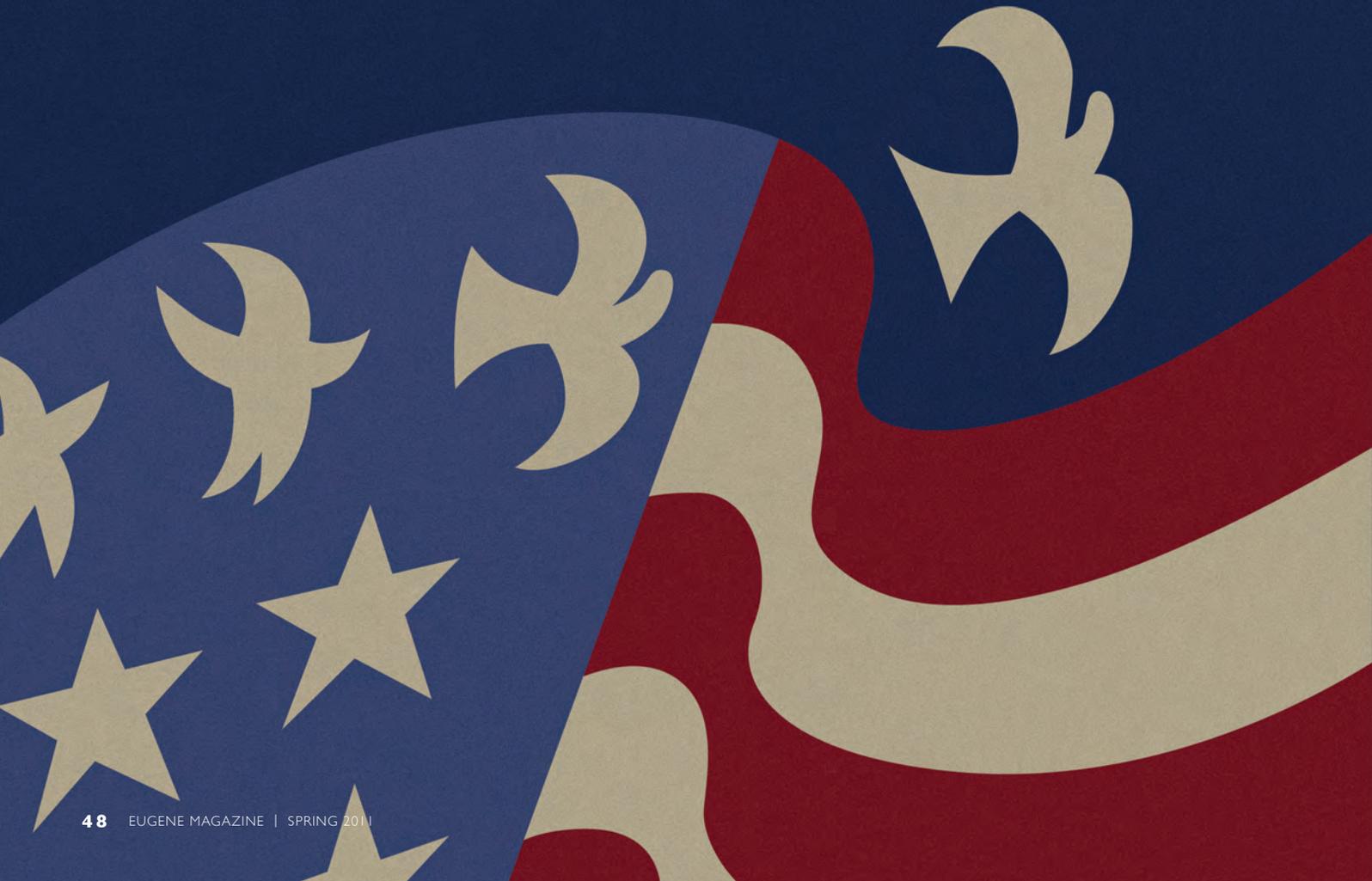




# *THE* **PEACE CORPS** *AT 50*

Local citizens who  
began their service  
overseas





Returning Peace Corps volunteers participated in the 2008 Eugene Celebration parade.

BY MIKAEL KRUMMEL

**M**OST ANYONE WITH EVEN A MODEST sense of 20th century American history can recite the oft-quoted line from John F. Kennedy's 1961 presidential inauguration speech. The words remain a powerful call to action: "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country!"

