

Chicago Area Peace Corps Association 2003 Annual Report

The Chicago Area Peace Corps Association (CAPCA) brings together Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) in the Chicago area. Organized in 1979 and incorporated in 1991 as a non-profit organization, CAPCA is affiliated with the Washington, D.C. based National Peace Corps Association (NPCA). CAPCA's primary objective is to fulfill, in the Chicago area, the mission of the NPCA – continuing to work for world peace, understanding, and well-being, with an emphasis on bringing the world back home. CAPCA carries out this mission by raising funds to support Peace Corps Partnership projects that offer leadership and cross-cultural experiences, providing speakers to organizations interested in the Peace Corps and international development, and participating in volunteer activities throughout the year. In addition, CAPCA provides numerous social and networking opportunities and several communication channels to reach its membership. CAPCA publishes a bi-monthly newsletter, has a well-utilized electronic list serve, and maintains a frequently-visited website – www.capca.org. At the end of 2003, CAPCA's total number of active members was at 230 comprised of joint CAPCA/NPCA paid memberships, CAPCA/NPCA free memberships (for RPCVs in their first-year back) and CAPCA-only memberships

CAPCA's biggest activity in 2003 was planning for the 2004 NPCA conference. In January, Trina Janes and Stephanie Arnold traveled to Providence to present to the NPCA board the CAPCA proposal to host the 2004 conference. The board approved Chicago as the venue and the conference theme. In April, CAPCA nominated then president Stephanie Arnold as a candidate for the one-year Great Lakes Regional Representative. She was subsequently elected and has been tremendously helpful in facilitating the contact between CAPCA and NPCA in preparing for the 2004 conference in Chicago. Conference Chair Trina Janes and Vice-Chair Chuck Sheftel have provided great leadership and recruited a number of key volunteers to organize the conference. The conference will be held August 5-8, 2004, which nicely coincides with CAPCA's 25th Anniversary. Trina and Stephanie traveled to Portland in August to participate in the NPCA General Annual meeting and to promote the conference to participants – primarily leaders of the COS groups. The Burnison Group led by Judi Burnison was hired by NPCA to serve as the professional manager for the conference and work with the CAPCA volunteer team. The committee holds monthly planning meetings. CAPCA is hoping to attract nearly two thousand people for the four day event. The theme of the conference is "Celebrating a Legacy of Service". At the end of 2003, the conference launched its official website – www.rpcv2004.org - with information, program updates and online registration.

CAPCA organizes at least one activity per month for members to socialize and have fun. CAPCA continued its long-standing tradition of monthly dinner meetings at many of Chicago's fine international restaurants or hosted by other organizations with similar interests. As an incentive to boost membership, CAPCA began adding a nominal surcharge above the cost of the food for non-members attending dinners. A CAPCA board member with a current membership list and membership enrollment forms checked in attendees the door. This brought in several new members and served as an alert those who were about to expire that they should renew. CAPCA also continued to hold successful special events like the annual Founder's Day dinner, holiday potluck and summer picnic potluck. Each year CAPCA members also organize two camping weekends at Camp Vista in Dundee, Wisconsin, and assemble a summer softball team called the Culture Shocks.

January's dinner, planned by Kim Chulis, took place at Café Bolero, a Cuban restaurant on the west side of the city. Nearly 40 members attended and enjoyed the buffet and a chance to network on a cold winter night. The weekend of Jan 31-February 2, many CAPCA members attended the winter Camp Vista weekend, where they had the chance to ski, hike and enjoy home-cooked food, games and the company of other RPCVs. The group returned to Camp Vista in the summer for another weekend with hiking, biking, swimming, cookouts and nights by the camp fire. CAPCA members organized an informal happy hour in January at the Huttenbar on the city's far north side, which brought some recently returned volunteers who hadn't been to monthly dinners. It was such a success that they planned another happy hour in February at a musical venue close to downtown, Rhythm.

In February the Chicago Peace Corps recruiting office partnered with CAPCA to host a diversity dinner of soul food at Daley's on the city's south side. The location, venue and focus of the event drew nominees and a large number of RPCVs who haven't been active in CAPCA for years. In March, CAPCA members dined at the Greek Islands in Chicago's Greektown, planned by Board member Marie Erdman. Also in March the board engaged in a second retreat to determine strategic goals for the coming years. Nearly every board member was present for the day long meeting to discuss: building membership, identifying new activities that members can engage in,

identifying roles for each of the board members, planning for leadership succession, planning strategy for the upcoming 1+years leading up to and beyond the conference.

CAPCA tries to vary the location of the monthly dinner meetings and holds events in the nearby northern and western suburbs at least once each year. Board member Kara Malenfant planned the April dinner at the Kabul House in Skokie. This northwest suburban location drew over 45 RPCVs who were interested in learning more about Afghanistan and engaging in some person-to-person diplomacy at a time when coalition troops were waging war there. CAPCA and the newly forming "DuPage County" RPCV group worked to gather a group to attend a Youssou N'Dour concert at the College of DuPage scheduled for early April. Unfortunately N'Dour cancelled his US tour over threat of war in March. In the spring the board voted to fund a project by board member Rachel's Sharon called "Seeds of Learning" in Nicaragua.

