

December 2009



Friends of Sierra Leone

Peace Corps to Return to Sierra Leone

By Judy Figi, Advocacy Chair

On November 2, at the U.S. Embassy in Freetown, United States and Sierra Leone government officials signed an agreement to reestablish a Peace Corps program in Sierra Leone after a sixteen-year absence.

In June 2010, 40-50 volunteers will go to Sierra Leone as secondary math, English and science teachers. Most will work in rural schools in the north, south and east where the needs are greatest. They will also work in community development and teacher training. Peace Corps Response will be sending volunteers to Sierra Leone after the Peace Corps program is established.

The return of Peace Corps to Sierra Leone culminates several years of lobbying by Friends of Sierra Leone. We have met with State Department officials, staff at the U.S. Embassy in Freetown and the Sierra Leone Embassy in Washington, staff at Peace Corps Washington, and staff of many Senators and Representatives. Some of us have returned from Sierra Leone with letters from Sierra Leoneans asking for the return of Peace Corps. Many Friends of Sierra Leone members have written to and called their Senators and Representatives and our U.S. President.

At the press conference following the official signing ceremony in Freetown, Lynn Foden, Peace Corps Regional Director for Africa, praised Friends of Sierra Leone members for our efforts to bring Peace Corps back. Kevin Quigley, President of the National Peace Corps Association, said "Without their efforts this day would not have come. Friends of Sierra Leone is a sterling example of our community's ongoing commitment to the places where we served, a commitment that for this group never wavered despite enormous and tragic challenges."

Among the Senators who wrote Peace Corps in support of a return to Sierra Leone are Russ Feingold, Herb Kohl, Johnny Isakson, Saxby Chambliss, Dick Durbin, and Barack Obama. Representatives who wrote on our behalf are Mark Green, Paul Ryan, Tammy Baldwin, Jan Schakowsky, Ed Royce and Tom Tancredo. We thank them for their support



Sierra Leone Foreign Minister Mrs. Zainab Bangura and U. S. Embassy Charge' d'affaires Glenn Fedzer exchange copies of the signed Peace Corps agreement at the ceremony in Freetown on November 2, 2009.

Save the date! The 2010 Friends of Sierra Leone annual meeting will be in Atlanta, June 11, 12 and 13.



Friends of Sierra Leone members meet with Peace Corps officials at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington.

From left to right, Evan Baker (Sierra Leone desk officer at the Peace Corps), former Ambassador to Sierra Leone Tom Hull (Friends of Sierra Leone at-large board member), Judy Figi (Friends of Sierra Leone advocacy chair), Aaron Williams (Peace Corps Director), Billie Day (former Friends of Sierra Leone president), Peggy Murrah (Friends of Sierra Leone president), Aiah Fanday (Friends of Sierra Leone vice president), and Anthony McMillon (Friends of Sierra Leone at-large board member).

THE BOARD RETREAT

By Patty Bruzek

The newly refurbished Sierra Leone Embassy in Washington, DC was the site of the 2009 Friends of Sierra Leone Board Retreat. Eighteen of us met there the weekend of October 17 and 18. We discussed our current programs and talked extensively about the future. At the time of the meeting, it was not definite that Peace Corps was going back to Sierra Leone and a lot of discussion centered on that topic.

Sierra Leone's Ambassador, the Honorable Bockarie Stevens, joined our meeting along with Mr. I. Conteh, the Deputy Chief of Mission. We had a lot of frank discussion with both of them about Peace Corps going back into Sierra Leone and what was needed for this to happen.

We had a presentation by those who ran the Bo Teachers' Workshop in July. We broke into committees (Advocacy, Projects and Education) to set goals, figure out our next steps, and plan for the future. We learned more about our webpage, talked about a fundraising committee and discussed the 2010 Annual Meeting. All in all, it was a very productive two days.

An enjoyable and delicious dinner was shared by most of us at Sumah's restaurant on Saturday evening!

Anthony McMillon is a Mende

Anthony McMillon, Friends of Sierra Leone at-large board member, was a Peace Corps volunteer in the early 1980s. Now we know he is a Mende. We know this as a result of testing that compared his mitochondrial DNA to mitochondrial DNA in large databases. Matching sequences are interpreted as genealogies reflecting the maternal lineage history of the human race. In Anthony's case a segment of his DNA inherited through his mother matched a segment that shows that his ancestor not only lived in Sierra Leone, but that she was a Mende. So, Anthony is a Mende.

Anthony sees the results as a vindication for the many Sierra Leoneans, Mendes themselves, who insist, based on his appearance alone, that he is a Mende. He appreciates the irony that, 28 years ago, the Peace Corps and the government of Sierra Leone facilitated his "homecoming," albeit, unknowingly.

The research was done by an organization called "African Ancestry," located in Washington, D. C. Upon request, they send a testing kit that includes two cotton swabs to scrape the inside of the cheek. The swabs are mailed to the lab. The results, with a certificate of ancestry and a copy of the mitochondrial DNA sequence, are returned in about six weeks.

Rose Coker

Rose Coker passed away last July, may her soul rest in perfect peace.

