

# partners

*Committed People for Creative Action*

## Building Bridges

### DOUBLING THE NATION'S VOLUNTEERS, ONE VOLUNTEER AT A TIME

Crisis can set the table for opportunity. On February 4th, in the shadow of global economic crisis, Partners of the Americas coordinated an inspired gathering of over 100 international volunteer organizations, universities, government agencies and corporations at Gallaudet University in Washington DC. The consensus of the gathering was clear: International voluntary service and citizen diplomacy are more important now than ever.

The conference was sponsored by the Building Bridges Coalition (BBC), which includes organizations such as the Brookings Institution, Peace Corps, and American University. As one of the founding institutional members of the BBC, Partners was asked to convene major practitioners to advance the coalition's goal of doubling the number of international volunteers by 2010. Plenary speakers included former Sen. Harris Wofford, a veteran of the Kennedy Administration; David Caprara of Brookings; and Brian Chelcun, aide to Sen. Russell Feingold. Fifteen Partners' volunteers and staff participated - from Washington DC, New Jersey, Oregon, Massachusetts and Paraguay.

Wofford put current volunteer numbers into perspective: "If we double the number of active [Peace Corps] volunteers by 2010,

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HONORING ONE MAN'S DEDICATION TO  
EXPANDING OUR CULTURAL HORIZONS

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**November 12-14, 2009  
Washington, DC**

**Education and International  
Voluntary Service:  
A Sum Greater than its Parts**

New Alliances toward Progress  
A New Kind of Partners Convention

Stay tuned for more information  
soon at [www.partners.net](http://www.partners.net)

**E**ven during times of uncertainty, our volunteers see new opportunities to make a real difference in the communities where they work and serve. Partners has been part of a growing network of organizations who champion international volunteerism as part of a key strategy for building understanding and collaboration.

Our history as an organization shows that in order to find solutions to the many longstanding and unforeseen challenges affecting our communities, we need to rely on people-to-people engagement.

As you will read in this newsletter's lead article, Partners hosted a gathering of Partners volunteers, international volunteer organizations, universities, government agencies and corporations at Gallaudet University in Washington D.C. The participants were focused on one general question: How do we coordinate our efforts to provide more and better opportunities to those who want to serve internationally? The new administration has shown itself to be open to our suggestions by committing to approve the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act that will expand the number of volunteers and the funds to support their work.

We will be building on this momentum by holding our annual convention on November 12-14 here in Washington, titled "Education and International Voluntary Service: A Sum Greater than its Parts." Never before has the convergence of education and international service been so pronounced. Volunteer organizations seek to tap into the ideas and energy of students. Students want to engage internationally to make a difference. Universities scramble to meet student demands responsibly, sorting through the multitude of volunteer organizations -- including Partners of the Americas -- to ensure a quality experience.

Our growing network of volunteers is an example of how to achieve a true and lasting impact on individuals across borders and languages. Our goal is to transform citizens from every corner of the Americas into active agents of change through volunteering in their communities and internationally. We hope you will join us in our efforts and keep us informed of your work.



## BUILDING BRIDGES

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we will arrive at the very same number of Americans volunteering internationally as we had in 1966." Such a quantum leap in international volunteerism, he observed, "sends a message. This says to the world, 'we are here to help.'" Presentations and dialogue were followed by working sessions to share effective practices, form new alliances and assess the changing policy environment.

Service, volunteerism, citizen engagement and public diplomacy are deeply-held and long-practiced values

in the United States and, increasingly, in the Western Hemisphere. These values inspired the citizens mentioned in President Obama's inaugural speech: "the risk takers, the doers, the makers of things—some celebrated but more often men and women obscure in their labor—who have carried us up the long rugged path towards prosperity and freedom." To expand this spirit beyond US borders will indeed answer the president's call for "a recognition on the part of every American that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world."

We in Partners know that citizen-to-citizen engagement between

nations helps solve community challenges, alleviate poverty and diminish inequalities. We know that it also empowers nations to expand diplomacy to include every willing citizen. As Partners we continue to champion volunteerism, from the Summit of the Americas to our local governments. With the Building Bridges Coalition, we will strive to double the number of our volunteers.

