



FEBRUARY 2024
NEWSLETTER

In this issue:

- President's Letter
- Featured Photo
- **2024 Gala Fundraiser**
- AGM Report
- 2024 Board of Directors
- Youngest PCVs
- In Memoriam
- Project Updates
- Other Upcoming Events
- Peace Corps Response & Virtual Service
- Fiji Reading List
- Links

Letter from the president

Bula vinaka and namaste to all Friends of Fiji,

As you will see from the other newsletter articles, we have been busy, and we are looking forward to exciting times. Two groups of Fiji PCVs began service last year and more are expected in 2024. We plan to provide them assistance and support. We also hope to support projects for the IndoFijian community, which is not currently served by PCVs. We thank you for your generous support for past projects and welcome your suggestions for new projects.

We welcome two new board members: Lindsey Kren, our new Secretary, and Anthony Zenos, who has already volunteered to help with the gala. Our "old" board members continue their heroic service: Seokmin (Saki) Kim provides leadership as Vice President while also completing his PhD thesis. Barbara Mutz, our Treasurer, keeps the books balanced. Deb Stice provides "boots on the ground" in Fiji. Anne Baker is our liaison with other Pacific Island Friends of groups. Jay Sztuk identifies new projects while continuing his roles as webmaster, membership chair and newsletter editor. Lalesh Nagy is super-busy organizing the gala. Thank you all.

We are looking forward to the gala as a chance to see old and new friends. It will be our first big post-Covid event. Hope to see you there. It will be fun.

Vinaka vakalevu to all of you for your continued support.

Jim Reiersen

Featured Photo

50 years ago ...



Jerry Richolson, Fiji XXI

Forestry

Do you have a picture from your Peace Corps service you'd like to share? Send it to us with a short description and year it was taken.

Email - Info@fofiji.org

The Friends of Fiji Gala is back!!!!

Please join us at the 2024 Friends of Fiji Gala

The **2024 Friends of Fiji Gala** will be held on **May 25, 2024 from 5:00pm - 10:00pm**, at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, 4301 Wilson Blvd. Arlington, VA. The evening will include Fiji cuisine, dancing to Fijian music, a silent auction, and a drawing for a trip to Fiji.

[CLICK HERE FOR GALA TICKETS](#)

Printable order form is on the next page for those who prefer to pay by check



WIN A TRIP TO FIJI

The winner will receive **2 round trip tickets from L.A. or San Francisco to Nadi, Fiji**, courtesy of **Fiji Airways**.

(Travel must be complete by May 31, 2025. Blackout dates are June 16 – Sept 5 2024, and Dec 14 2024 thru Jan 15 2025. Non-transferable)

Raffle tickets are \$20 each, or three for \$50.

Drawing will be held on May 25th, 2024, at the Friends of Fiji Gala.

All proceeds support community based development & education projects in Fiji.

[CLICK HERE FOR RAFFLE TICKETS](#)

Printable order form is on the next page for those who prefer to pay by check



*** If you prefer to buy gala or raffle tickets with a check, please print and mail the form below ***



Registration form – Please fill out and mail to:

Friends of Fiji, 7111 Woodley Lane, Falls Church, VA 22042-2539.

Make checks payable to Friends of Fiji

Name: _____ Phone: _____
Address: _____ Email: _____

Gala Tickets

Individuals @ \$55 _____ # Couples @ \$100 _____
Children: 13yrs – 18 yrs (each) @ \$20 _____ #Children 12 & under Free _____
Total Registration \$ _____

Ticket includes: Food, 2 drinks (wine / beer), entertainment

Please list names of other attendees in your party



Win a Trip to Fiji

Raffle Tickets (\$20 ea or 3 for \$50): _____ **Total Raffle Tickets \$** _____



Donations

General Fund (Sustains FoF) \$ _____
Projects Fund (Projects in Fiji) \$ _____
Disaster Relief Fund \$ _____
Dan Cantor Memorial Fund (for PCV events in country) \$ _____
Local Events Fund (FoF / RPCV events in US) \$ _____



Membership

- I would like to become a member of Friends of Fiji
- I would like to become a member of the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA)

Membership in both organizations is free

2024 AGM Report

The Friends of Fiji Annual General Meeting was held on January 27, 2024, at the home of Jim & Polly Reiersen. The President's report presented at the meeting is on the following page.

2024 Board of Directors members elected at the AGM are: Anne Baker, Seokmin Kim, Lindsey Kren, Lalesh Nagy, Jim Reiersen, Barbara Mutz, Deb Stice, Jay Sztuk, and Anthony Zenos.

