



Friends of Sierra Leone Newsletter

January 2012

Contributions Can Now be Directed to PCV Projects

By Barry Mitsch and Peggy Murrah

Do you remember how difficult it was to get funding for a secondary project during your Peace Corps service? Would you like to assist the work of a current Peace Corps Volunteer in Sierra Leone?

If you answered "yes" to both of those questions, you will want to get involved in the project fund established by Friends of Sierra Leone. The Board recently approved a \$2,000 allocation to

**Friends of Sierra
Leone Establishes
Project Fund for
Peace Corps**

be used for specific projects conducted by active Peace Corps Volunteers in Sierra Leone. Projects will be reviewed and approved by the Peace Corps Director and funding made availa-

ble to the Volunteer in the field. In exchange, the Volunteer will provide Friends of Sierra Leone with updates so that we can see the direct impact of the contributions.

But we need help to keep the fund replenished and available for more and more projects. Please consider a contribution to the project fund by sending contributions labeled "PCV Project Fund." Our hope is to be able to keep funding PCV secondary projects in Sierra Leone.

Your tax deductible donations enable us to fund our small grants projects and the Peace Corps secondary projects. Be sure to indicate clearly if your donation is for a specific project rather than the general projects fund.

Daphne Sawyerr-Dunn Memorial

Daphne Sawyerr-Dunn is a beloved founding member of Friends of Sierra Leone who passed away in 2007. In her memory, Friends Sierra Leone contributed to the general scholarship fund at the Paul School for the Blind in Bo. A check for \$250 was presented to Principal Mohamed S. Conteh at the school on November 30 by Mr. Emmanuel Gborie, acting on behalf of Friends of Sierra Leone.



Mr. Conteh and his students offered their condolences to Daphne's family and thanked all who made donations in her memory. Friends of Sierra Leone will make additional \$250 contributions for the next three years. A plaque will be placed at the school in honor of Daphne which will read: "She inspired and engaged everyone she met for Sierra Leone."

American International School of Freetown Job Opportunities

The American International School of Freetown is a nonprofit, independent pre-school to grade 9 school accredited by Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges. The school currently has 90+ students representing twenty-seven nationalities. Our facilities and resources continue to improve. Class sizes range between 8 and 17 students.

Positions Available 2012-2013:

- Primary Grades-Lower
- Primary Grades-Upper
- Middle School Social Studies

Contact Sharon A. Sperry, Director, at s.sperry_aisf@yahoo.com

Fiftieth Anniversaries

In celebration of Sierra Leone's 50th Independence Anniversary and the 50th Anniversary of the Peace Corps, the Embassy of Sierra Leone and Friends of Sierra Leone jointly sponsored a reception at Africare House in Washington, DC, on September 23.



The panel shown above provided updates to the guests. Presenters included:

Ambassador Thomas Hull - Emcee and Moderator

Ms. Bernadette Graves - U. S. Department of State

Mr. Dick Day - Director of Operations, Africa Region, U. S.. Peace Corps

Ms. Lynn Foden. - Chief of Operations, Africa Region

Mr. Sheku Mesali - Counselor, Embassy of Sierra Leone - Country Update

Mr. Malik Chaka - Director, Millennium Challenge Corporation

Dr. Gail Kettlewell - George Mason University - Adult Education Project

Guests included Returned Peace Corps Volunteers who served in the first cohort, many who served more recently, and other friends and supporters of Sierra Leone. The official presentations spilled over to informal conversations and everyone enjoyed authentic cuisine.

January 13th, 2012

Dear Friends of Sierra Leone,

In addition to wishing you a very Happy New Year, I would like to express my deep gratitude for your invaluable support of the Friends of Sierra Leone Freetown HIV Awareness Cup. From November 16 to 26, 2011, almost 200 boys and girls were taught how to protect themselves and their communities from HIV while taking part in a competitive and truly exciting football tournament. Without your contribution, this would not have been possible. From me, the young adults who participated, and the broader communities who benefited from this initiative, thank you!

