

Western Montana Returned Peace Corps Volunteers ACTIVITIES REPORT FOR 2012

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



Steve and Heidi, the hosts of the August potluck

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 continues to see improvements and use. The Facebook page gets some use as well.

Bunny Sims (Philippines 73-76), 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. Through their efforts nearly 1100 students in local schools heard personal stories from Returned Peace Corps Volunteers. Several members in other areas of Montana worked with local schools to speak to individual classroom groups as well. Western MT RPCV members continued to make presentations to schools and community groups throughout the year.

Near the end of March, 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 representative on campus 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 Peace Corps representative 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. In August Heidi Halverson and Steve Torcoletti (Jamaica 84-86) hosted a fun potluck featuring the Jamaican Rum Shack. The annual Christmas celebration at Jim Burchfield (Guatemala 1973-77) and Melissa Mackenzie's (Costa Rica 1981-84) brought together a large gathering of people, good food and good fun.

We also had a couple special guests at Tony and Michelle's potluck in July. Ernie Zaremba and his wife are RPCVs who were traveling the country collecting video interviews from RPCVs all over the country for their project "Peace Corps Family Album", which they have put up on YouTube. Our members enjoyed being a part of their project.

One other fall event we participate in was the Homecoming Parade in Missoula. We had a very good and enthusiastic participation and got our name and faces out in the community. The weather also cooperated nicely. 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 Brad Hass at the August Potluck and he 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.

In December our group took part in an advocacy project involving NPCA and a letter to President Obama. We signed on to a letter drafted by the Advocacy branch of the NPCA which asked the newly re-elected President to continue supporting the Peace Corps in various ways from budgetary to choosing a new director who has served as a volunteer.

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.