

SEPT 5, 1985

TO KATY HANSEN, RPCVoice
FROM ROGER LANDRUM, RPCV/W

MATERIAL FOR 25TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL ISSUE

INTRODUCTION TO GROUP

RPCV/W draws its 600 members primarily from the District of Columbia and the nearby Maryland and Virginia suburbs. Some 30 members come from other states and overseas. All members are dues-paying. Most are RPCVs and former Peace Corps staff.

RPCV/W is administered by a steering committee composed of 12 officers elected annually by mail ballot of members who are RPCVs. Policies are also set by the steering committee, except in the case of major decisions submitted to a general meeting of members.

Our goals are to operate positive programs for our members and community, to help maintain a strong Peace Corps, to enable RPCVs to continue to be involved in global development efforts, and -- as an affiliate of the National Council and other local RPCV groups -- to help create an influential national community of former volunteers and staff.

We seek to be an enjoyable association of former volunteers and staff with a clearly-defined annual agenda effectively carried out. We view our organization as providing members with good ideas the means for carrying them out, subject to guidelines set by the steering committee to protect our nonpartisan standing and good name. RPCV/W has set out to be, in the eyes of our members and community, a reliable, effective and respected organization.

Our biggest challenges are implementing our programs without paid staff, better utilizing the talents of our growing membership, and establishing closer ties with other RPCV locals and the National Council.

RPCV/W supports stronger representation of local RPCV groups on the NC board, a NC membership goal of 10,000 with a detailed plan to achieve this, and creation of a coordinated, long-term effort by RPCVs nationwide to support selected people-to-people development projects and other special projects.

HISTORY OF GROUP

MAY 1979: An organizing meeting called by RPCVs Charles Cox, Brian Moore, and Paul Smolen was attended by 100. A survey of interests led to six standing committees and the umbrella name, ACTION Alumni Association of Greater Washington Area (AAAGWA).

1980/81: By-laws were passed and a first steering committee was elected at a general meeting. Karen Keefer was our first president. First testimony was made before Congressional committees, on increases in readjustment allowance, Peace Corps separation from ACTION, and Peace Corps budget increases. Social events, including receptions at Kenya and Nigeria embassies, formed the core program. With \$5 dues, membership reaches 100.

1981/82: Lew Howell was elected president, and our name was changed to Returned Peace Corps/VISTA of Washington, D.C. Linda Lammachia established the newsletter. Membership reached 120 by Sept. 1982.

1982/83: Steering committee was established as policy-making body with elections by mail ballot. David Hunsberger elected president. An organizational brochure was printed, and Issue Forums become part of core program under direction of Roger Landrum. Dues raised to \$15. Membership reaches 250 by Sept. 1983. RPCV Committee on Central America is set up as an independent group for purposes of political activism and later published the widely praised Voices of Experience in Central America.

1983/84: Tom McGrew forms Committee on the Peace Corps budget, which helps reverse decline in agency budgets. Holland McKenna elected president in close race with Susan Greeley. Core program functioning smoothly. Membership reaches 325 by Sept. 1984 under chairperson Barbara Thomas.

1984/85: Roger Landrum elected president and a professional journalist, Jeff Drumtra, redesigns newsletter. Fund-raising for development projects becomes part of core program. Members contribute \$1775 to the Ashoka Society plus matching foundation funds, and \$3745 is contributed to Oxfam-America from flea market/auction organized by Susan Greeley. Matt Erulkar establishes wreath-laying ceremony at JFK gravesite. Committee on Peace Corps Recommendations prints statement with five recommendations, and three pass Congress and are signed into law by President Reagan. Annual awards, Kenya vacation safari, and 25th anniversary cookbook are planned. By Sept. 1985, membership reaches 578.

1985/1986: Roger Landrum re-elected President and Drumtra continues to edit newsletter. June Gertig assumes chairmanship of membership committee. Bill Carey becomes social chairman and launches highly successful International Happy Hours. Membership contributes roughly \$4,000 to The Ashoka Society, which with double matching grants generates almost \$12,000 for support of Ashoka Fellows. Happy Hours fund two Peace Corps Partnership Programs and contribution to Eye Care Inc. RPCV/W hosts author's party for Gerry Rice's The Bold Experiment which is attended by over 400 members. RPCV/W hosts 25th anniversary conference of Peace Corps alumni on the Mall, attended by over 4,000 and organized primarily by RPCV/W members Landrum, Siglin, and Carey. Membership reaches 1,200 at the time of the September conference.

RPCV/W PROGRAMS -

A. CORE PROGRAMS

1. ISSUE FORUMS. We sponsor bimonthly (or more frequent) Issue Forums for our members and others. A six-month plan is developed and administered by an Issue Committee, chaired by the member of our steering committee elected Issue Chairperson. Each forum is organized by a member or members, either by bringing a forum idea to the committee or vice versa. Generally, a forum has a panel of three speakers selected for expertise and contrasting points of view. Each speaks briefly, followed by a Q and A sessions. The committee carefully refines each forum plan for a clear theme, best available speakers, balance of views, and time schedule. No fee is paid to speakers and we use free public facilities. Themes are selected for timeliness and interest to members. Rarely, we feature one speaker or an advocacy panel. Members are invited by a post card 10-14 days before each forum. Forums are crisply chaired.

Average attendance is 50-80. Over 200 attended a forum on the Future of the Peace Corps and some 150 attended a forum on the sanctuary movement featuring Jack Elder and another forum on "crisis in the Philippines" featuring Congressman Tony Hall.

We have many country specific forums: Ethiopia After the Revolution; Nicaragua After the Revolution; Will Afghanistan Survive? We often feature policy issues: Why Peace Corps Exits Countries; AID, What Works?; U.S. Arms Sales and Military Assistance; the Contadora Plan; Politics of African Famine Relief.

