

NENY RPCV Meeting Notes
Tuesday August, 05, 2005

Agenda items:

- Eat, drink & enjoy the view from Susan & Van's garden
- Introductions
- Habitat for Humanity: Saturday, September 10th
- Peace Corps Year: Every year!
- October foliage hike: 2nd weekend in October
- Newsletter: September 15th deadline
- Thanksgiving dinner
- Famine relief for Niger
- Next meeting: 1st Tuesday in September
- Literature available
- Speaker: Jonathan Pearson, NPCA's Advocacy Coordinator

Eat, drink & enjoy the view from Susan & Van's garden:

After a wonderful garden dining feast at Sue Senecah & Van Calhoun, Steve opened the meeting with introductions of the 19 people in attendance, including 2 from the Boston RPCV and our speaker hailing from DC.

Habitat for Humanity: Saturday, Sept 10th on Delaware Av in Albany

Wendy Davis <WDavi@mail.als.edu> has scheduled **Saturday, Sept 10th** as a help out Habitat day. There may be some finishing up work (painting trim), but the primary help will be at a surplus building supply "garage" sale. Capital District Habitat had a building rush in the last few years and is now in need of fund raising for a next growth spurt. Come help set-up, tear-down or stay to help carry windows to people's cars. Wendy will send directions by email.

Peace Corps Year: Every year!

Christine Vanderlan <cvanderlan@hotmail.com> (via Steve Hoyt <steveh@albany.net>) has suggested a way to make Peace Corps Day more effective. She suggests that each of us make this school year the year in which we each make personal contact with one school district or teacher.

*She is **not** asking that we each give a presentation ourselves, only that we each make a personal contact to encourage that school district or teacher to participate. Steve and/or Christine will write a suggested introductory letter. Each of us can find appropriate teachers within our local schools to send the letter. Please contact Christine to sign up for the school or school district of your choice.*

October foliage outing: 2nd weekend in October

Augusta Field <afield3@earthlink.net> will organize a fall foliage outing. Susan & Van offered their property, with 360-degree vistas on 2 miles of mowed trail that runs through their fields. Bring your camera!

Newsletter: September 15th deadline

The newsletter needs to be timely, as Thanksgiving dinner will come shortly after the newsletter gets out. Please send all newsletter submissions to Christine Vanderlan <cvanderlan@hotmail.com> **before September 15th**.

Thanksgiving dinner

Joan & Harry Thornhill <thorn@nycap.rr.com> will not be at the October meeting, where they generally finalize Thanksgiving dinner details. So please think about Thanksgiving dinner sooner than later! If you can't help out, monetary donations are always welcome for buying plates, napkins, flatware, etc.

For new members, NENY RPCV throws an annual Thanksgiving feast for international students at RPI on the Saturday after Thanksgiving. We had more than 100 students last year. All prep, serving and clean up is done by us, but we get to go around from table to table to talk to the students, too. It's a great time and a great outreach!

Famine relief for Niger

Steve Hoyt <steveh@albany.net> will be sending a web link for famine relief donation to Niger. The Friends of Niger have identified a UN organization for sending funds. The famine was caused by 2 years of drought followed by locust, along with political factors of converting food producing lands to cash crops.

Next meeting: 1st Tuesday in September

The next meeting will tentatively be held at Bob Fakundiny's home in Castleton. Details will follow.

Literature available

After the meeting, literature was available from

- Amy Hart, www.WaterDoc.org, who is producing a documentary on clean water and having a Swim-a-thon on August 20th.
- NPCA's advocacy network on topics including cotton subsidies, The People Speak, Climate Change conference on September 25-26, and a sign up sheet for the NPCA's advocacy network. Go to www.rpcv.org >take action>advocacy

Speaker: Jonathan Pearson, NPCA's Advocacy Coordinator

We were happy to have Jonathan Pearson speak to our group about issues on the Advocacy Network's agenda. Jonathan was raised in CT, graduated from at Boston College and served in Micronesia 87-89. He's been NPCA's Advocacy Coordinator in about 1.5 years.

Topics on Jonathan's presentation:

While there are many issues the Advocacy Network could take on, the past year's focus has been on

- the federal Perkin's loan program and
- Peace Corps funding.

The Advocacy Network is presently researching the military recruitment concern which has come up in the past few months.