I'd also like to give you a recap of the Freetown HIV Awareness Cup. We invited 8 boys' teams and 4 girls' teams from in and around Freetown, Sierra Leone, to take part in HIV awareness seminars and compete in the Cup. The National Aids Secretariat of Sierra Leone graciously provided the instruction and personnel for the seminars; the Secretariat's participation is crucial to the future sustainability of the education, testing, and resources put in motion by the Cup. The participants were given the knowledge needed to make healthy informed decisions about sex and HIV including what HIV means; how it's transmitted; how to use contraceptives; how to get tested; and where to get treatment. Perhaps most significantly, a strong focus was placed on reducing the stigma surrounding HIV in Sierra Leone that prevents many from seeking the free treatment that can save their lives. The students were also heavily encouraged to assume leadership roles and share what they learned with their families and communities. In the week following the seminars, the teams took part in the HIV Awareness Trivia Challenge which tested the players on the principles and lessons learned during the seminars.


Thanks to the generous support received, we were able to give each team a full set of uniforms courtesy of Fairleigh Dickinson University, and cover the cost of all expenses associated with their participation in the seminars and tournament. Each player also received their own HIV handbook to reference during the seminar and to study for the HIV Awareness Trivia Challenge. Over 10,000 condoms, both male and female, were distributed to the players and spectators who attended the preliminary and final rounds of the Freetown HIV Awareness Cup. We were also able to provide free on-site HIV testing and counseling at the finals of the Freetown HIV Awareness Cup.

The Freetown HIV Awareness Cup was about having fun and coming together as a community to learn about HIV, but that didn't lessen the competition or the quality of the football. We saw lots of goals and several games ended in exciting penalty shootouts! The winning team of each of these competitions was awarded a trophy and other prizes including new balls and boots donated by Puma Football, plus bags and warm-up gear. Friends of Sierra Leone graciously provided a grant to send these items to Sierra Leone!

As other organizations and initiatives around the sport for development of community have shown, football is a powerful tool for development especially in the case of HIV prevention. The broader goal of the Freetown HIV Awareness Cup was to open up the dialogue on HIV in Sierra Leone and bring football into the discussion. We are confident and thrilled to say that the Friends of Sierra Leone Freetown HIV Awareness Cup has done just that. We are now looking forward to working with the National AIDS Secretariat in its efforts to utilize football in the fight against HIV on a national scale.

The Friends of Sierra Leone Freetown HIV Awareness Cup owes its success to the generosity and guidance of so many including: African Elite Athletes, The Embassy of Sierra Leone, Fairleigh Dickinson University Soccer, Good Football, Grassroots Soccer, The Many Hats, the Mohamed Kallon Foundation, the Network of HIV Positives in Sierra Leone, Play31, Play It Forward, Puma Soccer, Rhodes College Soccer, the Sailu Babatel Hotel, the Sierra Leone Football Association, the National AIDS Secretariat of Sierra Leone, and most of all, our individual donors. Thank you for your vital support!

Sincerely,



Justin R. Sampson

Project Manager – Friends of Sierra Leone Freetown HIV Awareness Cup



Justin Sampson and Friends

A Mother's Perspective

The following is a compilation of superlatives reported by Karen Haas, the mother of Peace Corps Volunteer Katie. Katie has been in-country for about a year and her family travelled with Friends of Sierra Leone attending the 2011 Annual Meeting in Freetown. Here are some of her impressions:

