Welcome in to the October newsletter. We have a fantastic interview with another one of our Board Members, Audrey Seidel, who served in Colombia from 1965-1967. Our interview dives deep into working with community partners, mixed emotions about coming back to the US, and rice, a lot of rice.

Moreover, the Peace Corps 2022 Calendars and Note Cards are on sale. Get them quick before they sell out! Please contact Jeri Titus (jerititus@yahoo.com) for your orders. Payments can be made via check or Venmo (@Buffalo-RPCV). We are currently working on identifying a time and place for an October Dinner Event. We will keep you posted via email.

TONIGHT is Leaving Kabul: We Thought We Had More Time - Academy for Human Rights. Please sign up for this incredible event. Also, starting tonight is the Buffalo International Film Festival. Get your popcorn and settle into more foreign films than the TIFF. Virtual access begins tonight with physical screenings beginning tomorrow.

The 2021 Membership Application has been updated with our new Treasurer’s (Ryan Ried) mailing address so please feel free to send in membership through post or online here. I will begin a membership campaign around the holidays and into early next year so prepare yourselves.

Also, right below this rambling that I am on, there is a short 3-minute video that showcases what RPCVs have been doing virtually while Peace Corps is still figuring out how to get volunteers safely back into country. I hope you enjoy it. It’s humbling and heartwarming.

Any happenings, updates, social events, recipes or items of interest can be sent to RPCVofBuffaloWNY@gmail.com to be included in the newsletter. Thank you for reading and hope to see you soon. Go Bills.

- Brett Claydon
Watch This

A 2020 Peace Corps evacuee made this very informative 3 minute video about what RPCVs are doing virtually while Peace Corps is sidelined.

Upcoming Events & Save the Dates

Oct 7th: Leaving Kabul: We Thought We Had More Time - Academy for Human Rights (Register Today!)

Oct 12th: Peace Corps Celebrates: Day of the Girl Child

Oct 13th, 21st, 27th: Peace Corps Moving Forward: A Series of Town Halls on Sex- and Gender-Based Violence

Oct 14th: RPCV of Buffalo & WNY Dinner Event (TO BE CONFIRMED - Details TBD via Email)


Oct 26th: Who Am I? A Reflection of Identity in Service

Oct 27th: Podcast I Sector Spotlight: Gender Equality/Girls Empowerment
Tell us your name, your country of service, length of service, and the program that you were involved with in Peace Corps.

My name is Audrey Seidel and I was in Colombia. My years of service are from 1965 to 1967 and I was in Community Development.

What is Community Development? What did that entail?

You work with an elected group, in Spanish, a ‘Junta’ (this not the military junta, this means a governing body or council). I would work with them and they would hold meetings on what projects that they would like to accomplish. We would work together to do that and because I was the ‘Gringa’ or ‘Americana’, I was able to go to the Governor with members of the community and he would see us. More than likely, if they went on their own, they wouldn’t get an appointment with him. For example, we had a road that was mud and in the rainy season when they were trying to get their goods to market, it was impassable. So what we needed to do was to raise money so that asphalt could be laid down on top of the mud road. We raised money through fundraisers and raffles, and the big fundraiser was every Sunday, where we had a dance that started at noon. For people to come to the dance, they had to pay to get in. So eventually, we raised enough money and then the men in the community came out to lay dirt down before the asphalt truck came and laid the asphalt down on top of the dirt. The other thing with Community Development is during training, I spent a week in Mexico - specifically in Ensenada - and we were given a folder where we kept track of our work and had to interview people in town and our host families in Ensenada about what type of Community Development projects they wanted. Also, it was great practice for language training and getting out into communities. Another thing we did in Community Development was work with health centers. Doctors and nurses would visit the health center and provide vaccinations to community members on Vaccination Day. We also hooked up with CARE and the CARE Director would visit periodically but I had a list from the junta, the community people, who would most need CARE products. Once a month, they would bring out flour and oil - mostly those two things and the women would come out to get a gallon of oil and flour. Additionally, one section of the town had no water, and I lucked out because I had water in my house, but we laid piping water in that part of the town that didn’t have water. Most of the time, water came from a pipe that came out of the ground where you lived. Another part of Malambo, which was my town, didn’t have electricity so we worked to get electricity there. I did a little bit of teaching of English in the classroom but that really wasn’t my main focus. My main focus was working with the junta and helping raise the funds to get projects accomplished.