2024 Board of Directors

The Board of Directors convened on February 4, 2024 to elect officers.

President: Jim Reiersen

Vice President: Seokmin Kim

Treasurer: Barbara Mutz

Secretary: Linsey Kren

Focus Areas–

Membership & Newsletter: Jay Sztuk

Projects: Deb Stice, Anthony Zenos

Events: Lalesh Nagy

NPCA / Pacific Islands Collaborative Liason: Anne Baker

Presidents' Review of 2023

Officers

- Officers remained mostly the same since last year's.
President: Seokmin Kim; Jim Reiersen Co-President
Vice President: Elizabeth Dunn (currently vacant)
Secretary: Arielle Stockbridge (currently vacant)
Treasurer: Barbara Mutz
- Chairperson positions
Membership: Jay Sztuk
Newsletter: Seokmin Kim
Projects: Jay Sztuk; Deb Stice
Pacific Island collaborative liaison: Anne Baker
Events Coordinator: Lalesh Nagy

2023 Accomplishments

Communications

- The 2023 Fall Newsletter was sent out on September. This newsletter included updates on our engagements with the community and current projects. Specifically, we advertised our virtual talanoa events, provided updates regarding ongoing and completed projects.
- Other communications were made through emails to disseminate news or announcements and through postings on our website and Facebook page.

Events

We were delighted to welcome the return of Peace Corps Volunteers to Fiji in 2023. In April, twelve volunteers (Group 97) were sworn in, followed by thirty members of Group 98 in November. We held Zoom meetings the new volunteers prior to their departure to Fiji. We also engaged directly with country staff with brainstorming and providing suggestions.

Meanwhile, we continued to engage the broader community through virtual talanoas, book club meetings, and participating with the Pacific Island Collaborative.

- We engaged in 3 virtual talanoas.
 - o Dean Roemmich regarding his efforts to monitor the world's oceans through the Argo System. (July 9)
 - o Peter Johnston regarding his thoughts and experiences on sustainable energy in the Pacific Islands (September 10)
 - o Victor Bonito regarding research, conservation, community development, and educational programs. (October 22)
- Book club meetings involved the following books:
 - o "Island Years," by Mark Odegard
 - o "Voices from the Peace Corps: Fifty Years of Kentucky Volunteers" by Jack & Angene Wilson
 - o "Coming of Age in the Cannibal Isles," by Fred Bell
 - o "Green Hills and Blue Lagoons," by John Penisten
- We are actively engaged with the Pacific Island collaborative. This group is made up of organizations that have similar mission as ours in the broader South Pacific. This includes groups from Tonga, Vanuatu, and Micronesia. Anne Baker serves as our official liaison with this group and hosted the event in December. A result of this collaboration is a link on our website to the Friends of Tonga Read-Aloud Video Library.
- In October we co-hosted a zoom meeting of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers for Environmental Action (RPCVs4EA) "Bikini-Enewetak's Heartbreak: Climate Change Driving the Atomic Afterlife"

Projects

- We completed two major projects this year. First, we fundraised more than \$8,400 to provide safe drinking water for Nanuku village. Construction of the water filtration system has been completed at a cost of \$12,643 (balance on hand in our projects fund covered the difference). Second, we provided \$1,166 to help purchase wheelbarrows for the Labasa Kauwai Youth Club. We also provided \$140 to print brochures for the Henibua Archeological Site.

Membership

- FoF members total 558 members compared to 535 from 2022. Some increases can be expected from the Gala and no that Peace Corps Volunteers again have a presence in country.

2024 Plans

- 2024 Gala Fundraiser: We are happy to announce that we are having our first in-person gala since COVID on May 25, 2024 at NRECA in Arlington, VA. Stay tuned for updates! Lalesh has played the key role in getting everything organized.
- Continued engagement: We will continue engaging with Peace Corps Fiji, incoming Peace Corps groups, and partners such as the Pacific Island Collaborative. We plan to support PCV projects directly and through the Peace Corps Partnership. Additionally, we want to expand our outreach to Fiji and the South Pacific more broadly.
- We will continue our book club and talanoas for members and prospective members. We hope to reinvigorate Friends of Fiji with additional members and look forward to interactions with Fijian groups in the U.S.

Fiji's Youngest PCVS

There's no age limit for Peace Corps Volunteers. Most are in their early 20s, a few in their 80s..... *but 10 and 8?!*

Four out of five members of the Fiji VIII training group in 1970 belonged to the Berkowitz family, one of a handful of Peace Corps families who served during the 1970s, when Peace Corps policy allowed couples with minor children to serve.