- **Best moment-** When we first saw Katie at the airport and got to give her a BIG LONG HUG!!! Hard to describe how great it was to be with her!
- **Next best moments** - meeting Katie's friends (Jessica, Marty, Alphan etc.) , her host family in Bo and her family in Pujehan. All of these people have made such a difference in her life! Their friendships are so important to Katie's life and well being in Sierra Leone (SL).
- **Best food- true SL food-** Patata (African Potato) and cassava leaf (spicy sauce). (Sorry about all spelling errors.....) **Semi- SL food-** this is sold in town and we had some at the beach- BBQ chicken. This was a big treat to eat!
- **Worst food moments-** every time the fish head was on your plate and one time we had some sort of oatmeal texture brownish dish - no idea what it was- Katie liked it- I had one taste and well that was enough of that.
- **Most educational moments-** We (the group Friends of Sierra Leone- which is who we went with - this group is largely made of people who were Peace Corps workers in SL at some point in the past) met with heads of many governmental agencies such as the Ministers of Finance, Education and Health. Also - a director of the World Bank. We learned a lot about the current state of things in SL. (Friends of Sierra Leone was instrumental in getting the PC back in SL -thus the extra special treatment.)
- **Most Impressive Event** - The President of SL - Ernest Bai Koroma - addressed our group at the State House in Freetown. He shook hands with the Friends of Sierra Leone leadership - front row seats- we were in the second row and got good pictures....pretty impressive getting an audience with a President!
- **Next most impressive** - The Ambassador from the US to SL - Dan Owen - invited our group to his beautiful home overlooking the ocean. We were treated to drinks and hors d'oeuvres. Yummy!
- **Best transportation stories** - must tell three -
 - 1) When we arrived - I am guessing intending to impress our group—the government sent a brand new large double-decker bus. This seemed very fine until they tried to get the bus off the ferry we had ridden to get from Lungi (the airport) to Freetown. OH MY! No other vehicles could get off the ferry as the bus was blocking the others in. They tried adding wedges to the off ramp, they tried backing up

the ferry — many suggestions were discussed — in the end they had it positioned as best as possible — the bus backed off, but when the front end was coming off it smashed on the ground denting the front and damaging the door. The crowd cheered because at last the bus was off the ferry. The double decker bus ride was one we shall never forget. We still had a 45 minute ride on the bus to get to the hotel. We arrived at the hotel at one AM!

- **2) The Three Hour Tour**.....remember Gilligan's Island? Well we rode a large wooden boat over to Bunce Island -which our leader Amadu said would be a 3 hour tour- one hour over- one hour on the island- one hour back. On our way back we suddenly stopped when the boat hit a sand bar. First a few people got out to push the boat- the water was up over their knees. Then it became clear the boat really wasn't budging so everyone who was able got out- this was about 90% of the 52 people on board. Soon the water was down to our ankles and then, well, we were completely grounded! Amadu called the boat company - they said it wasn't an emergency— soon the embassy was called and low & behold two speed boats came to the rescue. These boats were fast! Night & day from the old boat we traveled over in. It was a funny picture to see the boat grounded. So everyone was rescued except the crew. They were waiting for the tide to change. I wouldn't want to be at the dock when they got back to shore ..the boss was NOT going to be happy!

- **3) When we get ready to go from Bo to Pujehan**, Auntie Moosue knew a Non-governmental Organization worker and he got permission for us to hire him to drive us to Pujehan. He came and we got in the large white Land Rover. Soon an argument ensued. Not just 3 white people were coming. Auntie Moosue and several family members clearly wanted to come along for the ride. OFTEN with transportation in Sierra Leone people sit on top of other people and vehicles are SUBSTANTIALLY overcrowded. The driver was having none of this . Finally, Mustafa, the youngest of those in the car got out and now everyone had a seat. So Jim and I were in the front and off we went and oh did we go. We were at times going about 75 mph -for the quality of the roads this was WAY TOO FAST! Katie at one point handed me a camera in case I wanted to take a picture...."What, are you crazy?" I wanted to say , "Sorry my heart is beating so fast I can't see straight and truly I was praying for our safety AND praying we would get to the portion of road that was unpaved. Katie did request twice that he slow down just a LITTLE. How about A LOT? NEVER have I been so happy to see potholes and ditches! Hallelujah - praise God for bumpy, unpaved roads! We did arrive safely in Pujehan in record breaking time!

- **I could go on, but**....this is it. I'm sure I've included trivia and left out important experiences that will stay with me forever.

