

Western Montana Returned Peace Corps Volunteers ACTIVITIES REPORT FOR 2009

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Wildhorse Island – Flathead Lake

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.

A new volunteer, Tish Herries (Sierra Leone 64-66), took on 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 over 400 students. 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, we once again 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 a way for us to reach out to other RPCVs and prospective volunteers in the community.

In the spring of the year we hosted a NOM potluck for the newly nominated volunteers in the area. Through the U of Montana recruiter and the recruiting office in Seattle, WA, we gather together and share 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.

A number of our monthly gatherings this year featured presentation by recently returned volunteers, which helped to add to the enthusiasm of the potlucks. Nora Olsgaard who recently returned from Tanzania gave an entertaining and informative presentation. Later Jared Alden and his wife Beth gave a presentation about their just completed service in Mali.

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.

The fall of 2008 brought Michael Bradbury (Gabon 2003-05) to the U of M campus as the recruiter for 2008-2009. He got off to a good start and became involved in our group's activities as well as doing a lot of recruiting work. Thanks to him, numerous forums were held in which RPCVs had a chance to tell their stories and answer questions from curious audience members. In the fall of 2009 Amy Quandt (Tanzania 2007-09) became the recruiter on campus and continued the fine work of recruiting and the cooperative involvement with our group.

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.