

Friends of Fiji  
2009 President's Annual Report  
Robert Bartel

**Mission**

In 2009, Friends of Fiji, a non-profit 501c(3) organization, initiated strategic planning activities to allow it to more effectively accomplish its core goals;

- (a) To be the alumni association of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) and staff who have served in Fiji;
- (b) To undertake and sponsor educational and charitable activities designed to help assure realization of the educational and charitable goals for which the United States Peace Corps (the "Peace Corps") was created;
- (c) To inform and educate its members and the public on matters relating to Fiji;
- (d) To develop a community to assist in accomplishing the foregoing purposes...

**Officers**

At the February 2009 Board meeting, the following officers were elected to leadership positions: Robert Bartel, President, Robert Salerno, Vice President, Beth Shearer, Secretary and David Downes, Treasurer.

**Membership**

Friends of Fiji began 2009 with approximately 275 dues paying members and closed the year with just over 200 members. This ebb of membership is consistent with years in which no gala fundraiser is held, as levels for paid membership are tied largely to newsletter publication and the biannual Gala Fundraiser advertizing campaigns. Recognizing the liability of potentially losing track of members' current contact information during lapses in membership, the Board is embracing new membership renewal techniques, such as reminder postcards and possibly reminder emails. Friends of Fiji will continue to strive to clearly communicate the benefits of membership, including all the work that we do with membership dues and fundraising activities.

Keeping track of volunteers has always been difficult for Friends of Fiji because government privacy policies do not allow Peace Corps to release volunteer information. Reciprocity arrangements with the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) have worked well for Friends of Fiji, as NPCA regularly accepts payment for membership in both organizations and shares its membership information with our group.

In-country liaisons have provided a tremendous benefit to the organization as they have been able to publicize the efforts of Friends of Fiji, in particular the opportunity for PCVs to receive financial support for their development projects and to advocate for them to take advantage of free membership upon close of service (COS).

**Communications**

Friends of Fiji continues to provide valuable information to our community via our website and our biannual newsletters and has a growing presence on FaceBook and

*Peace Corps Connected*, the National Peace Corps Association's private social network for Returned Volunteers.

The Friends of Fiji website continues to be maintained by webmaster, Jim Reiersen, who is championing efforts to evaluate new themes for the organization and hosting of our content in *Word Press*. Jim is communicating with other RPCV groups to share experiences and to determine current best practices for the maintenance of RPCV group websites.

In the Spring of 2009, the Board welcomed Paul Nuti to the editorial helm of our newsletter, *Friends of Fiji News*. Under his leadership two newsletters have been crafted in 2009, containing a fresh organization and new features. It is hoped that with increased member input, the newsletter may be published three times a year beginning in 2010.

The Board wishes to enhance the value of the content included in the newsletter and to more regularly post updates on activities, status reports for funded projects and links to relevant content on our website and publicize these via our social networking groups. As most members admit that they primarily join to stay connected with their fellow RPCVs, providing opportunities for members to connect is central to our mission. The Friends of Fiji FaceBook group and our group on NPCA's *Peace Corps Connect* provide an easy and efficient way to facilitate communication between members and the organization. In addition, we encourage individual groups of Fiji RPCVs to establish subgroups within our own.

### **Dan Cantor Memorial Fund**

Dan Cantor, Peace Corps Fiji's Country Director from 1972 until 1975, passed away on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009. In honor of Dan's spirited service, the Board established the Dan Cantor Memorial Fund in his honor to "provide support to current Peace Corps Volunteers and Staff serving in Fiji that may not be available from the Peace Corps itself, as determined by the Board of Directors." It was with monies from this fund that Friends of Fiji was able to provide libations for volunteers at the COS this year.

### **Social Gatherings**

On Saturday October 3, 2009 Friends of Fiji members in the Washington, DC area hosted a Fiji Day barbecue at a local park to celebrate Fiji's 39<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence. The event included live music by members of the local Fiji community and was attended by approximately fifty guests, virtually all of whom brought a dish to share. The public venue was well appreciated by attendees as it was informal enough to engage in *taralala*. It is hoped that the Fiji Day barbecue in DC can become an annual event. The Board would like to see similar local gatherings held wherever a critical mass of Friends can be assembled.

### **Development Projects**

In the past year Friends of Fiji has funded *Peace Corps Partnership Projects* for the construction of vital infrastructural elements for Fiji communities, including composting toilets for a school and village in an ecologically sensitive area; a rain catchment system

necessary for running water in a village and a kindergarten building to serve villagers along the Wailevu coast of Vanua Levu. In addition, the Board has approved funds to provide capacity building workshops for an ongoing beekeeping project.

### **Fundraisers and Fundraising**

Friends of Fiji has enjoyed reasonably stable revenues from membership dues and fundraising activities. The Gala Fundraisers held in Washington, D.C. every other year have been the primary source of revenue for supporting development projects. One consistent challenge in planning and executing the Gala Fundraiser has been competition with other Fiji Day celebrations around the country. To avoid conflicts with other such events and to avoid the hazards of hurricane season, the Board has moved the 2010 Gala to May 15, 2010. The Gala will again be convened at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's Conference Center at Ballston in Arlington, VA, as this venue proved not only spacious and well appointed, but also economical for the organization and convenient to attendees driving in or riding the Metro.

As in recent years, Air Pacific has generously donated two roundtrip tickets from Los Angeles to Nadi, which will serve as the grand prize for the raffle held in conjunction with the Gala Fundraiser.

### **Branding**

An organization such as Friends of Fiji must convey a clear identity for members and non-members to recognize its services and the value of membership. A good branding campaign will clearly and emotionally connect our members with the organization and to our shared experiences with Fiji. Solid branding is a foundation for all marketing and communications.

To this end, Vice President Robert Salerno (FRE-4) has lead ongoing discussions around crafting a Friends of Fiji logo and other ideas for branding of our organization. Rob has had several appealing initial designs and is continuing to work to bring forward to the Board a few finalist designs for consideration. Once a logo is selected it will become a focal element in the design of the new website as well as the new look for the newsletter and social networking pages.

In addition, Friends of Fiji may launch a line of products that will allow all members to proudly display their love of Fiji while establishing a new source of revenue for supporting additional development projects.

### **Peace Corps 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary/ Friends of Fiji 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

In anticipation of the 2011 anniversaries of the Peace Corps and Friends of Fiji, the Board has participated in the NPCA Group Leaders Forum to monitor anniversary plans. Independent of the NPCA and Peace Corps' plans, Friends of Fiji has been working to explore ways to celebrate our own organization's anniversary. At present, Fiji RPCV Ben Raterman is reviewing the logistical elements required for Friends of Fiji to organize an in-country service opportunity through Habitat for Humanity.