For those of you who didn't know Rose, she and her husband ran Coker's Saloon Bar in Bo. They were the salvation of many a PCV, CUSO, VSO, Catholic priest and other ex-pats who found themselves living in the Bo area or just traveling through. It was a gathering place for volunteers, contract workers and their friends. Pa ran a tight ship and while fun was always present, I never saw anyone get out of line. Pa was a very large man. He and Rose lived with their children above the bar and the kids were always around if school wasn't in session. They were respectful, friendly and hard working children raised with guidance and love by their parents. When a volunteer felt down, he or she could count on an afternoon at Cokers to get through a tough time with Rose and Pa providing companionship, conversation, food, and even the best sound system and music in the whole city.

Rose was one of the kindest women I ever knew. She not only showered her own children with love, but also the children of other women including my mother's. I had not been in Sierra Leone very long before I met Rose and Pa. Pa scared me a little but Rose made me feel safe and cared for. Our relationship continued from our meeting in 1978 until now. My last evening in Bo during my visit last month was spent at Rose's small shop where she fed me again, as she has done more times than I can possibly count. I spent a very pleasant evening with Rose, her son Christopher, Bob Moran and his wife, and Emmanuel Gborie and his wife. I had no idea it was to be my last evening spent with Rose.

Rose has taken care of so many people and most people aren't aware of all she did. But she did. Rose never asked for anything for herself. If she needed something, it was because it would be used to take care of someone else. Her compound always had children everywhere and adults coming and going. If you paid attention when you were around her, you would notice that she was constantly giving something to someone. Rose was a caretaker. No one ever loved her family and friends more than Rose Coker. The world has lost one of its warmest lights with her passing. I will miss her so very much. To her sons and other family members, our thoughts and prayers will be with you during this very difficult time. We share your sorrow.

With love, Peggy Murrah

Peggy,

Your remembrance of Ma Coker was deeply moving. I did not know her well, but well enough to know that she loved PCV's. We met once in Bo when I was Ambassador and a couple of times at the Embassy in Freetown where we talked about our shared hope for the return of the Peace Corps. She was a wonderful person. I regret that the next generation of PCVs will not have an opportunity to know her.

Thomas Hull, former U. S. Ambassador

The Solar Electric Initiative

The Solar Electric Initiative has gotten off to a very successful start. We expect to install our first solar array at the Kamakwie Secondary School in February or March, 2010. This is not only consistent with our most optimistic wish, it will be a much larger installation than we anticipated. After struggling with fundraising for a year during an economic collapse, everything came together last October. We received a fabulous donation of nine 170 volt solar panels from Namaste Solar in Boulder. This made for a much larger scale project than anticipated, and forced us to upscale and expand all the supportive equipment, again putting the implementation beyond reach. But within days, Friends of Sierra Leone located additional project moneys, making it possible to install a system and some applications this dry season and with the possibility of adding on for years to come. The grant was made possible by a special donation from Dr. Robin Hill in memory of her father. What a wonderful honor for us!

Last summer my husband Jack and I took a cross-country trip with this project as the “theme.” We never knew that this trip would provide the means for the project to come together, We took an inspiring week-long workshop on Renewable Energy for the Developing World at the Solar Electric Institute in Carbondale, Colorado. Subsequently we held a rather disappointing fundraiser at Namaste Solar in Boulder, never appreciating how successful it would turn out to be. When we attended the Friends of Sierra Leone annual meeting in Minneapolis, we had no idea this project was just a few months away from fruition. The components of the system are now en route to Sierra Leone and we expect to follow.

We would like to see this project not as an end but a model for Sierra Leone and for us to expand solar power in rural schools. Cuba has solar energy in all its schools. Wouldn't it be wonderful if Sierra Leone can do likewise?

We welcome all questions, assistance and donations. The Solar Electric Initiative is a special project hosted by Friends of Sierra Leone. Your tax-deductible contributions can be made directly to Friends of Sierra Leone, either by check or through our website, www.fosalone.org.

Leslie McKeon

mckeon119@mac.com

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Dr. Jody Olsen Receives Humanitarian Award

By Peggy Murrah

For only the third time, Friends of Sierra Leone has bestowed its Humanitarian Award. It was given to Dr. Jody Olsen for her part in returning the Peace Corps to Sierra Leone. Dr. Olsen referred to a meeting with the Sierra Leone Vice-President, Samuel Sam-Sumana, in which he told her that he had promised the people of Sierra Leone that the Peace Corps would return. Dr. Olsen said his vision became hers and she also decided that this should happen. She was the acting Peace Corps Director until Director Williams had been appointed and confirmed. Dr. Olsen has an extensive Peace Corps background as a volunteer as well as a Country Director.

Friends of Sierra Leone had been told that the return could not possibly take place until the new Peace Corps Director was in place. However, Dr. Olsen helped ensure that the return took place as quickly as possible. While the announcement wasn't made until Director Williams was on the job, the decision was made prior to his arrival. For that, we are grateful to Dr. Olsen.

The Board of Directors of Friends of Sierra Leone presented the award to Dr. Olsen during the board retreat held in October at the Sierra Leonean Embassy in Washington. Accepting on Dr. Olsen's behalf was a family member who thanked Friends of Sierra Leone for acknowledging her work and commitment.