JFK's challenge to Americans is reflected in an urgent mandate he passed to Congress shortly after his inauguration: Charter a national organization comprised of volunteers charged with serving the humanitarian needs of developing countries across the world. Congress formalized the resulting army of idealistic volunteers as the United States Peace Corps.

March 1, 2011, marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Peace Corps. Over the past five decades, Eugene has been a hot spot for Peace Corps recruiting, and a community that embraces Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) after they return to the States. The West Cascade Peace Corps Association was founded in 1980 by a hometown group of returned PCVs invested in staying connected socially while carrying out a Peace Corps goal of bringing the world back home. Eugene has also long ranked among the agency's most productive

Peace Corps recruiting sites nationally. The annual tally of UO student recruits has averaged 60 or more in recent years. Plus, plenty of local non-student enrollees come out of our community. Many of them are drawn to service in the health care arena. "Partly, the interest is generated because community service is a crux of what the university is about here," says Justin Overdeest, a Peace Corps recruiter at UO. "But there's also an energy and general attitude in this community, and a large number of nonprofit organizations. The interest is really a product of the people here, their ethic, and what they want to give back to others."

All Peace Corps volunteers have fascinating, often inspirational experiences while living outside the United States. The hours they spend working in other cultures and the people they meet while abroad tend to create indelible marks on their memories. That's certainly true for Eugene's thousands of former Peace Corps volunteers, most of whom who have remarkable experiences to share.

Find an opportunity to ask one of Eugene's many Peace Corp alumni to share a story about their time abroad. Oh, and while you're at it, you might also ask them what you can do for your country!



**Julie and Nick Bosustow**

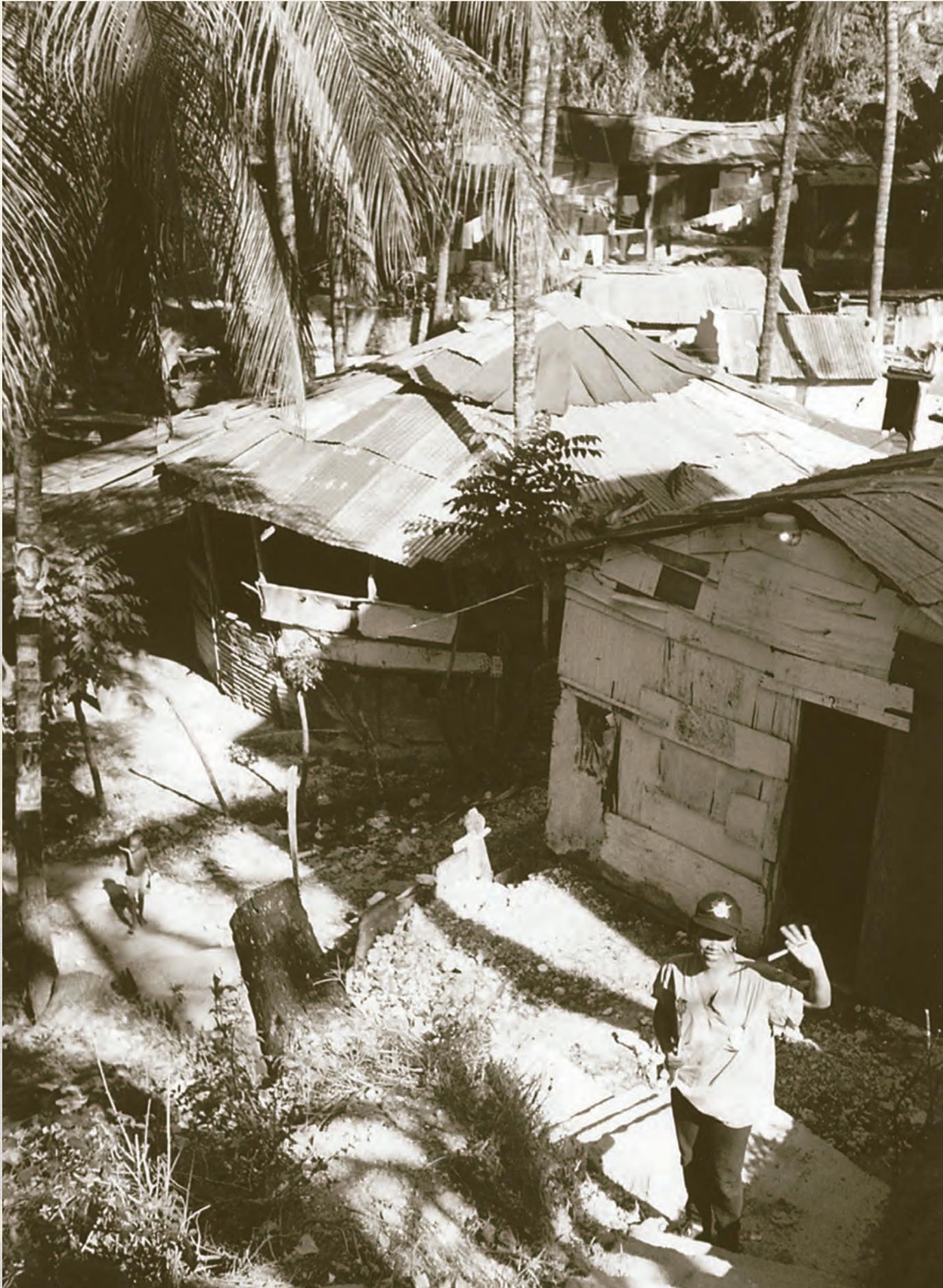
Guatemala (1999-2001) and Suriname (2004-2006)

