



Friends of Sierra Leone Newsletter

December 2014

Taking on Ebola

By Jim Hanson, Projects Chair

As the Ebola epidemic has taken its toll in Sierra Leone, it has also devastated the economy and most development projects in the country. As a result, the Friends of Sierra Leone Board of Directors voted to focus all new projects on Ebola education and prevention, as well as sanitation and nutrition. We hope to empower community groups to take an active role in protecting their people. To speed our response to this fast-moving disease, our application process has been shortened. We will review applications as we receive them rather than at the usual six month intervals. Groups can apply for up to \$3,000, and they are required to provide program feedback to us

within six months to judge the effectiveness of their work.

The first Ebola prevention project was approved for funding at our November meeting. The We Yone Child Foundation has operated primary schools for years in the George Brook and Kroo Bay communities of Freetown, some of the city's poorest areas. They were granted \$1,521 to train 20 Ebola prevention instructors from these and 11 other at-risk communities. These instructors will then hold training sessions within their communities and establish informer networks and action plans to prevent the spread of the virus. They hope their message will reach thousands of people in these under-served

parts of the city.

We expect many more applications to come in over the coming months, as the crisis is far from over. We will fund as many viable projects as our funds will allow. As always, 100% of your donations to the projects fund will go di-

rectly to Sierra Leone to help poor communities weather this storm. A sincere "Thank You" to all who have generously donated to this cause so far, and we hope many more of you will join us in this struggle to end Ebola in Sierra Leone.

A Special Appeal from President Peggy Murrah:

Friends of Sierra Leone members are very caring people. I am honored to be part of such a generous group of people. Thank you to everyone who has sent a contribution toward our projects fund and, especially, our Ebola fund. We may not be able to help everyone in need during this especially difficult time in the lives

of those who are used to difficulty, but we can help some. Remember that a relatively small amount of money can have a positive impact on the life of someone in Sierra Leone. If you haven't already contributed, please consider doing so now. No amount is too small. Thank you again and have a great holiday season.

Every Aspect of Life Is Disrupted by the Ebola Threat

By Hannah Siebold

A returned Peace Corps Volunteer, member of the first Peace Corps group to go to Sierra Leone after the war(2010), and part of the Bureh Bay Surf Club

The Bureh Beach Surf Club (BBSC), established in December 2012, is the first and only surf club in Sierra Leone. BBSC functions as a community-based organization, where all profits from renting surfboards, private surf lessons, refreshments, and accommodations are designated back into the local economy. The club is situated in Bureh Town, a small fishing village with a population of about 300 people, and located on the Western Peninsula of Freetown. BBSC has served as a hub of resources for not only the local community, but also the international population present in Sierra Leone.

The Bureh Beach Surf Club members, a group of 19 young adults, who came of age during the war, are contributing to the national efforts of rebuilding Sierra Leone's spirit in their own way. BBSC was established to serve the community, and as many of the surf club

members grew up with little familial support, they, in turn, sympathized with the various dilemmas troubling Sierra Leonean youth. Through its junior surfer program, BBSC provides a safe place for the youth of Bureh Town by providing mentorship, skill building opportunities, and water safety lessons. The club has also offered external support to the youth by providing transportation to and from school, as well as surfing and swimming lessons.

Anyone who frequently visits the surf club may be surprised with how far it has come in such a short time. With several newly constructed accommodations, a fully equipped kitchen with a talented staff of chefs, and surf instructors who are armed with great communication skills, it is clear that there is much potential for the surf club. Further evidence of progress was the selection of BBSC to host the first Africa

Surf Invitational Competition in November 2014. With the steady progress and growing international interest, we all felt very optimistic for the future.

I was staying at the club when we first received the news of Ebola officially diagnosed in Sierra Leone in late May. We had a feeling it was already present within the country, but learning of its confirmation was a sad reality check. We were all nervous. We limited our travel and interactions with people to remain as safe as possible. Slowly but surely, all the foreign NGO workers and expats alike left Sierra Leone for extended 'holidays.' Anyone who had the ability to leave was doing so, and as the majority of the BBSC customers are foreigners, business at the club came to a screeching halt. On one occasion, one of the members at the club shared: "Everyone is leaving Salone for safety, but where can we go?" We felt absolutely powerless; all we could do was "play by the rules and pray" as the club manager would say.

