



Board Members

President

Mary McGee
mcgeemh@yahoo.com

Vice President

Bethany Martinez
bethanyartinez714@gmail.com

Treasurer

Steve Randolph
irpcvtreasurer@gmail.com

Secretary

Lee Hendricks
Hendricks_N-L@yahoo.com

Membership

John Bigelow
johnrobertbiglow@hotmail.com

Social & Programs

Sonja Gregor
sgregor@gmail.com

Lila Cabera

caberalila@gmail.com

Newsletter

Judith Eighmy
judyeighmy@gmail.com

Past President

James Watson
chefwatson13@gmail.com

Common Ground

IDAHO RETURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dumela Maa - O tsogile jang? “Hello and how are you?” These are greetings in Setswana, the main language in Botswana where my husband and I served 2010 – 2012. When passing someone on foot or transacting business, one always began with a greeting and a “how are you” or “how was your night”. I often think of that in everyday communication, especially online, when we want to be quick and concise with no time wasted on pleasantries. If I learned anything from this past year it has been to slow down whenever possible, enjoy the simple things in life, take a few minutes to say hello and count our many blessings.

One of those blessings has been to work with our Idaho Returned Peace Corps Volunteers board members as we supported the goals of IRPCV. Top of my list is to thank this past year’s board members, especially James Watson, former Board President and now Past President. He very kindly served two years as president, giving me time to better understand the roles and responsibilities of the position. He did that graciously during a very hectic year for him job wise. Thank you James! Steve Randolph also gets a huge thanks for continuing as Treasurer which included the calendar sales which surpassed 2020. Eighmy kept the communication going via the newsletter and timely online updates and she continues to refine and expand that role. Lila Cabrera, Sonya Gregor, Chelsea Krema, Katie Miller, Kathy Cawrse and Matt Anders all contributed to another successful year of IRPCV. New board members for 2021 are John Bigelow (Membership), Bethany Martinez (President Elect) and Lee Hendricks (Secretary). The board recently unanimously elected Lee who is from Pocatello will also represent southern Idaho.

The board will meet soon to discuss spring and summer events with the hope that a get together in person may be possible. We hope that these meetings can take place in the other regions of the State as well and we were pleased that IRPCV members joined in the Zoom annual meeting February 21 from as far apart as Garden City, Pocatello, McCall, Boise and beyond

(Cont. page 2)

Cont, from the President

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Samaya sentle - “go well”

Moe McGee

President, IRPCV

Thanks to Steve Randolph who informed us about the Demonstration for American Values behind the Capitol, several of the IRPCVS showed up to represent the American Values of the Peace Corps.

We displayed our banner and had a good time waving at the cars driving by. We received lots of honking encouragement from the drivers.



Three Boise IRPCV waving flags for democracy on State Street, Boise, November 31, 2020. From left: Kathy Cawrse (dressed as a Macedonian Peace Corps volunteer), Mary McGee as herself and Sydney Rocklin (dressed as RBG).

IRPCV Donates to Learning Lab

As many RPCV's know, the experience of returning to the United States after serving in another country can be a challenge. It is often called reverse culture shock. For example, the pace of life in most developing countries contrasts greatly with the often hectic lifestyle in the U.S. After spending 2 or more years in another country learning and becoming part of its culture and perhaps not speaking much English, RPCV's must reassimilate into the United States. It's not easy.

When I returned from my Peace Corps Mexico (2007-2011) service, I was very fortunate to obtain employment at Learning Lab in Boise as volunteer coordinator and educator. My employment there gave me the opportunity to continue to work with people from different cultures, to hear different languages, and to feel I was extending my service experiences from Peace Corps.