Happily married, edging into their 60s, living a comfortable Southern California lifestyle in the late 1990s, the Bosustows hardly seemed a couple on the verge of self-reinvention. But Nick, an Academy Award-winning film producer, and Julie, an accomplished elementary school teacher, wanted new meaning in their lives. They traded their possessions and their existential longings for an assignment in the Guatemalan town of Totonicapán. A few years later they reposted to Suriname.

Julie applied her teaching and career-counseling skills to the challenge of promoting health education in a half-dozen schools, training teachers and students in nutrition, sanitation, personal hygiene, and environmental awareness. She also helped bring in the village's first flush toilets. Nick used his business acumen to help a bakery and furniture shop improve productivity and profits. "It was a long haul," Julie says. "Across the Peace Corps you find that family comes first. If there was a family issue, that's what I dealt with. I helped with their babies, or if there was a death. It was very basic stuff, and I had to be very careful not to change their culture."

Julie Bosustow teaching health and nutrition in a classroom in San Cristobal, Totonicapán, Guatemala, in 1999, above. Julie with two young villagers from San Cristobal, opposite, top. Nick Bosustow taught small business management to a group of bakers in Chipuac, Totonicapán, Guatemala, in late 1999 and 2000, opposite, below.







Shannon Micheel, above, holding a baby in the barrio of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, where she worked with members of Las Chicas de Arroyo Hondo, a girls group/club formed to provide them with educational and community service opportunities as a way to build self-esteem. La Puya, the barrio where Shannon worked in the capital city of Santo Domingo doing home visits to weigh young children and to do a community assessment, left.

### Shannon Micheel

Dominican Republic (1995-1997)

Most PCVs work in remote, rural areas of their host country. Not the case for Shannon. Her assignment to a family planning NGO and her work to reduce local infant mortality unfolded in the Santa Domingo slum of La Puya. Early on, Shannon conducted door-to-door interviews with mothers to survey infant health conditions. She also weighed babies to establish a baseline for later assessing the effectiveness of her community education efforts promoting breastfeeding, clinic exams, and improved nutrition. The work was not so far removed from what she does today as a nurse practitioner for Lane County Community Health.

“Part of the Peace Corps goal, I think, was to send people with specific skills to accomplish a specific project, and to leave something behind that was replicable,” says Shannon. “But probably more important was the third goal to bring knowledge back home, to help people in this country realize that they could have it much worse than they do.”



### Janet and Bob Hollander

India (1966-1968)

Janet and Bob served as volunteers in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh during the first decade of the Peace Corps. Janet taught nutrition in adult education and preschool programs. Bob worked on poultry projects, improving egg production as a culturally acceptable way of introducing increased protein into vegetarian diets. He also taught kitchen gardening to villagers lacking funds to buy fresh produce.

Today, Janet is a Nia lifestyle fitness coach—work, she maintains, not altogether removed from her Peace Corps experiences four decades past. Her point of view also incorporates events nearly 15 years post-Peace Corps, when she and Bob returned to India to visit their original placement site.