On July 31, I received news that made the threat of Ebola more real than ever before. Peace Corps Volunteers were being pulled out of the epidemic countries, Since this crossed my personal boundary for safety and worry, tensions climbed high at the club. Previ-

ously, we would all talk about how the Peace Corps Volunteers stick around even when things get tough and somewhat dangerous. We told ourselves not to worry too much unless they were evacuated. When it actually happened we were all in shock and any hopes for the end of Ebola dissolved into dread and fear for what was to come. The following day, His Excellency President Ernest Bai Koroma called a Public State of Emergency with the hopes of scaling up the failing response to the Ebola outbreak. Flights were being canceled and security checkpoints were erected all over the country. I was originally scheduled to leave August 13, and all I could do was hope that the airline I was traveling with would continue service out of Sierra Leone. I made it safely back to America as planned, but was met with stigma and fear that I too was infected simply because I was coming from Sierra Leone. There was no regard for the real problem at hand, and many treated me like a diseased leper until the designated 21 days passed, and I was leerily 'accepted' back. Fear of the incurable, deadly disease was gripping everyone and everything; mass media did a great job spreading the terror to the Western world.

Aside from the growing fears of Ebola, the hugely anticipated Africa Surf Invitational Competition was also postponed indefinitely. All of the club members were crushed, although they had seen this sad news coming for a long time. Spirit and morale at the club slumped down to nothing — with no positive end in sight. As with any disaster, the price of rice and other food goods drastically increased over a two week period. Simultaneously, the cost of public transportation became very expensive and generally considered risky. The rich culture of Sierra Leone was literally plagued with the fear of Ebola. The typically very friendly and outgoing population became one which did not stop to

shake hands and greet, one which conducted business and hastily returned home to wash. Some Sierra Leoneans compared this transformed lifestyle to the days of the war, but this time the enemy was invisible.

Currently, Bureh Town and the surf club are holding steady. The community has taken measures to protect itself and educate themselves and outsiders alike. Although the club income has dwindled to nothing, they are managing to maintain their health and food supplies through outside donations. It is another tough time, but the resilience of Sierra Leoneans always shines through despite devastating challenges.



Check out their Facebook Page: [Bureh Beach Surf Club - Sierra Leone](#)

A Letter from Ambassador Hoover to Friends of Sierra Leone President Peggy Murrah

Thank you for everything Friends of Sierra Leone is doing to support Sierra Leone at this time of crisis. There is good news and bad news on the Ebola front. The good news is that the epidemic is on the wane in the East, where it originally began and first raged. New cases in Kenema and Kailahun, for example, have been in the low single digits over the past two weeks. This success appears to be for all the right reasons: improved infection control, better surveillance and contact tracing, effective public messaging and social mobilization, and safe medical burials. The bad news is that the caseload continues to grow sharply in the two Western Areas around Freetown and in adjacent Port Loko. This is where Government

of Sierra Leone and international efforts are focused at the moment. A number of new Ebola treatment units and community care centers are coming on-line every week in these districts, but not yet quickly enough to keep up with new infections. Until they do catch up, the number of Ebola victims requiring treatment will continue to outstrip the number of "safe beds" needed to isolate and treat these cases. This is leading some who need treat-



ment to return home, where there is a great risk of further onward transmission. This situation is of utmost concern to everyone in Sierra Leone right now and is the focus of all domestic and international efforts. The Government of Sierra Leone, through the National Ebola Response Center, or NERC, is working 24/7 in close collaboration with UN agencies and key partners like the U.S. and others, to stem the growth and to also nip in the bud any new hotspots that develop in more remote parts of the country. The coordination, and thus the effectiveness, of the overall response effort under the NERC's leadership has sharpened considerably in the past month, and I am cautiously optimistic Sierra Leone will begin to turn the tide on Ebola by the end of the year. But it will be a long and difficult war before Ebola is completely eradicated from the coun-

try. We have the greatest respect and admiration for the thousands of Sierra Leonean and international volunteers who are fighting this war on the front lines at great risk to their own lives. They are truly heroes. We mourn those who have already perished in the fight, while also celebrating and lauding those who have contracted Ebola but beaten it, and who now serve as symbols of inspiration and hope for others.

John Hoover Confirmed as U. S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone

John Hoover hails from Massachusetts and is a career member of the United States Senior Foreign Service. He began his career with the Department of State in 1988. In July, 2013, he was nominated by President Obama to be the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Ambassador Hoover served as the Director of the Office of Regional and Security Affairs in the State Department's Bureau of African Affairs from 2010 to 2013. His work in the field in Africa includes assignments to U.S. Embassies in Uganda as Deputy Chief of Mission, in Kenya as Economic Counselor, and, early in his career, in Swaziland as Political-Economic Officer. Additionally, Mr. Hoover has served in Shanghai, China; Taipei, Taiwan; and Paris, France.

Ambassador Hoover is the winner of two global State Department awards: The Herbert Salzman

Award for Excellence in International Economic Performance in 2008 for his reporting and commercial advocacy in support of African efforts to enhance connectivity to the worldwide web, and the Director General's Award for Reporting (co-winner, 1998) for his reporting and analysis of trade issues in Taiwan that contributed to the island's successful accession to the World Trade Organization.