So is Malambo on the Gulf of Mexico side or the Pacific side of Colombia?
Malambo is on the Gulf coast. It's on the outside of Barranquilla, which is similar to Buffalo as it is an industrial city. I wasn't on the coast directly, my town was inland but it was between Cartagena to the west and Santa Marta to the east, both are very popular beach towns. Sometimes, I would take the girls from my town to the beach at Santa Marta. It was fun, we had a good time. What was interesting is that skin color in South America, there are different shades of brown and you see it in politics and throughout society that those with lighter skin hold the higher positions and this was 60 years ago. So we'd be at the beach, and a girl with darker skin who had African blood, the girls would say that girl is a Negro (*Spanish word and pronunciation*) and it was a real interesting cultural lesson for me in Colombian society.

**During your time in Colombia, what was your 'typical' day like?**

Most of the day was really visiting different members of the town. I visited a lot of the families in town. There was a volunteer in town before me who had the same concrete block house as me and the family next to me had ten children. The mother of the family was kind enough to make breakfast for me and in town we had a small store where we could get a few things. I usually had dinner with another family and they would fix dinner for me. When we were told what to bring, they told us to bring a pressure cooker. There's a photo of me where I'm making dinner in the pressure cooker for the family next door. I did have a hot plate in my room that served as the kitchen. I think most of the time I was getting to know the people in my community. Some evenings we would meet and I learned to bring a book because they would say we would meet at 7 but we really didn't meet until 8:30. The first night I got there, the Priest came over with wine from the church and other members of the junta and we drank wine and I got to know many people. You know, I remember going through this thing about culture shock and other than language, which took a little time before you get to a point where you can speak Spanish without thinking in English first. But other than that, I never really felt culture shock until I came back (to the US). It was all overwhelming and to see all that we had. Coming back from Barranquilla around Christmas time, it was mixed emotions. I was anxious to head back to the US around Christmas time because I kind of didn't want to see anybody besides my family and I was kind of put off by the amount of things that we had here in the US. It was hard, you know, I was just content and good with the little that I had back in Colombia.

**What was the most rewarding part of your service?**

I think that it was living with and getting to know the people there. I was a bridesmaid for my neighbor’s eldest daughter and when her youngest was born, I was the godmother. That family next door to me, I was very close to. Some of the younger kids would hang their hammocks and sleep in my house at night and then take them down in the morning. Anything that we could do for the town was really impactful, especially getting the main road done so the farmers could take their goods to market. Just the friendships were the most rewarding.

**What was the most challenging part of your service?**

I think trying to get things accomplished. It's a very mañana society. Getting them to meet or an appointment with government with offices you had to meet with, it just took a lot of time. Part of my day was just trying to meet with the right people to get your project accomplished.
What was your favorite project? And why?

I think probably the health center and getting the kids vaccinated. Also, connecting with CARE and getting once a month food to people in the community. In a photo, there's a big pot cooking and CARE had sent us a nutritional drink and in this big pot we're cooking it. It was sort of like a smoothie. When you visited people’s homes, they all blenders, and they all had electricity so they’d be making smoothies from all this tropical fruit. But this nutritional smoothie didn’t taste as great but it was still good. But the fun thing was the basketball court and having the kids learn how to play basketball.

Let’s talk about food, what are some of the staples of the cuisine in Colombia?

Rice. Rice con pollo. Not so much pollo but a lot of rice. I was glad that I liked rice. Unfortunately, the woman that I had dinner with was not a good cook. Fortunately, I grew up with tongue. My mom used to make tongue with this delicious raisin sauce, which I loved. But one time I went to dinner and there was this small tongue, just broiled with rice. But the main staple was rice, definitely. They also had plantains and you can cook it soft and sweet or you can slice it and fry it, like tostones. Chicken would be the biggest protein. During training, we were taught how to kill a chicken and there’s a photo that I won’t send but in it I’m closing my eyes and the chicken is tied up and I’m supposed to slice its neck but I’m surprised I didn’t slice my finger because my eyes were closed. The reason I bring up the chicken is that one time I loaned my suitcase to a woman and in return she gave me a live chicken as a thank you. The chicken would sit on the window bars and I would feed him corn and then one morning, I got up and there was no more chicken. So I think somebody took the chicken for you know what purpose. When we would go the city (Barranquilla), we would all eat at the Chinese restaurant in town, funny enough. If you went to the beach, you could buy a whole fish but my town was inland.

Breakfast I usually had an egg a day and my wonderful neighbor, she did my laundry and she made my breakfast. I guess I had bread but I don’t think I had a toaster.

And what was the WNY food you wish you could have shared with the people of Colombia? And why that food?

