



Fall 2008

# Friends of Sierra Leone

## New Sierra Leonean Ambassador

In late May, a group from Friends of Sierra Leone met at the Sierra Leone Embassy in Washington, DC, with the new ambassador, His Excellency Bockari Stevens. In a wide-ranging discussion, Ambassador Stevens thanked Friends of Sierra Leone for its continuing assistance to the people via different education programs and projects. He also complimented our organization on the valiant efforts on Capitol Hill to bring Peace Corps Volunteers back to the country.



*Pictured from left to right are Aiah Fanday, Sarah Armstrong, Jim Sheahan, Judy Figi, Peggy Murrah, Ambassador Bockari Stevens, Sarian Bouma, and Hassan Conteh (Deputy Chief of Mission).*

## 2008 Annual Meeting Held in Freetown

### Report by Barbara Sheahan

The 2008 Friends of Sierra Leone annual meeting was held in Freetown this year. Attendees were entertained on their first evening in country by the National Dance Troupe's high energy performance including dancing, acrobatics, devils, drums and fire eaters.

The next morning started with a trip to the new American embassy and a briefing with Ambassador Perry and Special Projects Officer Lindsey Kennedy. Visiting Friends of Sierra Leone members had a luncheon with invited guests who then participated in a roundtable discussion of the current state of affairs in Salone. Participants included the Honorable Hindolo Trye (Minister of Tourism), Augustine M. Alpha (representative the Ministry of Education), Foday Jalloh (Director of Cultural Affairs for the Ministry of Tourism and

Cultural Affairs), and Bimbola Carrol, (the creator of the website [www.visitsierraleone.org](http://www.visitsierraleone.org)). Peter Anderson, RPCV, Kono District, and Chief of Outreach and Public Affairs for the Special Court, spoke to us about the role the special court has played and the effort to have it make an impact far beyond the individuals on trial.

The official annual meeting opened with a moment of silence in memory of Daphne Sawyerr-Dunn, longtime organizer and volunteer for Friends of Sierra Leone who passed away last year. She is still in the thoughts of all who knew her and were inspired by her leadership and passion for Sierra Leone. Financial, projects and membership reports completed the meeting.

*[Annual Meeting continued on page 3]*

#### Friends of Sierra Leone

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This is the Makeni group that received a Friends of Sierra Leone grant for their gari making project with their gari making equipment. Pictured are Richard Frazier, Bailor Jalloh, Principal A.O. Barzey, and Rev. Eddie Kamara. The project is well underway and students have planted a field of cassava for the project. The profits from the sale of the gari will go back to the school (Makeni UMSS) for future projects. The group is very grateful to Friends of Sierra Leone for the grant. This project is especially timely because with the high price of rice people are being encouraged to substitute gari for rice.

*[Annual Meeting – continued from page 2]*

Attendees participated in a service project, painting classrooms for the Milton Margai School for the Blind. Some members of the group made tours of the Special Court, where they saw live coverage of Charles Taylor's trial on screens. Others visited a maternity clinic in Freetown and visited Fourah Bay College. Two members met with microfinance companies actively making loans in Sierra Leone for business entrepreneurs.

The day and the official conference ended with a dinner which included Daphne Sawyerr-Dunn's family and those who helped with planning the meeting and other activities. Friends of Sierra Leone announced at the dinner that it has named its annual service award in memory and honor of Daphne. She is also the first recipient of the newly-named award. It will be presented to her husband, Wynford, at a later date in Washington, DC. Special thanks to Alfred Gborie and his friends Sylvester and Bimbola, who were invaluable help with the myriad of issues that came up for the group.

## Projects Update

Reported by Jim Hanson, Projects Chair

Before our annual meeting in Freetown, the FoSL board approved funding for four projects totaling almost \$11,000.

Two of the projects, involving school construction, were in Tonkolili district. Women for Women of Sierra Leone, a New York-based group, received \$3000 to add classrooms to the elementary school in Yele. In the Kalmaraw community, Pan African Development Initiatives (PADI) received \$2970 to build classrooms. The PADI director, Mr. Richard Kamara, joined us at the Freetown meeting to receive those funds and tell us about their work.

Peaceful Schools International, a Canadian-based group working in Mapaki, Bombali district, was awarded \$3000 for completion of a community library and resource centre. The centre will be used for adult literacy as well as for students and teachers.

The approval of a project for the Milton Margai School for the Blind also provided a workday

opportunity for those who attended the annual meeting. Working with the Sierra Leone Community Association of Atlanta, FoSL provided \$2000 for kitchen improvements and a chimney at the school. The food for 66 resident students was cooked over an open fire. The new chimney will keep the smoke out of the classrooms and the kitchen, and will use less firewood. Our group was able to see the work and managed to paint two classrooms on our workday. A great day for all of us. See the photo below showing the open cooking fire in the foreground and the new cooksite with a chimney under construction in back.