To read more about the Brookings Initiative see [www.brookings.edu/global/volunteer](http://www.brookings.edu/global/volunteer). To see the agenda for the BBC conference, see [www.partners.net/BBC](http://www.partners.net/BBC).



*From left to right, Luz Stella Gomez, Alberto Gomez and Anita Burris-Meyer.*



*School children in Colombia showing their appreciation for Anita.*

## Anita Burris-Meyer (1915-2009)

Florida Partners member for over 30 years, Past Chapter President, and Chapter Executive Director for 15 years until her death in February, 2009. Past member of the International By-Laws Committee, and the International Elections Committee.

Partnerships that are very fortunate have a member who embodies and remembers the chapter's history, whose enthusiasm for Partners never wanes, who insists that things be done properly, and who loves the idea of Partners. The Florida and Colombian Partners lost such a person on the 17th of February. Anita Burris-Meyer gave over 30 years of service to our Partnership and was very active in the management and planning of the Partnership until the day she died.

Anita was tough and demanding. She set a high standard for herself and for the Florida Partners, and she was not afraid to call attention to the areas where we were lacking. Her goals and dreams for both the Florida and the Colombian Chapters were very ambitious and in many ways her persistence (and prodding) led to Partners in Florida and in Colombia accomplishing more than they ever

thought they could.

Many examples could be cited of Anita's persistence leading to a successful project, but the most recent success of the "Our Birds Are Your Birds Too" Project will have to suffice for this tribute. Please refer to the following article on this project.

Perhaps one final anecdote will leave the reader with a sense of Anita as an exemplary and adaptable partner. Years ago, perhaps when Anita was about 75, there were important Partner issues to be discussed in Colombia. Anita volunteered to go and, rather than seek Partners funds, she decided to use a cargo plane that was often available to take an extra person from Florida to Colombia at no charge. When she landed in Cali there were no immigration services in the freight section of the airport, so Anita was an illegal alien in Colombia for a time. She endured all of this with

good humor and conducted Partners business while the Colombian Partners resolved the immigration issue. But the adventure was not over. On the return flight, the cargo hold had been chilled to keep a shipment of fish from spoiling. Anita practically "froze with the fishes" as she would later say until the pilots invited her into the cockpit. She laughed often about that trip.

Anita was a very pragmatic person. She believed that volunteers should work with what they have to accomplish what they can. But she was also an idealist, who believed that we should set the highest goals for ourselves as volunteers and for our Partnerships as organizations. She knew that these big dreams may never fully be accomplished, but she urged us to pursue them nonetheless. We were fortunate to have Anita's volunteer spirit with us for over thirty years and we hope that her example of pragmatism and idealism will continue to guide the Florida and Colombian Partnerships.

*Written by Dr. John Schorr, President of the Florida/Eastern and Central Colombia Chapter*

# Taking Flight

## MIGRATORY BIRDS BRINGING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

Colorful banners highlighting migratory birds swung in the entrance way of Eduardo Umana Mendoza Elementary School, greeting its guests. Seated on chairs in front of a third grade classroom, two U. S. visitors were surrounded by the excited, smiling faces of chatting children as they pushed closer to their guests, pleasantly smothering them with their curious nature.



Mendoza students working on painting a banner of birds and their habitats.

Florida Partner member and Blue Lake science teacher, Patricia Swen, journeyed 1,700 miles from DeLand to meet with project coordinators and teachers at the Eduardo Umana Mendoza School located on the southern outskirts of Bogota. Here the culmination of a ten year project was in the hopeful stages of serious progress in which our Youth Ambassadors would utilize migratory birds as a commonality for dialogue.