“We went out to the village,” recalls Janet, “and it certainly was a reality check. We had spent a lot of time working in that village, and some of what we had built stayed in place and some of it was gone. But 15 years later, it really was the human connection that still mattered most. Those people were still our family.”

Julie Bosustow helped build flush toilets in Pacanac, Totonicapán, Guatemala, in 2000.

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## **Laura Massengale**

Senegal (2007-2009)

Laura speaks of her motivation to volunteer with the Peace Corps largely in terms of idealism and adventure: “I had this idea, you know, of making a difference, and all those other things. But I also wanted to live in another place and really get to know that place well.”

Owing to a paperwork snafu, Laura’s request for an immigration-related placement in Latin America unexpectedly gave way to disease-prevention projects in two villages near the Gambia River in western Africa. “I was kind of given to the chief of the village and adopted into his family—basically, I was treated like family,” she recalls. “I ate meals with the women of the household. Whenever I wanted to go to town, I would go to the chief, my father (but old enough to be my grandfather!), and tell him where I was going.”

Laura is currently doing graduate work in international studies at UO, and weighing a career that includes targeting the problems of Senegalese migrants.



Shirley Stevens with a group of people in Palompon, on the island of Leyte, Philippines, above.

**Greg Richterich, M.D.**  
Kenya (1971-1974)

Greg spent the front end of his placement teaching math at a high school campus outside Nairobi. It was a time, he says, when the last bonds of a post-colonial union tying Kenya with Tanzania and Uganda were fraying, and the Peace Corps was trying to maintain that union. Those circumstances nudged him into a third-year assignment running a medical dispensary at an Outward Bound school managed by the trio of nations. The school was on Mount Kilimanjaro.

“I actually had it pretty good compared to a lot of other volunteers,” recalls Greg. “Didn’t always have electricity but had running water. Missed a washing machine. . . . If you wanted food, you had the market. If you wanted meat,” he laughs, “the cows were still alive: You went and got it warm, wrapped in newspaper and God knows how much lead ink!”

While in Kenya, Greg met and married a Dutch nurse also working as an international development volunteer. The camaraderie he discovered among her circle of Dutch medical volunteers, plus the interests he cultivated at the Outward Bound School, prompted him to seek a medical degree after his return to the States. He is now a dermatologist at Cascade Dermatology.

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## **Nicole Brulé**

Lesotho (1997-1999)

The impetus behind Nicole's placement in the kingdom nation located within the borders of South Africa came from the Lesotho Education Ministry. The intent was to reduce family reliance on school lunch programs and a national reliance on international food aid. Nicole's work involved grassroots agricultural development: cultivation of new food sources, and egg production for home consumption and sales. Her placement ended several months early owing to political unrest.

"Politically, things had been going downhill for a while," recalls Nicole, "and after we were evacuated, they gave us a choice to stay or leave. I chose to leave. I was feeling pretty done at that point, but it was definitely a conflicting experience."

Nicole says she experienced difficulty adjusting to life in the U.S after returning. "I had a longing," she says, "for comfort that I just couldn't find." The awkwardness and stress she experienced propelled her to study the hurdles faced by many other returning international volunteer workers. Today, she is a practicing psychologist specializing in treatment of former PCVs confronting the challenges of reintegration.

Nicole is the daughter of Julie and Nick Bosustow, profiled on page 50, and it was her commitment to the Peace Corps that compelled her parents to leave their comfortable Hollywood lifestyle for their own placement in the mountains of Guatemala.



### **Shirley and Rex Stevens**

Philippines (1984-1986)

Getting blindsided by the overnight failure of your family-owned logging and construction business can fling a rather large wrench into late-life plans. In 1982, it left Western Equipment Co. owners Rex and Shirley suddenly questioning whether the time had come to slide into a Palm Springs retirement lifestyle. Enter a local Peace Core recruiter. . . .

Shirley's decades of local volunteer work with Sacred Heart, Meals on Wheels, and the Red Cross made for a relatively smooth transition into her role as rural health care assistant at a clinic in Palompon, on the Filipino island of Leyte. The job eventually saw her establish family planning and dental services for villagers. Rex divided his energy and know-how between the challenges of improving regional water sanitation and "market development" for a village furniture business.