We also got good news about a 2007 project while in Freetown. The United Methodist Secondary School (UMSS) project in Makeni finally received their funds from the U.S. Embassy. Our sincere thanks to Lyndsey Kennedy at the embassy for her help.

Once again, thanks to all of you who continue to donate to our projects fund. With your help, we are able to improve the lives of many in Sierra Leone.



## Return to Salone

By Friends of Sierra Leone President Peggy Murrah

As most of you know, Friends of Sierra Leone held its annual meeting in Freetown this year for the second time in four years. While we had very few of the same people who made the trip in 2004, we had a vibrant and enthusiastic group. I am confident that this recent group came to the same conclusion that the first group did – we want to be active in the work being carried out in Sierra Leone at this time.

If you look back at the group in 2004, you will notice that many of the participants have gone on to carry out personal projects in Salone since that time. Anthony McMillan started the Forum for Information Technology Initiatives (FITI) and was responsible for numerous computers, printers and other technology components being sent to Sierra Leone. He conducted information technology training in Bo and Freetown and has helped educate numerous Sierra Leoneans in many technology areas. Bob Heavner has worked on his own projects and also helped friends with theirs. Cindy Nofziger started Schools for Salone and has built several schools as well as other educational facilities. My school system in Georgia has been sending fourteen girls and one young boy to school for the past four years and we have embarked on our fifth. We are currently working on building a school in a small village that doesn't have a school building. Judy and Dave Figi joined forces with a dedicated group of educators composed primarily of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers from Salone and just finished their third summer of teacher training workshops with a group of teachers in the Makeni area.

On this latest trip, I saw the work beginning even before our members were on their way back

home. People were talking about all the possibilities for projects in various areas of the country. And indeed, some of these projects have already been initiated and the work begun.

This result of having annual meetings in Freetown is, in my opinion, the best part of being there. People reconnect, rejuvenate and ideas flow. People go the first time not knowing what to expect, and, for those who were Peace Corps Volunteers, more or less like their original arrivals as new Peace Corps Volunteers. Many leave more dedicated to working with their friends in Salone than ever before. Maybe because we are older and more experienced, we seem to be focused on specific areas in which we can do something “with” our Sierra Leonean friends and not “for” them.

There is good news from Salone about improvements too. For the first time since I have been going back, there is dependable electricity in Freetown. The road from Freetown to Bo is gradually reaching out from one end to the other. It now reaches almost from Bo to Mile 91 and from Freetown to Masakai. It is good road!

At this time there is no plan to return to Sierra Leone in another two years. Since this kind of meeting has special challenges in planning, it doesn't seem fair to impose the job on a new board – and there will be a new board elected next year. But, if the new board decides to return, I encourage our members to seriously consider returning. While Sierra Leone has changed in many ways, you will have no trouble recognizing the beauty of the landscape and, more importantly, the people that you knew before. They are waiting for you.



## The Solar Electric Initiative

Reported by Leslie McKeon

Friends of Sierra Leone has recently launched a new project, The Solar Electric Initiative (SEI), for which I am the Project Manager. In partnership with the Environmental Foundation for Africa, SEI will bring incremental solar energy projects to rural communities with no electricity and little expectation of any.

I am a former Peace Corps Volunteer from serving in Kamakwie from 1966 to 1969. I re-visited in 2004 and 2005, working with an education project. I became convinced that the lack of energy undermined all other assistance and that solar power, more than any other energy source, could be the cornerstone for development. The sun is abundant, a clean, free and available source of energy.

Even with top-of-the-line arrays, solar is generally the cheapest source of power and the one most conducive to a bottom-up, community-empowered structure. It can be developed incrementally, giving almost instant gratification. For just a few thousand dollars we can provide streetlights and lights for schools. For just a little more, the solar array and a battery can provide electricity to operate appliances such as a refrigerator or computer in a clinic or school, or the power to such things as an electric groundnut oil expeller, a battery charger, an electric soldering gun for radio repair, or an electric sewing machine. Larger scale projects, such as a microenterprise center, a village water pump or irrigation pumps would each cost less than \$15,000.

The Environmental Foundation for Africa is a well-established West African non-governmental organization with offices in Freetown. They have collaborated with and received support from the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees, CARE, the governments and non-governmental organizations of Ireland, Britain, Germany, Canada and Holland, and international environmental organizations. They've done solar systems design and installations in clinics and schools and are interested in making solar power available in rural communities. They have a network of technicians and engineers that they work with and loads of experience with the logistics of project implementation in Sierra Leone.

A well-designed solar array is relatively easy to maintain and could be done locally, so the system can be sustained for about 10 years with minimal outside assistance. Collaboration between Friends of Sierra Leone Solar Electric Initiative and the Environmental Foundation for Africa could design a flexible prototype to make solar power feasible throughout Sierra Leone.