It was Florida Partner Dr. Robert Coyne, who first wrote and obtained a grant through the Florida Audubon Society in his efforts to unite children from counterpart countries with a

common cause. El Colegio Integrado de Fontibón, an inner city school located in Bogota, was first chosen for the project. The school began training and education initiatives that transitioned the school as an advocate for nature conservation, highlighting endangered bird species in the region. The students led and participated in informational programs and initiated an annual community birding festival. In the fall of 2007, Blue Lake Elementary was contacted by Florida partner and Stetson University student Alison McKellar to join this project. As Blue Lake's lead project teacher, Swen worked with University

of Florida Agricultural Extension agent, Laura Cash, who trained approximately 600 students on local birds and environmental habitats. By integrating state curriculum, students researched local birds, mapped migratory routes, and created captioned bird illustrations.

Now as a new school year begins for the students of Eduardo Umana Mendoza Elementary, they will take with them a collaborative experience and a better understanding of two different cultures. This January, the migratory birding project began anew, and as students are to discover once more, "Our Birds Are Your Birds, Too."

## RHYTHMIC EXPRESSIONS: A HIP HOP EXCHANGE

This past year the Massachusetts-Antioquia Partnership has begun reaching out to new programs which involve youth, art, and culture through an innovative Hip Hop exchange: La Lengua de mi Barrio. La Lengua is an exchange network between youth groups in Boston and Colombia who seek to express their personal and communal realities through the international language of Hip Hop, using visual arts, music, poetry, and dance which has encouraged them to explore non-violent alternatives to their difficulties. In October of 2008, with the support of Partners of the Americas, La Lengua de mi Barrio was able to realize its first guided exchange with both an international and a national artist. Lady Enchantress, from Boston, Massachusetts, and MC Ebony, from Cartagena, Colombia, spent 10 days in Antioquia, Colombia visiting Hip Hop schools, youth and arts organizations, and performing in the Hip 4 Festival.

We are proud to announce that this exchange was chosen at the Binational Partners conference to be a new Pan-Colombian initiative. For more info, contact Ruth Henry, La Lengua exchange coordinator, at [ruthkathryn@yahoo.com](mailto:ruthkathryn@yahoo.com).

"If our hopes of building a better and safer world are to become more than wishful thinking, we will need the engagement of volunteers more than ever."

KOFI ANNAN  
FORMER SECRETARY-GENERAL  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

There are dishes that evoke entire cultures and the essence of a people, as cherished to them as their flag or national anthem.

To think of Brazil is to think of Carnival, soccer and stunning beaches. However, Brazil holds treasures for every taste and spirit, from its arts to the varied landscapes and music. But for those who wish to begin their discovery of Brazilian culture through their palates, there is one dish that to all Brazilians is Brazil: Feijoada Completa.

A feijoada is a stew made of black beans and different meats including beef slabs, pork loins and ribs, pig's feet, tails and ears, bacon, sausage, and other ingredients such as kale, oranges, onions, garlic and peppers. The main dish is customarily served with rice, farofa (manioc meal fried with a variety of ingredients that include bacon, garlic, onion and boiled eggs) and "couve mineira", or collard greens.

The origins of feijoada date back to the sixteenth century to slaves using the parts of farm animals that plantation owners thought unfit and discarded. Today feijoada is eaten throughout Brazil and each region has its own recipe. The "proper" way of serving feijoada stirs many heated debates, as some prefer their meat to be served in an earthen pot of black bean stew while others will only eat it with the meat served separately. This debate is best left to the professionals, but we invite you to savor the taste of Brazil by trying its national dish, feijoada.

## Leading the Green Construction Revolution

This past January Latino's of Chicago met the Green revolution head on at the full day symposium, "Green World-Mundo Verde," which – initiated by Partners of the Americas, United States Green Building Council (USGBC), and Hispanic American Construction Industry Association (HACLA) – endeavored to educate the Hispanic community on Green building. HACLA was present to prepare its constituents to be competitive in the emerging green workforce. Partners members in Sao Paulo plan to replicate the event through partnership support via

Illinois-Sao Paulo.