Learning Lab is a non-profit education center in Boise whose mission is to improve the lives of adults and families through literacy and access to education. It offers classes in family literacy, English, GED and citizenship. Diversity is high with students representing over 50 countries. In addition, Learning Lab has a vigorous volunteer program with many community members (including RPCV's!) serving as tutors. For more information check its website: <https://learninglabinc.org/>

The annual fundraiser for Learning Lab is a large event called Lunch for Literacy, held in February. This year's event was held virtually and featured speakers Anthony Doerr and Jamie Lee Curtis. In addition, many donated book baskets were auctioned. Several IRPCV's donated items for a Peace Corps basket from their countries of service including Botswana, Ghana, Guatemala, Mexico, Kenya, and Thailand, and it sold for \$100. In total from items auctioned and donations, Learning Lab raised more than \$94,000, a very successful fundraiser for a superb organization. Thanks to all who supported this donation to Learning Lab!

Sonya Greeger



Dear Kenya: Don't I owe you something more?!



(Steve Randolph Kenya 77-80)



I'm betting that I'm not the only RPCV who, on reflection, would admit that they got more from the Peace Corps experience than the host country got out of the deal. Well, it was my conclusion anyway, so when the opportunity arose to give back a little more to Kenya I embraced it.

A few years ago, my best PC buddy (from 40+ years ago) got me reconnected with Kenya* and for the last 16 years we have served on the board of the Makindu Children's Program. MCP, headquartered in Oregon, supports a program targeting orphans and vulnerable children in rural eastern Kenya called the Makindu Children's Center (MCC). (As a PCV I worked about 90 miles up the road and visited Makindu, a dusty little town on the Mombasa-Nairobi highway, many times back in the day.)

MCC was established in 1998 in response to the impact of the dreadful AIDS pandemic which left a generation of orphans in Kenya since the mid '90s. The majority of the Makindu orphans were living on the streets, sleeping in alleys or old abandoned sheds, and begging or stealing in order to survive. They were desperate and isolated. A volunteer at the local medical clinic from Oregon teamed up with a local Kenyan teacher to ask the community what they thought should be done to help these many abandoned street kids. A very successful community-designed program is the result.

Instead of creating an orphanage (which the elders felt would further isolate the kids), the kids are placed with guardian parents (typically grandparents or other relative – all typically very poor). There are now 318 guardian families enrolled with 542 children served directly by MCC in Makindu town and the surrounding villages. Now that COVID restrictions are easing in Kenya, the children again come to the Program center, simple concrete buildings, to receive food, bathe, study, play, and access the computer center. Children who live in more outlying villages are visited by one of MCC's three social workers. They all receive periodic medical checkups and access treatment for illnesses including HIV and have their fees and uniforms paid for local public schools (primary, secondary and vocational). MCC now has an early childhood education program for pre-schoolers and a vocational college on site. MCC's shamba (little farm) grows food to contribute to daily lunches and maintains dairy cows for nutritious milk. Most important, the care and support kids find at the Center provides *tumani* – hope.

Guardians formed community councils at each location and organize extension trainings – such bee keeping, goat raising – and help with checking on kids' school progress and safety.

Since last spring and the onset of lockdown in Kenya, MCP has been sending extra funds to provide bulk food purchases to ensure that malnutrition isn't added to their problems. Staple foods – maize, beans, rice, cooking oil – are distributed to the guardian families and ultimately feed over 1800 people.



Peace Corps News.

With the new Administration in place, the 60th Anniversary of the Peace Corps as well as the end in sight for managing the Covid –19 virus, there is much news about the Peace Corps. There is too much news to print in this small newsletter so I urge you to subscribe to the National Peace Corps Association at www.peacecorpsconnect.org.

On Monday, March 1, Rep. John Garamendi, who served as a volunteer in Ethiopia, introduced the Peace Corps Reauthorization Act of 2021 in the House of Representatives, The legislation calls for important reforms, including issues addressing better healthcare and protection for whistleblowers in the Peace Corps. And it takes seriously an increase in funding that will be necessary for the Peace Corps to help lead the way in reengaging with a world profoundly changed by COVID-19. Garamendi said in a release “with the goal of reaching 10,000volunteers serving annually around the world.