Jonathan left us with 2 topics

- March 1st NPCA national call-in day and
- Collaborative opportunities for advocacy

Summary:

1) The federal Perkin's loan program has been an incentive for Peace Corps recruitment, but GW Bush proposed eliminating the forgiveness of student loans for PCV's. Both the

House and Senate voted to restore the Perkin's loan program, but it's not a "done deal" yet.

2) In 2002 GW Bush proposed doubling the number of PC volunteers by 2007, but no substantial growth in funding has been seen. Jonathan handed out a graph showing projected "doubling" and the huge gap between the proposed and reality. Projections for a doubling volunteers based on \$40k/year/volunteer suggests a substantial need to increase PC funding. Jonathan gave funding statistics. No matter how Steve Gottlieb calculated those statistics, the increases in both funding & volunteers has been minimal.

Next year, for the PC's 45th anniversary, funding will be a major issue for the Advocacy Network.

3) A recent article about a pilot program for military recruits to offer PC volunteerism as part of a military recruitment package was posted by Elliot here...

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/08/01/AR2005080101310.html?referrer=email>

PC/military recruitment is of concern to the PC for 3 reasons.

- PC Director Vasquez was unaware of the arrangement.
- It represents an incorporation of PC into a defense bill
- It creates a blurry line between PC & military

The concern is enough to contact the original drafters of the "National Call to Service" bill, Senators. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Evan Bayh (D-Ind.). The original bill covered different "service," including military, PC & Americorps, but each was originally treated separately. Different sections of the bill got moved around and it's not clear when and how PC got included into the military recruitment plan.

The PC Advocacy Network hopes that the language that includes PC would be removed from the defense bill.

A brisk discussion followed:

Bob Fakundiny stated that original PC recruitment excluded all individuals who have served in the military.

Several others gave examples of people who had been rejected from PC due to previous military service.

Terry Amrheim said that PC presently welcomes past military and doesn't know when this policy was changed.

Terry also suggested that this military recruitment program reflects the reality that previous military service persons have served successfully in PC.

Carol Hegeman and others pointed out that there is a difference between a military service person finishing their duty, then reentering a civilian life from which they decide to volunteer for PC and the continuum between military and PC.

Terry pointed out that military recruits would still be military while in PC. They will *not* be civilian volunteers

Jonathan reiterated that the Advocacy Network would like to see the language removed, pointing out that 1) Promotion of PC in from the onset of military recruitment is different from the current situation and 2) if it *isn't* different, then there is no need to have the language in the bill.

Bob questioned whether PC selection process would have open access to military records in making selection decisions and questioned the perception of a connection between PC and military intelligence.

Neither Terry nor Jonathan knew how military records would be handled in the PC selection process.

Ruth Steward and others questioned the security of PC volunteers if they were to become perceived as military and pointed out that there is already a considerable amount of suspicion of PCV's in some host countries.

Ruth also questioned PCV's freedom of speech with a military presence.

Bob stressed heavily the need to keep PC and intelligence separate.

Terry pointed out that there were advantages to the military recruitment. Primarily that
1) present PCV's who previous served in the military have a lower attrition rate
and 2) since military volunteers will be eligible for GI benefits, these benefits would have to be extended to civilian PCV's.

Steve Gottlieb made a motion that our group would oppose the language in the defense bill, siting strong opposition from the group in attendance and the possibility of misrepresentation.

Joe Doherty seconded.

Bob questioned procedure, quorum, etc.

Steve Hoyt suggested that a letter be drafted and sent to the broader membership before a vote be taken.

4) Jonathan left us with 2 topics:

- March 1st has been designated NPCA national call-in day... reminding RPCV's to call their representatives on issues on the NPCA Advocacy agenda. He commended Wendy and (Steve?) for their meeting with Representative Sweeny, who is key a member of the committee that determines PC funding. He also commended Bill Batt and Dave Borton for their work with The People Speak.
- He pointed out several opportunities for advocacy which were PC has connections with other organizations. These concerns are worldwide and not limited to PC.
 - Oxfam has advocacy efforts regarding US subsidies of cotton, which disadvantages small cotton farmers worldwide.
 - A Climate Change and Renewable Energy conference, September 25-26, where RPCV's will meet with their representatives in DC.
 - Other worthy causes are on www.rpcv.org >take action>advocacy