By exploring the latest developments from Europe, the attendees who gathered at the Instituto Cervantes compared the U.S. to countries like Spain and Brazil, and were also afforded the opportunity of two site visits: the UNO Veterans Memorial School Campus – an adaptive reuse of a 175,000 square foot complex featuring solar thermal panels and sunlit communal spaces – and a second tour which included a visit to two Chicago Green Homes Certified developments, which featured the reconstruction of a 53-

unit senior rental housing project.

Two of Spain's leading architects – Aurelo Ramirez-Zarzosa and Daniel Hellil Ayala – of the Foresis Company, led a discussion on Spain's Green Building Council, as well as a provocative lecture on philosophical frameworks for thinking about green architecture.

Talks also included preludes on projects-to-be in Chicago's First Ward, like the Green Exchange, which will help the Hispanic community establish itself as a player in the green collar workforce.

# Planned Giving and the Partners Network

## THE NEW ERA

**P**artners of the Americas relies on the continued generosity and dedication of volunteers who contribute their time, skills and energy to building the person-to-person connections that make it a one of a kind organization. In response to queries made by long-term volunteers and friends, we present a series of articles focusing on how planned giving can benefit volunteer members, donor's families and Partners.

With 2009 off to a flying start, there is a high level of curiosity whether the economic strategies being implemented by national and world leaders will prove to be effective. Many Partners members have been affected by current economic events, most are aware that "something is happening" but a significant number have little or no change to their incomes, job situation, and lifestyle. The uncertainty of the future is perhaps the biggest issue, with recent news reports that Americans are saving money at a rate that has not been seen for decades, attempting to create their own liquidity cushion. You may want to consider helping Partners to create a nest egg of cash to ensure work and effectiveness of the organization continues unimpeded regardless of what may develop.

An interesting fact is that private

citizens contribute approximately 75% of all charitable gifts nationwide. The general perception is that foundations and corporations are responsible for most charitable giving, but the reality is that individuals and households provide more gifts. Many people give because they believe in the work an organization does and find supporting the organization's work empowering and enriching. Others give because someone asked them personally to help, and most people find it difficult to say no to a direct request. Some people give simply because they can, and they enjoy the act of sharing. Making a gift won't change your lifestyle, but it could change someone else's life. As our proverbial "cup runneth over," sharing is a vital component of our humanitarian spirit and enhances the effectiveness of Partners.

In the last newsletter, the temporary availability of "Charitable IRA Rollovers" was briefly discussed. This special provision is only available through the end of 2009, and allows IRA Planholders over 70 ½ to directly transfer up to \$100,000 to Partners. Additionally, the Required Minimum Distribution has been suspended for 2009 as a concession to the difficult economic environment, but any substitute amount directly transferred to Partners (up to the \$100,000 limit) would be tax deductible.

We are a volunteer organization moving to a new level of volunteerism where members not only contribute time and skills, but are being encouraged to collaborate and participate in finding funds to ensure the continuation and expansion of our unique organization.

*- Article by Stephen (Steve) Waechter, President, Colorado/Minas Gerais Partnership, Financial Advisor, Waddell & Reed, Inc. 970-353-8800*

*Steve has worked with Waddell & Reed since 1981 as a Registered Representative, Division Manager, and Senior Financial Advisor. His passion is Charitable Estate Planning.*

## ENDOWING OUR CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

**In honor of Ambassador William Stedman, who has decided to resign after more than 20 years of service to Partners of the Americas, we have established the Ambassador William Stedman Endowment. The Endowment will be used to support educational and cultural endeavors, Bill's passion for so many years.**

**Our hope is that this endowment continues to provide others with the opportunity to build friendships through volunteer service and discover that when we strive to understand others, our own lives are enriched. The Ambassador William Stedman Endowment will be a fitting gesture for a man who has had an immeasurable impact on so many of our volunteers' lives.**

**To contribute to the endowment, please visit: [http://www.partners.net/partners/Donate\\_EN.asp](http://www.partners.net/partners/Donate_EN.asp).**

# A Ganar Participants in Top 3 at Football For Hope Championship – Chile 2008

Three participants from the Ecuador A Ganar program formed part of the delegation that represented Ecuador at the South American “Football for Hope” festival and football tournament held in Santiago, Chile from December 1st to the 7th.