In May, CAPCA members enjoyed some middle eastern hospitality, facilitated by organizer and CAPCA member Jeff Mattison, at Olive Mountain in north suburban Evanston. In May Leslie Jean-Pierre, President of the Minority Peace Corps Association, came to Chicago to discuss the possibilities of starting a MPCA chapter. CAPCA Board member Liz Thomas, worked with her to facilitate this visit, believing that given it's diversity, Chicago would be a supportive environment for starting an MPCA chapter.

June brought CAPCA's annual Founder's Day fundraiser at Maggiano's. CAPCA member Christine Blair chaired this successful event which drew 89 attendees and raised \$4,284.49, comparing favorably to recent years. Proceeds were used to fund two Peace Corps Partnership projects by Illinois RPCVs – Bamako Waste Management Improvement Initiative in Mali and the Computer Learning Center in Romania. The evening featured family-style Italian dining, a silent auction & raffle, and keynote address by Noel Kreicker, RPCV Philippines '67-'69, President and Founder of IOR Global Services. Joseph Permetti, Director of Development and Membership at the National Peace Corps Association, Virginia Koch, Regional Manager, Chicago Peace Corps Office, and Stephanie Arnold, CAPCA President, also provided brief updates about their respective organizations.

In July the DuPage RPCV group, later affiliated formally as Northeastern Illinois RPCVs, kindly invited CAPCA to join in their family picnic in the west suburbs. CAPCA members put on another informal happy hour in July at Lizzie McNeill's on the Chicago River. It brought some recently evacuated volunteers from Morocco who were working to readjust and had many questions about living in Chicago. Other summer activities included the summer Camp Vista weekend in July and the Culture Shocks softball team of RPCVs and friends that played throughout the season. In August, Board member Chuck Sheftel organized a repeat of last year's successful summer potluck at Ravinia, a north suburban summer music festival, for CAPCA members, family and friends. About 30 picnicked and enjoyed a musical performance of Mozart, Beethoven and Bernstein. This was Christoph Eschenbach's final Chicago Symphony Orchestra performance as Ravinia's music director.

In September, the Milwaukee Peace Corps Association (MPCA) invited CAPCA members to join them again for a Cubs vs. Brewers game at Miller Park in Milwaukee. With many CAPCA members willing to make the road trip to see the Cubs win, which they did in impressive fashion, and socialize with Milwaukee RPCVs, this year drew nearly 50 participants - almost an even split between MPCA and CAPCA members and friends. Prior to the game, the group met for a tasty champagne brunch at Saz's Restaurant, not far from the Miller Brewing Co. corporate headquarters and the new baseball park. A good time was had by all. It is hoped that this can become an annual affair and that CAPCA will host MPCA members at Wrigley Field in the future.

In the fall, former CAPCA president Brian DeFilippo began a new committee to connect RPCVs to the community, specifically targeting teenagers and grade school children through workshops he calls "Passport to the World". He envisions this as away to expose participants to a variety of global and social issues and enhance cultural understanding in a fun and participatory way atmosphere.

CAPCA's general annual meeting was held at the September dinner meeting at Ina's. Guests Kevin Quigley & Joseph Permetti from NPCA updated the nearly 60 attendees on the latest in Washington. CAPCA's board elections were also held at this meeting. CAPCA currently has several non-elected ex-officio board members: Stephanie Arnold (Immediate Past President and NPCA Great Lakes Representative), Melissa Hall (newsletter editor), Judy Ossello (website team), Liz Thomas and Jeri Titus (liaisons to the Regional Peace Corps Recruiting Office). Newly elected board members are: Christine Blair and Carol Wilkerson. Three CAPCA Board members were reelected: Trina Janes, Chuck Sheftel, and Wallace Goode. Continuing board members are Beth Versten,

Marie Erdman, and Kara Malenfant. During 2003 two board members stepped down, Kim Chulis and Rachel Sharon who was leaving the country. At the October board meeting, the current slate of officers was re-elected as follows: President: Wallace Goode, Vice Presidents: Marie Erdman and Kara Malenfant, Secretary: Christine Blair. Goode proposed appointing additional board members and the board agreed. They are Kori Scurlock, Holly Denniston, Eva Lord, Lara Weber, and Lee Losey – who is returning to Chicago and the CAPCA board after many years away. Eva Lord subsequently took on the role of treasurer. CAPCA's board meets monthly.

In October, CAPCA members filled every seat at Dina's African Restaurant enjoying a buffet of tasty Ghanaian food organized by Stephanie Arnold. In November, CAPCA members were once again invited to join the Oak Park Council on International Affairs for their Annual Peace Corps Partnership Fundraising Dinner. The Oak Park Council has sponsored more than 260 Peace Corps Partnership Projects since the first dinner was hosted 40 years ago. CAPCA holds only one event during November/December. In December, CAPCA hosted the 5th Annual Holiday Potluck at the Corinthian Yacht Club. Several CAPCA members helped to make this event a success – particularly Eric Kerlow, who makes the venue available to us each year, Helen Haugsnes, who co-chaired the event with Lucinda Boyd, and several CAPCA members volunteered to help out. It was a big success attracting close to 80 attendees.

CAPCA had a successful year in 2003 and set ambitious goals for the coming years.