When appropriate, a task force or committee grows out of a forum to follow some line of action.

2. NEWSLETTER. RPCV/W publishes a bimonthly newsletter for members, produced by an editor or editors on our steering committee. It is generally 12 pages in length and features investigative articles, opinion pieces, reports on RPCV/W activities and Peace Corps, Third World news, letters from members, interviews, etc. The Newsletter is very popular with our members and is currently edited by Jeff Drumtra, a professional journalist, who volunteers his time.

3. SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS: In 1984 we set a goal of supporting two overseas development projects. The first selected, on proposal by a member of the steering committee, was the Ashoka Society. The Society organized a reception for our members to make a presentation, then a fund-raising letter was set to members asking for (1) Combined Federal Charities pledges, or (2) a check contribution, or (3) a small fund-raising project or dinner. Members contributed \$1775, which was matched by a foundation, for a total of \$3550, well beyond our \$2500 goal. This contribution supports two Ashoka Fellows, Annand Kathadia who conducts an anti-corruption project in India, and Pak Jo, who organizes a community of poor squatters in Indonesia. The progress of their work is reported in our Newsletter. We hope to support Annand and Pak Jo for their three-year Fellowship period. We have an additional goal of encouraging RPCVs nationwide to support 10 Ashoka Fellows, which would make a major contribution

to growth of this new development organization.

Our second project was a May 1985 flea market/auction to support Oxfam-America. Over 100 members helped organize this event and many more contributed artifacts for sale or auction. This event helped involve and unify our members, and \$3,745 was raised and contributed to Oxfam-America.

4. COMMITTEE ON THE PEACE CORPS BUDGET. Chaired for three years by attorney Tom McGrew, this committee analyzes the Peace Corps budget and submits oral and written testimony to the appropriate committees of Congress. It coordinates its efforts with the NCRPCV committee on national and international policy. The McGrew committee has focused fresh attention on the Peace Corps budget and helped reverse years of decline in real dollars.

5. WREATH LAYING. One of our members, Matt Erulkar, has organized an annual wreath laying at John F. Kennedy's gravesite to honor his founding of the Peace Corps. This ceremony is cosponsored by the National Council and other RPCV groups and has received much media coverage.

6. SOCIAL EVENTS. Administered by our Social Events chairperson, we sponsor dinners at ethnic restaurants, picnics, pot luck dinners, country nights, and softball games. This year a special project is preparing a 25th anniversary Peace Corps cookbook for publication.

7. MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT. A membership chairperson sits on our steering committee. In October 1984, David Hunsberger planned and administered a membership drive. A brochure and information packets were circulated to prospective members identified by current members. RPCVs were targeted in federal agencies, the World Bank, area PVOs, etc. Membership climbed steadily to 600. Regular dues are \$15, \$6 for out-of-town members, recent returnees, or special cases. All RPCV/W operations are carried out with dues except for a few self-financing projects.

B. SPECIAL PROGRAMS

1. TASK FORCE ON PEACE CORPS RECOMMENDATIONS. Chaired by steering committee members Matthew Cossolotto and Roger Landrum, this task force formulated recommendations to improve the Peace Corps. Five were selected because of membership support and good prospects for implementation. A polished, four-page report was printed for circulation to members of Congress and others. Support was organized by members and RPCVs working for members of Congress. Three of these recommendations were advanced by Senators Alan Cranston and Richard Lugar and by Congressman James Leach. They passed Congress in 1985, somewhat modified, and were signed into law by President Reagan. They are: (1) abolishing political tests for selection of overseas

Peace Corps staff; (2) establishing a bipartisan Peace Corps Advisory Council of 15 members, 7 of whom must be RPCVs; and (3) a 10,000 goal for PCVs in service overseas (long championed by Congressman Leach). This year we plan to establish a task force on recommendations to improve RPCV/W operations and structure.

2. CHARTER VACATIONS. We are planning a 1986 charter flight to Kenya open to members and friends of members. This project is coordinated by Lynn Randels and Marsha Zellum, members who were PCVs in Kenya, and in-country excursions will be outlined for small groups. This is an experiment with a new service to members and, if successful, will become an annual offering to Third World countries. We hope to gain favorable travel and lodging rates plus good travel companions and RPCV expertise in cultural guidance.

3. ANNUAL AWARD. RPCV/W is developing a plan for an annual award(s) ceremony to be cosponsored by NCRPCV and other RPCV locals. The objective is to honor individuals who have made special contributions in selected areas highly valued by RPCVs, and to gain publicity for these areas. Presently coordinated by Matthew Cossolotto, the Award(s) will be administered by a Permanent Committee under procedures agreed to by RPCV organizations.

4. SMALL ENTERPRISE CONFERENCE. One of our members, Galen Hull, after organizing an Issue Forum on small-enterprise development, organized a conference attended by 80 professionals interested in this field. Additional lines of action are under consideration and Galen will publish a book on the subject.

PEACE CORPS 25TH ANNIVERSARY

RPCV/W initiated a coalition effort with the National Council, Peace Corps Institute, and Citizens Committee for Future Directions for the Peace Corps. The purpose is to insure maximum participation by RPCVs and former staff in the 25th anniversary and to advance selected RPCV projects during the anniversary year and beyond.

Among these projects are the Sargent Shriver Awards for Distinguished Humanitarian Service, a data bank on all Peace Corps alumni, an Alumni Archives Project possibly done in collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution, a Peace Corps Alumni Foundation, and a Third World Magazine.

RPCV/W will host the 25th anniversary conference in September 1986.