Probably pizza and hamburgers. Wings weren’t really around as much in the 60’s. Probably a good hamburger and pizza, for sure.

Describe one of the most comedic instances during your service:

That’s easy. I decided I was going to show a free movie in the center of town. In our Peace Corps office, we had a projector. There was a sort of a theatre in town but it was an open air theatre with no ceiling and a big, gigantic sheet was the screen. We set it all up and we were going to show it against the side of the church in the middle of town. I had gotten a Mexican Western film. They loved Mexican Westerns because they would laugh at the way the Mexicans spoke Spanish. They speak in a very sing-songy way. I got the film and everything set up. There were a couple hundred people there and we went to plug it in and next thing we know, we blew the whole electricity out in the town. We blew out the lights and they didn’t have the wattage. I felt bad because all these people were looking forward to it but looking back on it, it was pretty funny.
Last one, what is one thing that you wish Americans knew about Colombia?

What warm, kind, loving people they are and no matter how poor they are or may, they will share everything and anything with you. They are definitely warm people. I highly recommend that people go experience other countries and learn more about them and from them.

Photos taken during Audrey’s service in Colombia
Let’s help resettle our incoming Afghan evacuees. Join the Western New York Refugee and Asylee Consortium (WNYRAC) in welcoming and assisting our soon-to-be Afghan Neighbors. Click here to make a contribution.

RETURNED VOLUNTEER SURVEY: Help Us Tell the World About the Impact of Peace Corps Service in Your Life

Sixty years ago, in convincing a skeptical Congress of the value of the Peace Corps, President Kennedy stated that Peace Corps would not only share the talents of its Volunteers within their countries of service and work to build peace and friendship abroad, but that Returned Peace Corps Volunteers would unequivocally provide a significant dividend to the United States. Although anecdotal evidence exists of that dividend, there has never been an empirical study to determine the extent to which the Peace Corps experience has made a difference in the lives of returned Volunteers and in our country. Take part in a survey of returned Volunteers and help others understand that impact as never before.

Take the Survey
In 2019, 1 out of every 3 Peace Corps Volunteers experienced sexual assault. Legislation like the Kate Puzey Act (2013) and the Farr/Castle Act (2018) were passed to protect volunteers, but we still have more work to do to ensure the safety of everyone who serves in the Peace Corps. Join RPCVs of Washington D.C. and Boston Area RPCVs starting Wednesday October 13 for a 4 part series of events on sex- and gender-based violence. These sessions will include a storytelling and community-building circle, a session specific to BIPOC RPCVs, and development of recommendations moving forward.

Register here to receive one link for all four events. Please feel free to attend as many as you would like. The Zoom link will be provided by email and a calendar invite for each event.

Peace Corps 2022
International Calendars & Notecards Now Available!

$15 for Calendars and $10 for a Pack of Notecards! The Notecards come in a pack of 8 and are perfect for any occasion.

Get your Holiday Season shopping started with a 2022 Peace Corps Calendar & Pack of Notecards today.

Contact Jeri Titus (jerititus@yahoo.com) for ordering and payments can be made by check or Venmo to the RPCV of Buffalo & WNY Group.
House Foreign Affairs Committee Advances the Most Sweeping Peace Corps Legislation in Years

The Peace Corps Reauthorization Act now moves forward. It would bring critical reforms to better protect Volunteers and put Peace Corps on the path toward a budget to bolster the number of Volunteers around the world. Though when it comes to health insurance and the Volunteer readjustment allowance, today’s changes provide a little less support.

By Jonathan Pearson

The Peace Corps Reauthorization Act (H.R. 1456), bipartisan legislation introduced by Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Representative John Garamendi (D-CA) and fellow Representative Garret Graves (R-LA), cleared its first significant hurdle Thursday afternoon, when the House Foreign Affairs Committee moved the bill out of committee with a favorable vote.

The committee advanced the bill with a strong bipartisan showing in a vote of 44 to 4. Nineteen Republicans joined all committee Democrats in supporting the legislation, which will next go to the House Education and Labor Committee for review and then to the House floor for further consideration.

In bringing the legislation to the committee today, Garamendi noted that in communities across the globe, Volunteers have served in education, agriculture, and public health programs. “Peace Corps Volunteers are the face of America in these communities, building trust and goodwill,” he said. And the legislation would provide additional federal funding and resources “to advance the Peace Corps’ mission around the world and better support current, returning, and former Peace Corps Volunteers.”