The Washington Post published the following: Grounded in a sense of history with an eye on the future , Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Lacy Feigh makes the case for Peace Corps leading the way in helping the United States reengage with the world. ”Just as it did 60 years ago, the Peace Corps offers us a way forward: By investing in engagement and exchange, we create a better American community, and, in turn, a better world.”



EXHIBITION OPENING AT THE IDAHO STATE MUSEUM ON MARCH 13, 2021.

The women highlighted throughout the exhibition have impacted the political, cultural, economic, academic, social and civic fields. They have been voices for change, barrier breakers, revolutionaries, and more. Their stories remind us that anyone can be a trailblazer.

In fact, one of our members Judith Eighmy is one of 75 women featured with both her military and Peace Corps experiences.

Visit www.smile.amazon.com and click “Pick a charity.” Search for Idaho Charities and **IRPCV**. Like magic, an Amazon icon will appear on your home tool bar, making it easy for you to click on the icon every time you want to shop Amazon. When you make a purchase, click on the icon and a percentage will go to us, giving us a little more to help us continue our work!



February 28, 2021 General Meeting

The virtual meeting was called to order by outgoing President James Watson. At 2:00
26 Members attended the Zoom Meeting.

The first order of business was the election of officers to serve in 2021.

Past President, - James Watson

President - Mary McGee

Vice President - Bethany Martinez

Treasurer - Steve Randolph

Secretary - Chelsea Krema agreed to remain until a replacement could be found

Membership Chair - John Bigelow

Newsletter - Judith Eighmy



First Fridays: The sporadic attendance was discussed and the decision made to make the zoom meetings available. Mary McGee will schedule them for the First Friday of each month at 6 pm Mountain Time. Information to be sent in an email blast and included in the next newsletter.

Treasurer Due to low expenses and good calendar sales, we have \$5,273.40 in the bank.

Annual Grant selection. Due to the Covid-19 virus, last year the Board in a virtual meeting decided to provide grant money to Global Gardens. The plan was to purchase vegetables with the money and donate the vegetables to the food bank, The gardens had a problem with the irrigation and had no water so the money remained in the bank. This year the group decided to provide \$500 to three refugee agencies as well as \$ 600.00 for Global Gardens.. The agencies are CSI, Refugee Program (Twin Falls) International Rescue Committee and Agency for New Americans both in Boise.

We received an update from a representative of the National Peace Corps Association in Washington DC. For the first time, the organization was contacted for input on Peace Corps appointments by the Biden administration. So far there have been 4 appointments.

We were also informed that all the foreign Peace Corps Posts have remained open during the pandemic. There is no known date for returning volunteers to the field.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 pm

Addendum: Subsequent to the meeting Lee Hendricks of Pocatello was elected Secretary by a unanimous vote of the board.

Meet the New IRPCV Vice-President

Most of you will Remember Bethany who was a star in role as Peace Corps recruiter for Idaho and Montana.

She was a hard worker and very successful at her job. Many of us got to know her from the myriad of events and activities she engaged in. She provided many opportunities for us to participate. She always kept us informed about Peace Corps programs, functions and activities. Bethany built great relationships at the Universities in her area of responsibility. Those relationships continue even after she left her post to return to school.



Bethany Martinez served in Ukraine from 2015-2017 as a Youth Development Volunteer. During her time in Ukraine she worked with the Presidential Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) program and implemented a Let Girls Learn grant at her site focusing on exercise, nutrition, and gender equality. Bethany is continuing her passion for health by becoming a nurse. She is currently attending ISU's Accelerated Nursing Program and will graduate in May 2021.

Bethany is so excited to continue working towards the third goal of Peace Corps with the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Idaho.

A Message on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion from Acting Peace Corps Director Carol Spahn

The global pandemic, protests against racial injustice, and civil unrest during the last year have highlighted the coexisting extremes of solidarity and isolation of people and nations in ways that remind us of our shared humanity and reliance on each other for our collective health, safety, and security.