Solar Electric Initiative Update from Leslie McKeon, Project Manager

The Solar Electric Initiative is one of five Friends of Sierra Leone Special Projects that receives administrative and fundraising support from Friends of Sierra Leone. Established in 2008, the Initiative seeks to extend solar technology into as many parts of Sierra Leone as possible.

Much has happened since my update earlier this year. First the bad news: in October, a lightning strike knocked out the solar system at the Kamakwie Wesleyan Secondary School that we built early last year. Not a disaster, but the inverter was damaged and we are waiting for a new board to be installed. We will also be adding a surge protector and lightning arrestor. The Solar Electric Initiative is paying for the new board and added protection, but the school will be paying for the labor and corrective work. A nuisance, but I guess we were due after a year and a half trouble free.

On the positive side, we are working toward bringing new projects into the Solar Electric Initiative fold. Several people have approached me about their project ideas. Arlene Golembiewski, a former Peace Corps teacher in Rotifunk, is beginning a solar project at Prosperity Girls High School, the first

girls' school for Rotifunk and surrounding villages. The facility will also be available to the other schools in town, adult learners, and graduates needing to update their skills. It will also serve as an internet café. Arlene expects to go to Rotifunk in January to deliver some computers and to work on the next steps for that solar project. You can learn more about this project at <http://pghs-sl.blogspot.com/>.

Also, one of the current Peace Corps Volunteers, Eric Silverman, wants to bring a solar array for a small school in Makali, in Tonkolili District. This will be a much smaller project, but he has already made headway in raising financial support. The Solar Electric Initiative is supporting his work. It would be so cool if he could participate in the installation while there as a Volunteer.

As many may know, the cost of solar panels has dropped and small lights-only systems can be installed for just a few hundred dollars. If you would like to fund or spearhead fundraising for a project in the school where you served as a Peace Corps Volunteer, let me know! These inexpensive systems greatly improve the learning opportunities for children in remote areas.

This fall, Friends of Sierra Leone and the Solar Electric Initiative formalized a partnership with Energy for Opportunity, a local NGO that designed and installed the Kamakwie array and several others throughout Sierra Leone. This relationship will help facilitate future project development and implementation. Energy for Opportunity has the technical knowledge and work experience in Sierra Leone. I am very excited about the potential of this arrangement to help Friends of Sierra Leone expand energy opportunities there.

Finally, we invite your help. For anyone interested in helping to expand solar opportunities in Sierra Leone, we welcome your financial contributions. We welcome inquiries if you are interested in developing a new project. Contact me at mckeon119@mac.com. Contributions for the Solar Electric Initiative should be made out to Friends of Sierra Leone and can be sent directly to me at Leslie McKeon, 130 Copley Avenue, Teaneck NJ 07666. You can also send directly through the Friends of Sierra Leone website or PO box, but be sure to clearly indicate "Solar Electric Initiative" in your communications. Thanks.

Projects by Jim Hanson

Our committee has selected two very good projects to fund. Our goals are to make our small projects grants benefit as many people as possible and to try to serve different districts of the country whenever possible. Both of these projects fit these goals and benefit Sierra Leone's young people.

The first is an award of \$3,000 to the Safe Haven Children's center at Lungi, Port Loko District. This is an orphanage that also serves many needy children in their community. The money will go for school supplies, desks, chairs, and seeds, tools, and manuals for agricultural training.

The second award is for school furniture at St. Peters Junior Secondary School in Bauya, Moyamba District. Peace Corps Volunteer Brandon Brown has joined with the teachers and community leaders there to improve the school environment and keep students in school. This money will provide tables, chairs, and cupboards for the teachers and new benches and desks for the students.

These are some of best gifts you could ever give, a great investment in the future of Sierra Leone. Thanks to all of you who continue to add \$25, \$50 or even several hundred dollars to your membership renewals to support our projects.

