

ACTIVITIES REPORT FOR 2013

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



Goat Chase 2013

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 wmrpcv.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 1000 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.

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 350 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.

Jonathan Pearson, from the NPCA, joined the April potluck in Missoula to introduce himself and explain some of the advocacy work that the NPCA is doing on our behalf and how we can get involved. We were happy we were able to include Jonathan in our gathering during his cross country trip. Since Jonathan's trip Otto Koester has taken on the role of local RPCV advocacy advocate and has participated in numerous advocacy issues.

One of the local RPCVs that we supported was Russ Parsons who traveled to Honduras with Missoula Medical Aid. Missoula Medical Aid is a nonprofit group based in Missoula that has been working to promote health and wellbeing for the poor people of Honduras since Hurricane Mitch devastated that country in 1998. Using the Spanish language skills that he acquired in the Peace Corps, Russ worked as an interpreter to a medical team, helping to ensure clear communication between doctors and patients and between the group and the communities they worked in.

In June/July 2013, Lynne and Otto Koester responded to invitations from two universities in Africa, Addis Ababa University (AAU) and University of Gondar (UG), to visit Ethiopia for approximately 2 ½ weeks. The main purposes were for Lynne to serve as the External Examiner for a doctoral dissertation and to give a lecture at Addis Ababa University (AAU), and for both Lynne and Otto to give presentations about their research and UM's international activities.

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.