

# Western Montana Returned Peace Corps Volunteers ACTIVITIES REPORT FOR 2011

*Submitted by Dennis Bangs (Ecuador 1970-72), President*



This past year saw continued enthusiastic participation in the regular potlucks in the Missoula area. Our nearly monthly meetings foster a real sense of family and community, along with the regular newsletters and the updates and reminders via email and website. The website [wmrpev.com](http://wmrpev.com) continues to see improvements and use. We also established a presence on Facebook.

In March we celebrated the 50th anniversary of Peace Corps with a public showing of a slideshow that featured pictures and stories from many RPCVs in western Montana. Kat Barry (Ecuador 2000-03) took the many photos and stories submitted to her and created a Power Point presentation which was presented at a public gallery in downtown Missoula. Even though we don't have many members in Great Falls or Billings, both of their local newspapers had articles featuring RPCVs and the 50th anniversary. In Helena, the local RPCVs under the direction of Mike Lee (Liberia 74-77) had three separate public presentations.

Tish Herries (Sierra Leone 64-66), continued the task of coordinating the Peace Corps Week presentations in early March in the Missoula area schools. About 15 local RPCVs shared their experiences with many students in the local schools. Several members in other areas of Montana

worked with local schools to speak to individual classroom groups. Western MT RPCV members continued to present to school and community groups throughout the year.

Right after Peace Corps Week, once again we participated in the University of Montana's International Week. The week culminates with a day of international food and festivities. Our group helps the Peace Corps recruiter get the word out about the Peace Corps at a special information table. Not only is it a fun, internationally oriented event, it also serves as way for us to reach out to other RPCVs and prospective volunteers in the community.

In the spring of the year Lynne and Otto Koester ( Ethiopia-Eritrea/Ghana 68-70/69-70) once again hosted the NOM potluck for the newly nominated volunteers in the area. Through the U of M recruiter and the recruiting office in Seattle we gathered together and shared our stories and experiences with the newly nominated volunteers who are getting ready to begin their service.

Like always, the Goat Chase Retreat in June was the big event of the year as well as our annual meeting. It brought together most of the membership for a weekend of fun, camaraderie, and discussion of the group's humanitarian activities.

The monthly potlucks continued during the summer, with a July gathering at the home of Tony Hoyt (Liberia 67-69/ Guatemala 74-75) and Michelle on the banks of the Jocko River. The Christmas celebration at Jim Burchfield (Guatemala 1973-77) and Melissa Mackenzie's (Costa Rica 1981-84) was a large gathering of people, good food and good fun.

Because of last year's success, we participated in the Homecoming Parade in Missoula in the fall once again. We didn't win a trophy like we did the previous year, but we had a very good and enthusiastic participation and got our name and faces out in the community. This is the second largest parade in the State of Montana with over 100 groups participating. The fall also brought a new Peace Corps Representative to campus. We met Dana Foster at the September Potluck and she continued to be an integral member of our group during the year.

The international calendars from the Wisconsin group continue to be our main fundraiser. With the hard work of many of our members, we once again sold 400 calendars. The Western Montana Returned Peace Corps Volunteers donate the proceeds from the calendar sales each year to local humanitarian efforts across Montana as well as around the world. It is one way to meet "The Third Goal" of promoting a better understanding of people in other parts of the world on the part of Americans while assisting with development and educational projects. Not only do the calendars themselves get the word out about Peace Corps, but this is also our only fundraiser and without it we wouldn't be able to support the many fine projects we do.

We also had the honor of a visit from the Western Regional Representative of the NPCA in the fall. Darryl Johnson was in Missoula for a conference on China sponsored by the Mansfield Center on Campus and he made time to meet with a few of us. We appreciated his efforts to reach out to us and hope to see Darryl and his wife at the Goat Chase Retreat in June.

The members of the Western Montana Returned Peace Corps Volunteers are a committed, compassionate group, involved in numerous local and international humanitarian projects. Over the years a wonderful sense of community has developed, always welcoming new members and other people interested in Peace Corps.