Helebu by Michael O'Neill

Michael lived in Sierra Leone from 1978 to 1992, at first as a Peace Corps Volunteer and later working for several non-governmental organizations. He is now director of Global Safety and Security for Save the Children International. As a community development field worker in Sierra Leone he developed extensive relations among the Mende people in scores of villages throughout the eastern and southern provinces. Upon entering a village for the first time, he made a habit of inquiring about the history of the place. He often asked the local people if they could explain to him how the village got its name. Once, while responding to a request for assistance to build a grain store, he had occasion to travel to a village named Helebu. In response to his usual inquiry, the elders described the turn of events that resulted in the village's strange moniker. Helebu, after all, is Mende for "beneath the elephant."

Many years ago, the elders explained, an offshoot settlement of the chiefdom headquarters town, Futa Kpeje, had been established near the site of present-day Helebu by a clan of earnest farming families. The place quickly gained renown for the bountiful harvests of rice, vegetables, and fruits produced from its farms and orchards. Each harvest season, merchants from distant chiefdoms made their way to the village market to buy up

the cornucopia of local produce. As the crops flourished, the people prospered. Then, one year when the rains had come with propitious timeliness and the sun coaxed nature's capricious bounty, just as the golden rice grains swelled upon bowed panicles, and plump vegetables ripened on the vine, disaster struck. A rampaging elephant appeared without warning, romping through the village farms, uprooting trees and damaging crops. The villagers' attempts to drive away the rogue beast included fencing the area at great expense and back-breaking labor, setting up a constant din of drummers, and dispatching a battalion of young men with slings and stones. All utterly failed as the elephant returned again and again to wreak havoc in the farms and orchards that surrounded the village.

Unable to rid themselves of this monstrous pest and fearing that their entire harvest might be lost, the village elders determined to summon a famous hunter from the remote forests to the east. As was the custom of the time, they first sought permission from the Paramount Chief to engage a man possessing such awesome powers. This done, the elders sent forth word of their dilemma and the need for the great hunter's services through the channels known to the shamans and herbalists, witch-finders and

soothsayers. As they waited for a response, the elephant continued to roam unchecked, devastating the carefully tended farms. Hope for a profitable harvest dimmed with each passing day.

In the gloaming of bleak twilight, as the elders reclined in low-slung hammocks passing a calabash of palm wine from hand to hand and bemoaning their great misfortune, a silent figure mysteriously appeared in the village. He was an altogether fearsome figure decked out in a kola-dyed, knee-length, country cloth *ronko* robe, dangling cowry shells and leather fetishes and other paraphernalia of the hunters' trade. He cradled an antiquated shotgun in the crook of one arm. With his free hand he flicked an elephant tail whisk at unseen gnats. The hunter strode to the center of the village, crouched on his haunches, and surveyed every corner and shadow with wary predator's eyes. The elders bestirred themselves to welcome the renowned stranger. He stood erect, oblivious to the chatter of interested onlookers who had begun to gather at a safe distance, as if responding to a secret clarion, to ogle at his ominous regalia and assure themselves that this great man would surely rid them of the accursed beast. The elders and the hunter repaired to the chief's compound where the customary greetings were exchanged, terms negotiat-

ed, and retainer paid. The hunter prepared at once to seek his quarry.

The hunter rose before dawn, performed the private ceremonies demanded by his fetish, then moved unseen through the village hidden by a shroud of wafting kitchen smoke commingled with the lingering morning mist. He strode to the edge of the village and disappeared like a specter into the nearly impenetrable forest. Beginning at the site of the elephant's destructive frolic, he surveyed the area with an expert eye. Before him lay a maze of trampled, matted rice stalks that zigzagged through the farms across which the great beast had plodded before re-entering the forest. Tree trunks as thick as the hunter's waist had been snapped in two under the elephant's weight where it had paused to scratch an infernal itch. Gurgling guinea fowl searching for grubs scavenged among the splintered bark and broken branches that littered the ground along the crooked path. Their indignant, shrill chortles broke the silence as they scurried into the underbrush at the hunter's approach. Squatting low with head bowed, the hunter followed the trail of havoc and mounds of fresh scat that marked the elephant's passage. All day he tracked the beast, stopping from time to time to examine the feces more carefully, or sniff the air and listen with eyes closed and his head

tilted back. As the blue-gray twilight settled and quickly waned, he realized that though he had hiked many, many circuitous miles that day, he had not wandered very far from the village. He could sense all about him the elephant's presence. He felt confident that he was close to his prey.