While David Berkowitz taught at USP and Carole taught at what was then known as the Crippled Children School, Larry and Rachel attended school in Suva and played with friends in their neighborhood on Matanitobua Street.

"It was a wonderful experience, both as a family and as a kid" says Larry Berkowitz. ***"It was one of the signature experiences of my life"***



DAVID A. BERKOWITZ



CAROLE BERKOWITZ



LARRY B. BERKOWITZ



RACHEL BERKOWITZ



In Memoriam

Jon Edward Anderson

April 10, 1948 - January 8, 2024

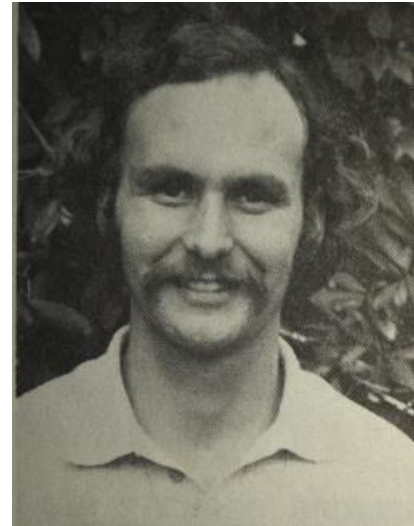
Jon Anderson left earth on January 8, 2024, as the public address system in the ICU announced "Visiting hours are over."

Jon was born in Cincinnati Ohio, where he graduated from Withrow High School. He majored in economics at University of Cincinnati and was the Beta Nu '70 fraternity house treasurer & president.

Jon's Peace Corps service in Fiji began in July 1974. He worked at the Ministry of Finance, in charge of Economic surveys, and piloted Tourist Expenditure Surveys. After completing service on 29 Sept 1976, Jon traveled New Zealand, where his part-time employment enabled the New Zealand Blind Industries to use wire twisting machines making muselets, among other things, to operate 24 hours daily when the blind were not staffing equipment.

After traveling 3 months through SE Asia with Christine Meukel Laws, his future wife of 43 years, Jon settled in San Francisco and began a 32 year public service career that included USDA Food & Nutrition Service, and U.S. Health & Human Services regional offices. Jon retired in 2006 and continued community service, volunteering to wire local Marina Middle School to accommodate internet computer technology, participating in Friends of Fiji, and NorCal PCA activities.

Jon was a beloved family member & friend. He will be greatly missed.



Project Update

Nanuku Water Filtration Project

The Nanuku Water Filtration Project is complete, and villagers now have a reliable supply of clean drinking water. Friends of Fiji contributed a total of 27,000 FJD (\$12,643.30). Sometimes projects come to us from outside of the Peace Corps community. Meet Quinton Heyer, who referred this project to us

Quinton, what brought you to Fiji?

I visited Fiji on three occasions. For high school, I attended Lakeside School in Seattle which had a popular program called Global Service Learning (GSL). This program involved taking about 10 students for a month to a rural global community as a form of cultural engagement. I was lucky to be accepted to the program in 2017 and I was assigned to Fiji in its first year in the GSL program. Our program was led by Tom Courtright (Peace Corps '14) and we lived in homestays in a rural community in the interior of Viti Levu. After my month in Fiji, I kept close relations with my host family and the community. Most recently, in the summer of 2022, I received a research grant and IRB approval from the University of Notre Dame to do a qualitative research project on community water governance in the same village I lived in during GSL.



What expectations or image of Fiji did you have when you started on your trip?

I certainly knew of "Survivor" and the beaches in Fiji. Although equally beautiful, the interior of Viti Levu was certainly more remote and jungle-like than my previous image of Fiji.

What struck you most when you arrived in a Fijian village?

I was definitely struck by how isolated the community felt from the more westernized communities in Ba and Nadi. In 2017, the village only had one truck that served as the main source of transportation to marketplaces. Additionally, many households used outdoor kitchens with wood-burning stoves to cook their meals. After living in a city my whole life, seeing a community not entirely dependent on modern technology and external entities struck me deeply.

What were some of the things your group did while in Fiji?

The program has run in Fiji about four times since. My cohort worked on facilitating a garden to diversify lunch meals at the local school and creating storybooks depicting local traditions written in English and in Fijian.

Did you get to travel anywhere in Fiji outside of your village?

Outside of the village, in the three times I have been to Fiji I collectively visited Ba, Nadi, and the Yasawa Islands. I have enjoyed my time in the interior the most due to the slow-paced lifestyle.