“This bill helps realize President John F. Kennedy’s vision of Americans ready to serve their nation in new and innovative ways.” — Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-NY)

Committee Approves Amended Version of Legislation

While the Garamendi-Graves legislation was approved, it came in the form of a substitute amendment presented by Committee Chairman Gregory Meeks (D-NY), which contained significant additions and other substantive changes in the bill’s original language. (Read the original legislation here. And see the full amendment here.) Continue reading full article here.
PEACE CORPS ANNOUNCES TOP 10 PEACE CORPS PREP CERTIFICATE-ISSUING SCHOOLS IN 2021

Agency also announces newly established university partnerships

WASHINGTON – The Peace Corps announced today the top 10 Peace Corps Prep certificate-issuing institutions for the 2020–2021 academic year. Additionally, the global service agency announced it is partnering with 11 more universities in 2021 to provide the Peace Corps Prep certificate program to undergraduate students.

“At this pivotal time in our history, young people have a crucial role to play,” said Peace Corps Acting Director Carol Spahn. “Through the Peace Corps Prep program, these schools have equipped students with the skills and understanding necessary to help communities near and far recover from the multidimensional and global shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Established in 2007, Peace Corps Prep aims to meet the demand for Peace Corps volunteers with broad and relevant areas of expertise and to support schools’ efforts to provide substantive, globally focused experiences for their students. Through the program, students learn about leadership, intercultural competencies, foreign language, and a professional sector of their choice like education, health or the environment. While having a Peace Corps Prep certificate does not guarantee acceptance into an agency Volunteer program, enrolling in the program helps graduates be more competitive during the selection process.

“Peace Corps Prep is an opportunity for all undergraduate students to develop competencies that will fortify their aspirations to serve abroad,” said La’Teashia Sykes, Peace Corps director of University Programs. “Congratulations to the top 10 Peace Corps Prep certificate-issuing schools and all newly-established partnerships on joining the Peace Corps family through the Peace Corps Prep program. We are thrilled to work together to spark students’ interest in Peace Corps service.”

The Peace Corps works with more than 150 partner institutions nationwide to deliver programming that underscores a commitment to global citizenship, intercultural competencies and a sense of service among students. Despite the global evacuation of all Peace Corps volunteers in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 700 undergraduate students completed the Peace Corps Prep program in the 2020-2021 academic year. Dozens of Peace Corps Prep partner schools adapted their programming to the virtual environment during the 2020-2021 academic year.
The top 10 2020-2021 Peace Corps Prep certificate-issuing partners are:
1. Virginia Commonwealth University
2. University of South Florida
3. University of Florida
4. Mercer University
5. Monmouth University
6. University of California Education Abroad Program
7. Elon University
8. University of Michigan – Ann Arbor
9. Walsh University
10. Pacific Lutheran University

The 11 New Peace Corp Prep University partnerships in 2021 are:
1. College of Staten Island
2. Rochester Institute of Technology
3. St. Lawrence University
4. University of Redlands
5. Humboldt State University
6. University of Guam
7. University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee
8. Utah State University
9. Florida A&M University
10. University of Maryland – College Park
11. University of Nebraska – Lincoln

The NPCA Store is your one stop shop for Peace Corps gear: classic Peace Corps T-shirts, ball caps, water canteens, and more.
Your purchases help bolster programs to support work by and for the Peace Corps community.
Vintage Peace Corps Poster of the Month
Do you have an announcement or item of interest to RPCVs?

All area RPCVs, Peace Corps supporters or interested persons are invited to submit event announcements, news items or other items which may be of interest to the Western New York RPCV community.

You may request for the information to be placed in the newsletter or as a separate email. Items submitted may be subject to editing and/or editorial discretion.

Submit to: rpcvofbuffalowny@gmail.com

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RETURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS OF
BUFFALO, NEW YORK
2021 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

RPCV/Buffalo membership is open to all returned Peace Corps Volunteers, active and
friends of Peace Corps. Please complete the following and return with your membership
dues (25.00 annually) payable to RPCV/Buffalo:

RPCV/Buffalo
c/o Ryan Ried
105 Donaldson Road
Buffalo, NY 14208

Please check

Renewing Member _____     New Member _____

Are you a member of the National Peace Corps Association?  Yes _____    No _____

I. Personal Information:

Name: (first) ____________________________  (last) ____________________________
Address: _________________________________________________________(apt)
City: __________________________________________________________________
State: ____________________________    Zip: ____________________
Telephone: ___________________________ Cell: ____________________________
E-Mail: ______________________________

I. Peace Corps Service Information (if applicable):

Country(ies) of Service:
________________________________________________________________
Dates of Service:
________________________________________________________________
Primary Service Role:
________________________________________________________________