But night and fatigue dictated that he make camp and pursue his task in the morning. He ate without cooking, performed his simple evening ablutions, and then strung his hammock between two stout tree trunks in the pitch dark forest. He feared nothing in the bush, for his fetish was very powerful. He nestled in the hammock's embrace as the day's exertion brought him immediate slumber. While he slept the elephant he sought appeared to him in a dream. There it stood a dark, humungous presence astride a wasted landscape under an ashen sky. In his dream the hunter was inexplicably stricken with paralysis — not out of fear, no never that — but as if he had been bound with invisible restraints. As he struggled against his confinement, the hunter hurled futile invective at his nemesis that landed as harmlessly as pebbles bouncing off its thick, gray-brown hide. The behemoth laughed at the hunter's foolish pride and warned him that to continue the pursuit was dangerous folly. The hunter bristled at the elephant's conceit, yet grew wary of a beast that could so easily invade his dreams. Surely this was no ordinary creature. The hunter, no

stranger to the realm of witches and shape-shifters, had many times confronted their evil manifestations and had overcome their mystical powers. But never before had his dreams been so trespassed. The elephant's musky redolence permeated the very air he breathed. The night's rhythm seemed to rise and fall with its exhalations. Finally, the hunter, calling upon the courage of his fetish, challenged the elephant to reveal its true self, for surely the elephant-form hid the nature of a powerful entity.

"Reveal yourself!" The hunter demanded.

"Sina gende, Sina gende," whispered the elephant as its visage faded. "Tomorrow morning. Tomorrow morning."

As the rosy rays of dawn splintered through the darkened forest, the hunter awakened from his fitful slumber. The elephant's essence completely suffused every aspect of the moment. The memory of the strange dream weighed heavily upon the man, — an unfamiliar anxiety. As he swung himself down from his hammock, the realization struck him like a blow. In the dark, he had strung his hammock not between two stout trees as he had supposed, but to the thick legs of the very elephant he sought. Fearing for his life, the hunter fled the scene and stumbled back to the village. An aged village matriarch, upon

hearing the hunter's tale, urged the people to quit the settlement, make sacrifices of rice, palm wine, goats, and fowl, and re-establish their village at the place where the hunter had encountered the

powerful spirit while he had slept "beneath the elephant." They called their new settlement, Helebu. Never again did the elephant return, and the village prospered.



You Need 2012 Calendars!

The **2012 International Calendar** produced by the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Wisconsin is available through Friends of Sierra Leone. This year the calendar celebrates its 25th anniversary. In addition to volunteers' photographs from host countries around the world, the calendar includes historic days, holidays, and holy days from many cultures, astronomical data, and references to recommended books, music, films and local fare from the featured countries. The proceeds will go toward Friends of Sierra Leone activities. Make your check to Friends of Sierra Leone.

Use this form or go to the Friends of Sierra Leone website (www.fosalone.org) and order via PayPal.

<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Price/Calendar</u>	<u>Shipping</u>
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2012 is already here. We still have a few calendars left! Order now!

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Relationship to SL (e.g., Sierra Leonean, PC, etc.) _____

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Membership: \$25 per Individual

Donations: FoSL Circle \$1000 and up

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Contribution to Projects \$ _____

Overseas Mail (add \$10) \$ _____

Membership in *National Peace Corps Association* (\$35) \$ _____

Total Remitted \$

Membership dues support operations for Friends of Sierra Leone, including meetings, newsletter, and the website. All other donations 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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How would you prefer to receive your newsletter? (circle one)

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Friends of Sierra Leone

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