What was your favorite Fijian food?

I really enjoyed all of the roti dishes. Growing up, my grandmother, who immigrated to the U.S. from India, would make me similar roti dishes. Eating roti in Fiji helped me feel at home.

How did you like drinking yaqona?

I have learned to enjoy yaqona in moderation. On the most recent trip, I brought some home from the duty-free shop for my friends to try which was a great experience. Ultimately, I enjoy the ceremonies around drinking yaqona more than the beverage itself.

What was the most memorable thing about the trip?

The most memorable thing about my time in Fiji was the sense of family that I felt in the village. This continued virtually after I left and grew each time I returned.

What are some of the things you learned from spending time in a place so different from your home?

Since first going to Fiji, I have gone on to live in South Africa and now currently I am working in Thailand. I think being able to overcome cultural barriers and connect with people who were brought up very different than you is an amazing skill.

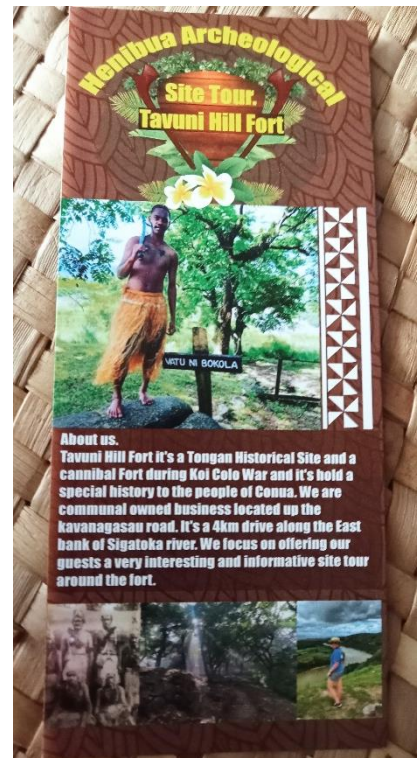
Henibua Archeological Site, Tavuni Hill Fort Brochures

From the site -

“On behalf of our team we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude for your support towards our communal business (Tavuni Hill Fort). Thank you for being there for us during your visit at the site and for your big donation towards the marketing of our products (Brochure). Attached are our new brochure which you've sponsored towards us.

Once again vinaka vakalevu for your big donation n we're looking forward for a new journey together in support of our communal business.

Vinaka vinaka vakalevu For Fiji Friends. Blessings be upon your Family.”



<https://www.fofiji.org/campaigns>

Other Upcoming Events

Virtual Talanoa



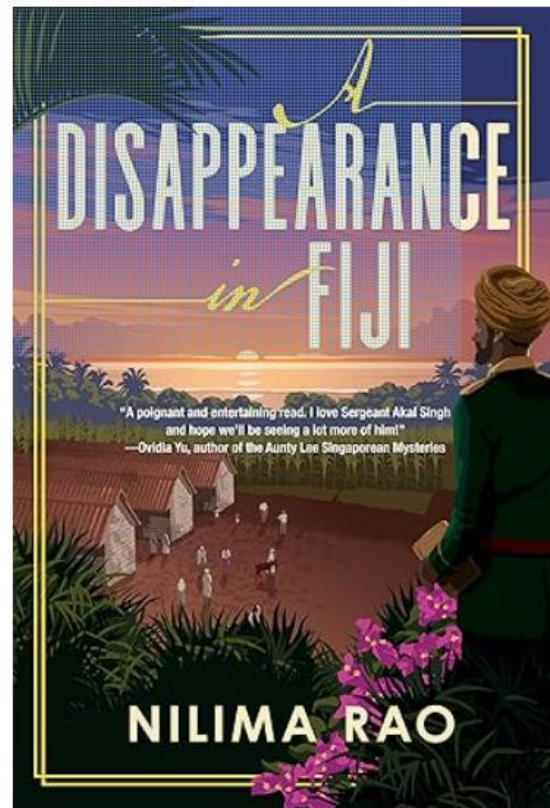
Sunday March 24, 2024 at 6:00 pm eastern time – [Click to RSVP](#)

FoF Book Club - The book for March will be *A Disappearance in Fiji* by Nilima Rao.

“A charming and atmospheric debut mystery featuring a 25-year-old Indian police sergeant investigating a missing persons case in colonial Fiji ... Nilima Rao’s sparkling debut mystery offers an unflinching look at the evils of colonialism, even as it brims with wit, vibrant characters, and fascinating historical detail.”

