



# BUILDING BRIDGES



*"We may affirm absolutely that nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion."*

*- Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel*

## MEET OUR SUMMER INTERN



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### FROM TICKLING THE IVORIES TO TAPPING A KEYBOARD

The only thing that kept Constance Speake from joining the Peace Corps in 1961 was her piano. A dedicated pianist, Speake knew the importance of daily practice, and performance—experiences she knew would not exist for her as a Peace Corps Volunteer. "That was the main reason I didn't join the PC in 1961," Speake recalls. "I wanted to see how good a pianist I could become." Speake went on to spend 45 years teaching music to students in Iowa, New Jersey, Wisconsin, Oregon, Idaho, and Chicago, gathering three degrees, including a Doctorate of Music Education, along the way. But she never lost sight of her service ambitions and now, at age 70, has taken her extensive experience abroad, making a difference in the lives of students in another part of the world.

When Speake first arrived in the remote Armenian town that she would call home for the duration of her Peace Corps service, she was approached by staff members at the State College. In response to a Ministry of Education mandate requiring all students in Armenia to become computer literate, the staff wanted to bring computers to their school. A shortage of computers and computer instructors in the country made this a daunting challenge for the

isolated town, but the staff knew that providing computers and diligently training local teachers in computer literacy would be a step towards meeting the mandate—and opening their students' eyes to a world beyond the town's borders.

With these goals in mind, Speake and her community successfully funded and opened the Computer and Language Lab at the College (CALL), transforming an old classroom into a brand new lab. Thanks to generous donations received through the Peace Corps Partnership Program, the lab is now home to six computers, headsets, microphones, an interactive English learning program, an internet connection, and Microsoft software that has enabled college students to author, edit and produce the only newspaper available to the community.

"We expected student enthusiasm, but not the overwhelming desire from students to learn or demonstrate what they knew," said Speake. "We were inundated at first with students wanting to use the computers, and we needed more supervisors of the CALL, to keep the room open all day."

### BEFORE



### AFTER



## COMING SOON

*OPSI is going green. "Building Bridges" will soon be an e-newsletter! In the next issue, we will request e-mail addresses from those who wish to continue receiving updates and exciting stories from the field.*

### COUNTRY FUNDS SUPPORT NUTRITION PROJECT IN NIGER

When Niger Peace Corps Volunteer, Jonathan Simms, needed to secure project support for his host community's Fencing for Improved Nutrition Project, he had to look no further than Peace Corps Partnership Program and the associated Niger Country Fund. Country Funds enable donors to support Partnership Program projects in countries where Peace Corps Volunteers serve around the world.

Following the construction of the fence, this model community garden will provide nutritious vegetables and plants previously vulnerable to damage from livestock and other wildlife. With this new protection, the local women's group will be able to provide more nutritious meals for their families, train others to start and manage similar projects, and have an opportunity to generate income by selling their extra produce.

Reflecting on the project's implementation, Jonathan stated that "gardening is now a possibility in the village, where it did not exist before," adding that "the goals of improved knowledge and decision making in food choices through increasing local availability have begun to improve."

This fencing project was supported wholly through donations to the Niger Country Fund. Since their introduction in the summer of 2007, Partnership Program Country Funds support Peace Corps Volunteers in the implementation of sustainable and community-driven Partnership Program projects around the world.

### FIJIAN PEOPLE REVIVE LOCAL FISHERIES AND GREAT SEA REEF

It may not be surprising to find out that last January a small group of individuals from an island in Fiji began a movement towards reviving the Great Sea Reef (known locally as *Cakaulevu*) in the Pacific Ocean. However, it might be surprising to know that this plan revolved around the construction of a common household structure: toilets.

Fiji, smaller than the state of New Jersey, is located next to the third largest reef in the world spanning over 125,000 miles. The reef is home to over 700 fish species including at least 12 threatened species of marine life. As a nation whose economy relies greatly upon tourism and its fishing industries, the reef and its surrounding waters provide a necessary source of marine life and exploratory opportunities. However, rapid population growth and out-dated sanitation techniques have contributed to increased sewage runoff and water erosion. As a result, large algae blooms have developed, threatening to destroy the reef and the ecosystems it supports.

In response, Peace Corps Volunteer, Joe Otts, and the local community came together to address the issue affecting both their environment and their livelihoods. Otts worked with NGOs in the region to help cultivate a comprehensive plan to address the needs of the community, including the introduction of dry compost toilets within the village. These toilets directly aid in new and sustainable methods of water conservation and promote reef and fishery restoration.



With the partnership of a local club, the island's first two dry compost toilets were created and proved to be a great success in taking the first steps towards eco-sustainability. With new programs in place, small subsistence farms will experience fewer water shortages and begin a new trend of promoting a cleaner environment locally.

"It is their identity, and their identity extends into the sea and out onto their traditional fishing grounds," said Otts in regards to the reef. "...the stock of reef fish in their fishing grounds is a direct reflection on them." And thus, the creation of these environmentally conscious compost toilets has helped to revive not only Fiji's natural environment and fisheries but also its people.