Both also took a strong hand in helping two young physically disabled villagers achieve mobility through rehab surgery and use of a unique bicycle wheelchair. "Those are the kinds of things," says Rex, "that made our whole time on the island worthwhile."

Rex Stevens in the doorway of the house where he and Shirley lived in Palompon, Philippines. Rex is holding a bolo knife, or machete, which was a useful tool for clearing vegetation, cutting wood, or digging in dirt, above. Shirley Stevens with Linda, a villager in Palompon, Philippines, opposite. Linda was the age of one of Shirley and Rex's granddaughters, and they became close. "We lived and helped out in the community like anyone else would," Shirley says. "People get to know you and know that you're no different than they are."

## Brook Edwards and Eli Meyer

Nicaragua (2004-2006)

Brook prefers to frame the disease-eradication project she worked on in Silais-Madriz a minor success. Eli considers his work constructing solar panels out of recycled material much the same way. Neither project, they confess, generated nearly the excitement they achieved “training trainers” to educate youth in self esteem, domestic violence, and other adolescent issues—particularly with regards to how those issues impact sexual health and reproduction.

“Like a lot of volunteers,” admits Eli, “we went into our placement with kind of a formulaic way of looking at things. For the first year, I couldn’t get it out of my head that the Nicaraguans were doing things wrong. But by the end of two years, the Peace Corps allowed us a glimpse into the alternate logic of why people did things they way they did.”

“And, if they had done it our way,” Brook adds forcefully, “it probably wouldn’t have worked!”





**Robert Pelz, M.D.**  
Thailand (1985-1987)

Just out of college, Bob was posted to a government-managed malaria control unit in northeastern Thailand where, it turns out, there was no malaria problem. He turned his attention instead to the problem of intestinal parasites.

The most interesting aspect of his Peace Corps work involved trips into the countryside to educate villagers about parasite transmission. He would teach them how to collect their stool samples, then, after an overnight stay, he'd pack the samples by motorcycle to a lab in the provincial capital. When he returned with the lab results, he'd provide more instruction and arrange medical treatment for the villagers.

"At times the work was frustrating," admits Bob. "It was lonely and isolating adapting to a different culture. Sometimes I just wanted to get away from people." But he also says he formed great friendships with other volunteers, learned a great deal about cultural perceptions, and in the end found his Peace Corps placement "a very rewarding experience." During his third year in Thailand, Bob applied to medical school in the U.S. He now practices critical care, internal, and infectious-disease medicine locally.

A photo of a resident of the town of Chichicastenango in Guatemala, playing the marimba to celebrate their patron saint, Santo Tomás, above, taken in 2001 by the Bosustows.

# Remembering the Peace Corps Founder



## **Robert Sargent Shriver, Jr.**

1915-2011

Sargent “Sarge” Shriver was the driving force behind the creation of the Peace Corps. His appointment as founding director of the organization in March 1961, by his brother-in-law President John F. Kennedy, resulted in the launch of the Corps seemingly overnight. Shriver’s enthusiastic leadership style had him locating start-up funds and moving volunteers into the field well before Congress even voted to charter the agency.

Shriver was a beacon of idealism, energy, motivational talent, and diplomatic skill in an era of unsettled international Cold War emotions. He was also a man of great influence and enviable accomplishment.

While studying law at Yale, Shriver founded the America First Committee, a group that worked to prevent America’s entry into World War II. He later served military duty in the South Pacific during the war, earning a Purple Heart for wounds received at Guadalcanal.

Kennedy drafted Shriver as a campaign organizer during the 1960 primaries, and following Kennedy’s death, Shriver served as Special Assistant to President Lyndon Johnson. He’s credited as the architect of the Johnson administration’s “War on Poverty.”

Shriver also founded numerous other successful social-service programs and organizations over ensuing decades: Head Start, VISTA, Job Corps, Community Action, Upward Bound, Foster Grandparents, the National Clearinghouse for Legal Services, Indian and Migrant Opportunities, and Neighborhood Health Services. Later in life, he enthusiastically served as chairman of the Special Olympics.

Shriver is said to have told a group of Yale graduates in 1994 that part of their mission was to “break mirrors.” “In our society that is so self-absorbed,” Shriver said, “begin to look less at yourself and more at each other. Learn more about the face of your neighbor and less about your own self.”

May Sargent Shriver’s spirit of service and generosity live on.

—Mikael Krummel