We hope to kick off this project next winter in Kamakwie. I have already raised \$2,000 and expect to raise more before we begin. So far I am a committee of one. I am inviting all of you who might be interested in working on this, who wish to contribute or have questions or suggestions, to contact me. It's a no brainer, right?

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### Schools for Salone Update

by Cindy Nofziger

2007-2008 has been a very busy and exciting year for Schools for Salone ([www.schoolsforsalone.org](http://www.schoolsforsalone.org))! The initial days of selling note cards so that we might be able to accomplish a few rural schools has evolved into an effort more wonderful than anything we could have imagined. Since we started in 2004, Schools for Salone has completed seven schools, a library, and three water wells. In

addition, we provide ongoing support to these schools and others with teaching materials, school supplies, teacher training and salaries, where needed. As of July 1, we became official. All donations to Schools for Salone are now directly tax deductible since we are a recognized 501c3 charity.

*Editor's Note: Schools for Salone is an organization independent from Friends of Sierra Leone directed by Friends of Sierra Leone board member Cindy Nofziger.*

## My Friend John Sesay

This was written by Friends of Sierra Leone member Les Law of Golden, Colorado upon hearing of the death of his friend John Sesay of Makeni. Les and John became friends as Les and others worked together at the United Methodist Secondary School during annual two week training sessions in Makeni.

I have observed that Americans want to know the cause of everything, while Sierra Leoneans accept death as part of life. After the appropriate mourning and remembrances, Sierra Leoneans get on with life. The life and memory of the person is more important than the cause of death. John Sesay stated that maybe Americans want to know the cause of death so we can avoid it.

As Americans we want to know the cause of everything. Why did this accident happen? Why did that person say what he did? Why does that person seem so blessed and I am not? Why did that person die? What caused it?

We want to know the cause so we can avoid the same thing happening to us, or to learn how to correct a problem so it is not repeated. These are not bad things but perhaps we are obsessed with "knowing why." Sierra Leoneans, and others in third world countries, are used to death. It happens all around them for various reasons, including hunger, disease, and wars, all in the environment of poverty. Death is so much a part of their experience that they know it is part of life. Their attitude may not be much different than what my understanding is of how Native Americans think of death. We are all part of creation and fellow travelers with the rest of nature while we are alive and in our death. The words "dust to dust and ashes to ashes" come to mind.

Many cultures revere the wisdom of those who are older and especially revere the memories of those that have died and the meaning of the person's life. People die for all kinds of reasons, but how they live and the memories of that life are what are important.

John Sesay died. Did we know him well? Of course not! We saw him once a year for a couple of

weeks. But look at the thoughts we have of him. His smile, his energy, his kindness, his work ethic, his caring for his students, his motorcycle, his humility and willingness to be in second place. How many people can have that sort of effect on us in such a short period of association?

Why do so many Peace Corps people and church missionaries have such fond thoughts of Sierra Leone? Why do I go back to Sierra Leone and why do I want to think of it as my second home? I suggest it is because the people of Sierra Leone feel that relationships are more important than the accomplishment of some task. Maybe that is why some cultures, more and more it seems, don't like us. We are consciously and unconsciously trying to replace their value of relationships with our value of "getting something done and getting it done fast" or "work now and talk later." I like it in Sierra Leone because they are more interested in me than what I bring. I know that some like my money and want to be "my friend" but that is a natural response to being born into poverty and their attitude is "born out of poverty."

The people of Sierra Leone need help to recover and to live in the current economic reality. Their life will become even more difficult unless changes are made. I, and all of us, need to be there but I hope that Sierra Leone can learn from us, be prosperous, and yet maintain their important values, especially the value of relationships.

Thank you Mr. Sesay and others like you, for teaching me about life. I like your attitude and I pray that I honor your memory by being more like you. "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in Heaven." We have the opportunity to be instruments of bringing God's intended kingdom to earth now, not later or after death. Mr. Sesay did.

The **2009 International Calendar** produced by the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Wisconsin is available through Friends of Sierra Leone. In addition to volunteers' photographs from host countries around the world, the calendar includes historic days, holidays, and holy days from many cultures. A portion of the proceeds will go toward Friends of Sierra Leone activities.

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<b>Membership:</b> Individual	\$25	<b>Contributions:</b> FoSL Circle	\$1000 and up
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- Both Friends of Sierra Leone and the National Peace Corps Association have discontinued the household membership category.
- Membership dues support operations for Friends of Sierra Leone, including meetings, newsletter, and the website. All other contributions support projects in Sierra Leone.
- Dues and other contributions to Friends of Sierra Leone are fully tax-deductible. The \$35 membership fees for National Peace Corps Association are **not** tax-deductible.

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