The book is available on Amazon.com in Kindle, Hardcover, and Paperback format

[Click here to order from Amazon](#)



Peace Corps Response Opportunities

As of this writing there aren't any Peace Corps Response openings in Fiji, but there are in many other countries. Click the link below to see current opportunities –

<https://www.peacecorps.gov/volunteer/peace-corps-response/openings/>

Peace Corps Virtual Service

Open to all over 18 years of age. The Virtual Service Pilot offers qualified individuals the distinct opportunity to apply their professional skills and experience to support Host Country Partners with their community-level projects. Participants are private citizens who donate 5-15 hours each week for 3-6 months in service of the Peace Corps mission.

<https://www.peacecorps.gov/volunteer/virtual-service-pilot/>

Books by Fiji RPCVs

“Perhaps the biggest takeaway from my four years in the Peace Corps was that I found that I loved new adventures. My eyes were opened, and I really liked what I saw. The world is incredible. The opportunities to bless and be blessed are Immense.”

Fred Bell, *Coming Of age In The Cannibal Isles: A Peace Corps Memoir*

We’re building a list of books by Fiji RPCV authors. Let us know if we’re missing any. Most books can be found on Amazon, or used book seller sites.

Bula Pops	Michael Blahut, Fiji 84
Coming of Age in the Cannibal Isles: A Peace Corps Memoir	Jeff Bell, Fiji 3
Dodging Machetes	Will Lutwick, Fiji 2
Fiji and Me	Carol Phillips, Fiji 53
Great Idea! And... Helping others learn to see the beauty in your ideas	Deb Wild, Fiji 54
Green Hills and Blue Lagoons	John Penisten, Fiji 1
Island Years	Mark Odegard, Fiji 26
Letters From Fiji	Keith Kelley, Fiji 73
Shadow Over Fiji	Barbara Restle, Fiji 35
Torn in the Pacific	Jeff Bronow, Fiji 66

Links

Peace Corps

Peace Corps Fiji facebook <https://www.facebook.com/PeaceCorpsFiji/>

RPCV Groups

Friends of Fiji www.fofiji.org
Friends of Fiji org facebook <https://www.facebook.com/BulaFriendsofFiji>
Friends of Fiji group facebook <https://www.facebook.com/groups/13309240876>
NPCA www.peacecorpsconnect.org
Friends of Tonga www.friendsoftonga.org
Peace Corps Worldwide <https://peacecorpsworldwide.org/>
Peace Corps Oral History Project <https://www.peacecorpsoralhistory.org>
Museum of the Peace Corps Experience <https://museumofthepeacecorpsexperience.org/>

Fiji News

Fiji Sun <https://fijisun.com.fj/>
Fiji Times <https://www.fjitime.com/>

Radio

Viti FM <https://radio.garden/listen/viti-fm/kJtLEHUh>
Legend FM https://radio.garden/listen/legend-fm/PP8D8z_V
Navtarang <https://radio.garden/listen/navtarang/xsnmPbga>
Radio Sangeet Masti <https://radio.garden/listen/radio-sangeet-masti/Rh14WTm3>

Culture

Talanoa with Dr. T. <https://www.youtube.com/@talanoawithdr.t4581>
Fiji Museum <https://fijimuseum.org.fj/>
Fijian Stories <https://www.youtube.com/@fijianstories3897>

Sports

Fiji Rugby <https://www.fijirugby.com/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GFyIEoZOok>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EEbjBodEddw>
Fiji Football <https://www.fijifootball.com.fj/>
Fiji Basketball <https://www.facebook.com/basketballfiji/>
Fiji Netball <https://www.netballfiji.org/>

Government

Embassy of Fiji in U.S. <https://www.fijiembassydc.com/>
U.S. Embassy in Fiji <https://fj.usembassy.gov/>
<https://www.facebook.com/usembassysuva/>

Thank you for reading this newsletter and for supporting Friends of Fiji.
To become a member, please click the link below. It's free!!!

[Join Now](#)



Board of Directors:

Jim Reiersen	President
Seokmin Kim	Vice President
Barbara Mutz	Treasurer
Lindsey Kren	Secretary
Jay Sztuk	Membership / Newsletter
Lalesh Nagy	Events
Anne Baker	NPCA Liason
Deb Stice	Projects
Anthony Zenos	Projects

Board of Directors Emeritus:

Alice Alexander
David Downes
Cynthia Grant
Fred Mosher
Beth Shearer
Sala Sucu

Contact – info@fofiji.org

