual Picnic, **Silly Socks Puppet Theatre** presented a special puppet show pro-bono for children as their parents took part in the Annual Meeting. This addition to the program provided an added benefit to members with children.

Merchandise

This past year, RPCV/W explored various merchandising options to not only bring in additional revenue to the organization, but to also raise awareness about RPCV/W and the Peace Corps.

The new logo also appears on the front of the newly-designed t-shirt along with “The Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Washington DC” followed by “Bringing the world back home since 1979” with the website below the text. The back of these violet shirts with dark chocolate ink feature an impressive spiral design of all the Peace Corps countries that have ever existed. In the center of this spiral is a past-tense version of the new Peace Corps slogan: How far did you go?

RPCV/W also continues to sell the popular Peace Corps Calendar produced by the Madison RPCV group.

All merchandise is made available at major events, including the Annual Meeting Picnic as well as the Holiday Party.

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