Well done, Dr. Olsen and we thank you.



Friends of Sierra Leone Vice President Aiah Fanday and President Peggy Murrah presented the Friends of Sierra Leone Humanitarian Award to Dr. Olsen's representative.

Friends of Sierra Leone / Schools for Salone Teacher Workshop Bo, Sierra Leone July 13-17, 2009

By Richard Frazier

This past July, Judy Figi, Catherine Frazier, Richard Frazier, Jeannie Siegler, and Kalyca Thomas, all members of Friends of Sierra Leone, offered a workshop for teachers in Bo, Sierra Leone. The workshop was jointly affiliated with Friends of Sierra Leone and Schools for Salone (<http://schoolsforalone.org>). Figi and the Fraziers had been working with teachers in Makeni through Operation Classroom (<http://hope4salone.org>) from 2005 through 2008. The workshop in Bo was designed from what they had learned during the professional development projects in Makeni. Seven past participants of those workshops served as Sierra Leonean facilitators in the Bo workshop. Friends and former colleagues in Bo served as site coordinators and helped tremendously with arrangements both before and during the workshop.

The goals of the workshop were 1) to offer professional development for teachers in Sierra Leone in the areas of literacy, science, health, and environmental studies, 2) to help them develop and produce learning materials, and 3) to provide experience with an approach teachers could implement with their own students. The workshop included field research by participants in the local community in order to obtain information for the content of books that were then authored by the teachers for their respective grade levels. Inquiry, integration, and innovation were proposed as parallel emphases, and teacher participants made a commitment to share their workshop experience with colleagues in their own schools as well as neighboring schools.

Seventy-four teachers from twenty-two schools attended the workshop. Their schools are located in the Southern and Eastern provinces and are predominantly rural. The highest level of education teachers had attained ranged from O-Levels to bachelors degrees. Twenty-five teachers had from one to five years of experience, and twenty-five had more than twenty years of teaching experience. Fourteen had six to ten years, six had eleven to fifteen years, and only four had sixteen to twenty years. Funds for the workshop came from both donations and sponsorships for particular teachers to attend. These donations were made through Friends of Sierra Leone and Schools for Salone. Nearly half of the participants came from Schools for Salone schools. A little more than a fifth of the participants were teachers with the Sierra Leone-Plymouth Partnership, an organization founded by Friends of Sierra Leone member, Jeff Hall. Other participants were sponsored by former volunteers. A few participants were invited because of service their schools/organizations had provided for the workshop. Participants received materials, funds for travel, per diem, and a stipend. . FAWE (Forum for African Women Educationists) Bo Branch did the catering; a simple breakfast and a rice meal were provided for the participants.

The workshop was opened by the Mayor of Bo, Dr. Wusu Sannoh. Opening ceremony speakers included Paramount Chief Samba Bindi Hindowa, Mr. Paul Saffa (Inspector of Schools, Bo City Council), Mr. Alex Nalloh (Administrator Bo Centenary Secondary School, and Dr. Richard Frazier (facilitator). The workshop was held at the Methodist Youth Centre, and everyone in Bo was warm and welcoming of the workshop organizers and participants.

Participants worked in groups organized by grade level and mixed as much as possible from the various schools. Fifteen books were researched, composed, and produced by the seventy-four teachers. Two hard copies of each book were prepared. Each participant received a photocopy of the respective book he or she had worked on. All books were scanned and a CD of all the books was presented to each school.

The books cover a variety of topics. The titles are:

- Common diseases that affect children
- The unprotected water well
- How to make gari
- Buying and selling of agricultural products
- Baby growth food
- Mama Siawo and family at work
- Garbage collection in Bo City
- Malaria is a dangerous disease
- Science and indigenous technology for Junior Secondary School (charcoal production)
- Pa Kanu needs to support his children: Aluminum pot making
- Making gara cloths in Junior Secondary Schools in Sierra Leone
- Pa Ngoka the distiller needs money to pay school fees
- Joe's journey from school
- Teenage pregnancy in schools
- In the blacksmith's hut

A book fair was held the final day of the workshop. Children from local schools came and read the books. Participants were very excited to have an authentic audience for their work and frequently applauded as a reader would complete a page or even a sentence. Children gave extremely favorable reviews and expressed delight at seeing familiar things in print and in learning new details about their culture, community, and local environment. In the workshop evaluation nearly all the teachers requested additional opportunities for professional development of greater frequency and duration.

For more information about the July 2009 workshop, contact Richard Frazier richard_frazier@hotmail.com. Plans for a follow-up project in 2010 have not yet been finalized. In order for Friends of Sierra Leone to continue to offer professional development for teachers in Sierra Leone, volunteers and donations will be needed.



Interviewing the blacksmith

The **2010 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, holiday, and holy days from many cultures. The proceeds will go toward Friends of Sierra Leone activities.

Use this order form or go to the FoSL website and order via PayPal.

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Total Remitted

\$

- 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.

Thank you for your support! Please return this form with a check payable to Friends of Sierra Leone to the address at the right. →

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