The Streetfootballworld Network brings together organizations that use football to overcome social challenges and inspire positive change among both individuals and communities. A Ganar was chosen from dozens of other programs to be one of the 15 delegations to participate in the tournament thanks to its effective methodology and the values that it instills in its participants. Fundación de las Américas [FUDELA], an Ecuadorean NGO created by Partners of the Americas that manages the A Ganar program in Ecuador, and SER PAZ, an organization that works with over 100,000 at-risk youth, along with the participants, raised the money necessary to make the two day trip by bus from Quito to Santiago.

As a member of the Streetfootballworld Network, FUDELA had an excellent debut showing in the Football for Hope Championship. Teaming with other youth from the SER PAZ organization, they reached third place in the five-a-side tournament.

■ **Congratulations:** A luncheon was held on Saturday, February 21st to honor Martha Swasey for her years of service to Partners of the Americas as a member of the Tennessee/Venezuela Chapter. Ms. Swasey is the Director of Signal School of Physical Education in Chattanooga, Tennessee and has served as Past President of the Tennessee-Venezuela Chapter and is a current Board Member of the Tennessee Partners of the Americas. Ms. Swasey expressed gratitude for her experience with Partners and encouraged everyone to get involved. “Partners of the Americas has allowed me to take physical education opportunities to other countries, as well as having broadening cultural exchanges with visitors coming to Chattanooga,” said Ms. Swasey. “It has enriched my life as much as it has enriched our visitors and those I have visited.”

■ **Paraguayan Singer Tours Kansas** – Thanks to the Kansas/Paraguay Partnership, Kansas citizens have had the privilege of seeing Paraguayan singer Liliam Rodriguez and accompanist Diego Sanchez Haase. Rodriguez, who has earned a superior degree in vocal performance and is a well-known soloist in her homeland, has sung with many of Paraguay's major orchestras. The duo will also perform their program of classical works and newly arranged Paraguayan songs in a number of venues throughout the state.

■ **Staff Transitions:** Partners would like to bid a warm farewell to **Jeremy Slezak**, our former Resource Development Officer. Jeremy will be joining the State Department as a new Foreign Service Officer and we look forward to his continued involvement with Partners in the future. We would also like to welcome **Ann-Lloyd Hufstader** as our Director of New Program Development and **Priya Bapat** as a new Program Officer for the *Farmer to Farmer* Program.

**Keep us in the loop!** When your chapter gets press recognition, we want to know about it! Send a clean copy of press clippings or links to Michael Sayre at msayre@partners.net or 1424 K St. NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005.

Partners is published by the Partners of the Americas International Office with contributions from chapter members. Electronic newsletters are available at [www.partners.net](http://www.partners.net). To contribute articles, please contact us at [info@partners.net](mailto:info@partners.net).

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## Youth Perspectives from Villa de Leyva

In November 2008, over 80 volunteers from five countries gathered in Villa de Leyva, Colombia for a US-Colombia conference titled: Strengthening a Learning Network: Learning from our collective experiences in order to build a new and impactful future. Below are some thoughts that the Youth Ambassadors who participated in the peer learning event shared about the impact of the conference:

### ***What impact did the conference have?***

"The support of people, the unconditional cooperation of members of Partners filled me and my partners with energy to continue with our purposes, projects that motivate the children and youths to want to overcome and create a better future."

- Cindy Gomez

### ***How do you think this conference helped to promote the inclusion of youth in future programs?***

"I greatly admire the effort that Partners makes to involve youth, [Partners] opens up new paths and innovative ideas for those who will be the future leaders in charge of watching over and working to improve many of the current situations through the expansion and implementation of different programs and projects."

- Nathaly Rivera Victoria

Visit [http://www.partners.net/partners/Peer\\_Learning\\_EN.asp](http://www.partners.net/partners/Peer_Learning_EN.asp) to find out more about this and other peer learning events.

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