Prior to his Foreign Service career, Ambassador Hoover worked as an investment banker in New York and Tokyo, and as an English teacher in Japan. He is a 1982 magna cum laude graduate of Princeton University, and a 1978 graduate of Acton-Boxborough Regional High School in Acton, Massachusetts, a small town where he grew up playing baseball and ice hockey.

John is married to Kathyrine Lin, and they have two adult sons, Terry and Patrick.

Lobbying for Aid to Sierra Leone

By Judy Figi, Advocacy Chair

Directly communicating with Congressmen, Senators and the President is one way each individual can influence the United States Government. Here are a few tips to make you more effective.

When you call a member of Congress you'll be speaking to a staffer, not the congressman or senator. Introduce yourself and indicate if you are a constituent.

They will be much more interested if they see you as a potential voter. State why you are interested in Sierra Leone (e.g., you're a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, a missionary, a Sierra Leonean).

Urge the Senator/Representative to support President Obama's request for \$6.2 billion to help fund the fight against Ebola. Relate personal information about the effects of Ebola that you have

heard directly from friends in Sierra Leone. Emphasize that Sierra Leone needs the same type of aid that Liberia and Guinea have been getting. The disease has to be fought in all three countries. Stress the need for action now. Too many people are dying every day.

Be sure to thank the staffer for his or her time. He or she may ask you for your contact information in case the office wants to get back to you.

Your call does not have to be long. However, it is critical that you emphasize the importance of having Congress approve of President Obama's request for Ebola funds and that it happen before the Christmas holiday recess.

2015 Election

Friends of Sierra Leone 2015 Board Elections Nominations Now Open

2015 is an election year for the Board of Directors of Friends of Sierra Leone. All dues-paying members may nominate by mail any other dues-paying member for a position on the Board of Directors. Send your nominations to;

Friends of Sierra Leone
P. O. Box 15875
Washington, DC 20003-0875

Nominations are due a minimum of fifteen days before the election. The election date is still to be determined. Voting is by mail ballot sent to all those with dues payments up to date. Prior to the annual meeting the membership will elect a president, vice president, secretary, and two co-public relations officers, all for two year terms. At-large board members are elected to staggered four year terms so that half will be elected in each election year. All board members may be reelected.

Membership Update

Meghan Welsh
Membership Chair
RPCV, Moyamba 2010-2013
meghan@fosalone.org

Thank you to all the members who filled out the membership survey this fall! The survey was developed to gain feedback from our members about what Friends of Sierra Leone is doing right, how we can do better, and how Friends of Sierra Leone should grow in the future. In light of the responses we initiated some changes and improvements.

We've been updating and cleaning up our membership database. Recently we sent out an email address verification so we can delete unused addresses. If you did not receive this email and would like to receive future e-communications from Friends of Sierra Leone send your updated or new email address to membership@fosalone.org. If you receive a paper newsletter and would like to switch to an e-newsletter, notify me the membership email address as well.

Your paid membership expiration date is printed on the mailing address label of this newsletter or on the subject line if emailed. This is currently the only reminder of your expiration, but

starting next year we will also send out an individual reminder at the time of expiration.

The survey indicates many members want more interaction between members. In response we'd like to better develop the Friends of Sierra Leone Facebook group. At this time most of our members have "liked" the Friends of Sierra Leone Facebook page, but the page does not allow back and forth discussion between members. However, the group allows just such interactions, and we believe it will be more beneficial. So we will be phasing out the PAGE and encouraging you to join the GROUP. This is confusing, but social media never made much sense. We also signed up for a new conference call service and would like to use it for webinars or discussion groups.

Friends of Sierra Leone is only as strong as its members. Please send us your suggestions and comments for further developments. Discussion topics, newsletter submissions, photos, fundraising tips, legislation information. We want to hear it all!

Check the date on the address label. Is it time to renew? If there's no date, or if the date is some time in the past, it's time to renew!

FRIENDS OF SIERRA LEONE MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name (include maiden) _____

Address _____

City _____ State ____ ZIP _____

Home Phone (____) _____ E-mail address _____

Day Phone (____) _____ Occupation _____

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

Sierra Leone Home _____ Years _____ to _____

Membership: \$25 per Individual

Donations: FoSL Circle \$1000 and up

Supporter \$500 to \$999

Sponsor \$100 to \$499

Friend \$50 to \$99

Membership (\$25 per member) \$ _____

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. →

FoSL needs your participation. Circle your areas of interest:

Advocacy

Education

Membership

Newsletter/
Communications

Projects

Events

Would you be willing to be part of a network to receive information and contact your members of Congress at important times? (Please include e-mail address, if available.)

Yes

How would you prefer to receive your newsletter? (circle one)

via the Postal Service

via e-mail

P. O. Box 15875
Washington, DC
20003-0875

Friends of Sierra Leone
P. O. Box 15875
Washington, DC 20003-0875

Web: www.fosalone.org



Address Service Requested

Friends of Sierra Leone

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