The need for mutual understanding and respect is so apparent in these times, and nowhere is it more apparent than in the worldwide call for action to ensure racial equity and an end to social injustice.

We have received numerous letters and calls to action over the past year, and appreciate the connection each author maintains to our mission as well as the shared concern that we live up to our values. The Peace Corps, at its core, is about serving at the invitation of host countries to meet their expressed needs and creating a deeper understanding between people that honors diversity around the world and leads to opportunity, equity, and inclusion.

In that spirit, the agency is reflecting on ways to build on our foundation of intercultural competence and mutual understanding. Through our Task Force for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, we are actively scrutinizing our structures, programs, and policies to ensure that our workplace, our Volunteer systems, and our culture reflect our commitment to these core values.

As we carry out this work, we are cognizant of the need to balance a collective sense of urgency with a need to be intentional, so that the changes we implement will be systemic, effective, and sustainable.

Throughout this process, and as we eventually return Volunteers overseas, we are incredibly fortunate to be able to draw on the insight and passion of the RPCV community. I want to personally thank each of you for your commitment to our mission and your help in ensuring that the Peace Corps improves each and every day. We appreciate you coming forward in the spirit of partnership on the journey

The Peace Corps' mission of world peace and friendship is more important than ever, and we are committed to meeting this moment—both in the work that we do and the way that we do it. We will continue to provide updates as we move forward in these areas, so please stay tuned.

Upcoming Events

Virtual Happy Hour for the year.

We have established the zoom calls for First Friday until next September when we hope to be able to meet in person.

Mary McGee is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: **IRPCV First Friday Happy Hour**

Time: Mar 5, 2021 06:00 PM Mountain Time (US and Canada)

Every month on the First Fri, until Sep 3, 2021, 7 occurrence(s)

Mar 5, 2021 06:00 PM

Apr 2, 2021 06:00 PM

May 7, 2021 06:00 PM

Jun 4, 2021 06:00 PM

Jul 2, 2021 06:00 PM

Aug 6, 2021 06:00 PM

Sep 3, 2021 06:00 PM



Please download and import the following iCalendar (.ics) files to your calendar system.

Monthly: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/tZcsceurqT0sH9f7qb73-IC8Wd-iZbgFR5R1/ics?icsToken=98tyKuGrrz0oGdOTthyERpwqBY_oa-nwtiFdgvpyw7nVHMebCuAeYPO4h9F_7i

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83162376653?pwd=aU5KZTY3V0lETnY2SEh2NS9nTUVSdz09>

Meeting ID: 831 6237 6653

Passcode: 4545





Meet the New IRPCV Secretary



The photo is of India X training group. I'm in the center, yellow top, tilted head.

Lee was born in California to Idaho parents, joined the Peace Corps at 20 to teach in Gujarat, India. Since then she has worked in Washington, DC, Afghanistan (7 years), Tajikistan (4 years), New Delhi (3 years), and eastern Europe. She worked for State Department, OSCE, UN, Asia Foundation, and two years at Peace Corps Headquarters; did election work in Eastern Europe, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan during civil wars. Her India X group has gotten together regularly since 1974 at Estes Park, CO. Since 2000 India X has held reunions every other year at each other's home towns-- Pocatello, Memphis, DC, Harpers Ferry, Decorah, Dubuque, Sioux Falls, Catalina/Tucson, Atlanta, Estes Park, Hilo, and Burke. During Covid-19, she started a monthly zoom where 6-10 of them join in. Everyone has contact with at least one other person in the group. Being a 5th generation Idahoan, she returned to Idaho upon retirement in 2015, and at 76, she is a perpetual volunteer and an avid genealogist, working on memoirs, and living in Pocatello with two furry tomcats named Moo and Tigger.

Nancy Lee Hendricks



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