

Friends of Sierra Leone
2010 Year in Review
Peggy Murrah, President

Another year gone already! I'd like to look back on the work FoSL accomplished over the last year. Before I do, for everyone who joined or renewed a membership in FoSL, thank you very much. It is through our membership dues that our administrative costs are covered. Remember, we are a completely volunteer organization and we have no paid staff. Thank you to all my fellow board members for your continued dedication and work. You are all great! For those of you who donated either to specific projects or any of our special projects, thank you many times over. Without you, none of the work that we are able to support in Sierra Leone would have had any help from us. For most of those projects, without our help, the project wouldn't have been possible. I know times are tough and I know it is hard to take care of yourself much less someone you don't even know. But, you continue to do just that. Thank you.

We spent the first couple of the months of 2010 basking in the joy of the return of the Peace Corps to Sierra Leone. While it was decided in 2009, they did not actually go until June of 2010. We were in constant contact with the Peace Corps in Washington concerning information the Peace Corps asked us to contribute. We surveyed our members and friends and were able to send them a list of what we felt the PCVs would want to take to Sierra Leone. The Sierra Leonean desk officer would send us a request for information, and we would dig through our resources to supply it.

In February, several board members were invited to meet with the new Peace Corps Country co-directors, Joel Wallach and Gale Metcalf, in Washington. The group met and had a long discussion concerning the return of the Peace Corps. Joel and Gale were very eager to see the program get off to the best start possible and explained how the first group of volunteers would be the "cream of the crop" to that end. We also talked about possible training matters and placements. Without having visited the country yet, Joel and Gale weren't able to comment much on specifics.

We also funded two projects in February. We gave \$2780 to the Dodo Community Agricultural Project in Tikonko near Bo. The other project was \$2450 given to the Jersey African Support Services for upgrading a primary school in Romanke Community in Yoni Chiefdom.

Jim Hanson and I were able to raise the money to build 3 classrooms, a teachers' room, and 2 latrines thanks to the generosity of friends and the hard work of a community member in Social Circle. The community of Kenema Blango in the Valunia Chiefdom had never had a "real" school facility. Classes had been held in the court bari for the area primary children. The village donated 10 acres, native materials and labor to do their part in getting the school built. About \$20,000 was raised to build the first part of the school.

Last spring, Leslie and Jack McKeon did go to Sierra Leone and install solar power in Kamakwie Secondary School. They included classroom lighting as well as the computer

lab. Through their dedication and extremely hard work in not only raising the money, but also acquiring donated panels and increasing their own knowledge about solar power, Leslie and Jack did more than they set out to do. To Leslie and Jack, we are all proud of your accomplishments and grateful to you for what you have done. Hats off to the two of you!

In June the Peace Corps hosted a reception for the 39 trainees who were leaving for Sierra Leone. Among others, they invited members of the Sierra Leone Embassy and Friends of Sierra Leone members. FoSL presented the trainees with a gift bag that included a commemorative t-shirt with “Piscoh don kam back na Salone!” (Peace Corps has come back to Sierra Leone) on the front and the same image as is on the home page of the FoSL web site. We also gave each trainee a Sierra Leone/US flag pin as well as a calendar from the Madison Area group. Authors Gary Stewart and John Amman donated copies of *Black Man’s Grave* to them. The reception was well attended and FoSL board member, Amb. Thomas Hull spoke on behalf of FoSL at the event.

The 2010 annual meeting was held in Social Circle, Georgia in June at the lovely home of Sam and Oleta Mitchell who very graciously allowed us to use their lovely facilities including their pool and picnic area. Peggy showed a video of the June 6th reception. Member Dan Paracka spoke about his work with the Bunce Island Exhibit and social studies education in middle and high schools in Georgia. Jim Sheahan reported on his work with Med-Share which has sent containers of medical equipment to hospitals in Sierra Leone in the past. He is working on a possible collaboration between MedShare and the Peace Corps: “This proposed collaboration between MedShare and the Peace Corps will provide an additional opportunity for Volunteers to work with host country nationals to build local capacity and sustainable programs, while supporting MedShare activities.” Guest Frederick Nabie, President of the Sierra Leone Community Association of Georgia, spoke on current conditions of Sierra Leone as well.

Also from June 28th until July 2nd the second Friends of Sierra Leone/Schools for Salone Teacher Workshop was held at the Methodist Youth Centre in Bo. In addition to the nine FoSL members and friends, there were eleven Sierra Leonean facilitators who served as Teachers Teaching Teachers. Seventy-one primary and secondary teachers attended the training. They ranged from the untrained/unqualified to experienced degreed teachers. For part of the workshop, the first group of Peace Corps Trainees since the Peace Corps closed the program in Sierra Leone in 1994 joined. The main focus of the workshop was using local materials to address literacy skills and syllabus topics through newspapers the participants produced. Once completed, the newspapers were used with a group of 32 school children of various ages and grades. A third workshop is planned for 2011.

In August, I was honored to be invited, along with fellow board member Etta Toure, to attend the swearing in ceremony of the new US Ambassador to Sierra Leone, Michael S. Owen. Amb. Owen commented on the contributions of Friends of Sierra Leone during his speech.

We funded three projects in August. There were two health related and one education projects. The Polio Challenge Association received \$3000 to treat victims of elephantiasis in Bombali District. The Educational Centre for the Blind and Visually Impaired will use its \$3000 to build a perimeter fence around its Western Freetown campus. Arts Education International received \$1000 for their project in Daru, Eastern Province, to preserve the traditional arts and crafts of Sierra Leone using local artisans to teach young people and to develop markets for the products.

We provided support to the new Peace Corps Volunteers in Sierra Leone by donating \$500 to the Peace Corps Partnership.

In September, Jim Hanson and I traveled to Sierra Leone to attend two very important celebrations, one of which was a FoSL sponsored project. First was the opening of the school in Kenema Blango. Peace Corps country co-director Joel Wallach, along with nine Peace Corps Volunteers, attended the opening. Joel and I cut the ribbon for the official opening. Jim and I also attended the celebration for the project my school system in Georgia sponsored. In Tikonko, near Bo, we paid a visit to the piggery funded by FoSL earlier in the year. We also opened a piggery in Taiama, Moyamba District. The piggery is maintained by the families of girls who are in a scholarship program the Social Circle Schools funds by donations from students, staff and other community members. Back in Freetown, we traveled to the Western Freetown campus of the Educational Centre for the Blind and Visually Impaired and saw the work that had already begun on the perimeter fence.

Joined by FoSL board member Amadu Massally, Jim and I visited several hotels to choose one for our annual meeting to be held in July 2011. We settled on the Taia Resort as our base for the event. While in Freetown before going upcountry, we had met with Amb. Owen at the US Embassy. Amb. Owen has expressed his desire to host an event for the participants of the meeting. Jim and I toured the new Peace Corps facility with Joel Wallach. Joel also offered to let us use their facility for a meeting in July.

For the remainder of 2010, we have been making plans for both the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps in Washington and the annual meeting in Freetown for FoSL. We had a new group of project proposals submitted and those will be announced in early 2011. Our advocacy committee is looking at what they will focus on next. We will have our board elections in 2011 and should have the next board in place by mid year.

Once again, to everyone who supported FoSL during 2010, thank you. The work done during the year was directly due to you.

Sincerely,

Peggy Murrah
President
Friends of Sierra Leone
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