

# PEACE CORPS

*50 Years of  
Promoting Friendship  
and Peace*



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Cover: A peace Corps volunteer helps a student in southern Africa.

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## **Peace Corps: 50 Years of Promoting Friendship and Peace**

### **3 50 Years of the Peace Corps**

JOSHUA BERMAN, TRAVEL WRITER AND  
RETURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER

For 50 years Peace Corps volunteers have shared skills, built friendships and cultivated greater understanding between Americans and other world citizens.

### **6 Peace Corps: The Next 50 Years**

AARON S. WILLIAMS, DIRECTOR OF THE  
PEACE CORPS

The Peace Corps will continue to meet the world's challenges with innovation, creativity, determination and compassion.

### **8 Volunteers at Work**

Kathleen Fraser, Panama  
Peter and Alene Kennedy Hendricks,  
Republic of Georgia  
Tia Tucker, Morocco  
Don Hesse, Jordan  
Jared Tharp, Senegal  
Juan Rodriguez, Guyana  
Rachelle Olden, Dominican Republic  
Scott Lea, Indonesia  
Kelly Petrowski, Malawi  
Albin Sikora, Bulgaria  
Patty and Harvey Gagnon,  
Kyrgyz Republic  
Löki Tobin, Azerbaijan



© AP Images/Heng Smith

Volunteer Colin Dayly, 23, spends time with his host family in a Cambodian village in 2007.

joined the Peace Corps nearly 40 years earlier — to see the world, to meet its people and to participate in one of the boldest experiments ever conducted in American public service.

The original mission of the Peace Corps — to send Americans abroad to share skills, promote peace and friendship and to improve inter-cultural understanding — is anchored to one of the most optimistic moments in U.S. history. An exhausted John F. Kennedy, the story goes, was campaigning for election as president in 1960. He arrived at the University of Michigan in the middle of the night, ready to sleep, but when he encountered a crowd of 10,000 students who had been patiently waiting for him, candidate Kennedy agreed to speak. For some reason, instead of simply shouting a few campaign slogans and going to bed, JFK issued a historical challenge that would echo across generations:

“How many of you who are going to be doctors are willing to spend your days in Ghana?” he asked. “Technicians or engineers, how many of you are willing to work in the Foreign Service and spend your lives traveling around the world?”

Kennedy’s quick and improvised speech looked ahead to the famous line from his inaugural address a few months later: “Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country.” But this first challenge to the students in Michigan was more specific, and it struck a strong nerve among those who heard it.

As it turned out, there were plenty of Americans

willing to spend their days in Ghana, their lives traveling the world. The idea was not entirely new, but a major government initiative to create and manage such a force of volunteers was new, and in March 1961, only months after being sworn in as president, Kennedy signed Executive Order 10924, providing for the establishment and administration of the Peace Corps.

“Life in the Peace Corps will not be easy,” he warned. “Men and women will be expected to work and live alongside the nationals of the country in which they are stationed — doing the same work, eating the same food, talking the same language.”

Despite these challenges, volunteers signed up by the thousands. As more

and more governments invited the Peace Corps to work in their countries, the program quickly expanded from two countries — Ghana and Tanzania — to dozens of developing countries worldwide. They lived deep in their assigned cities and villages. They worked with farmers, teachers, and health workers; they taught English; they helped raise fish and farm animals.

Throughout the 1960s, Peace Corps volunteers were assigned to newly independent but impoverished countries emerging from colonialism. The organization’s lofty goals of peace and development were genuine, and so was the Cold War–inspired mission to promote democracy and improve America’s image and influence.

In the 1970s, assignments became more targeted, and volunteers with more work experience were selected to serve. The average age of volunteers rose during this time — from 22 to 28 — and the percentage of volunteers over the age of 50 also climbed. By 1974, the Peace Corps had been invited to work in 69 countries, an all-time high.

In 1979, the Peace Corps was finally granted full autonomy within the executive branch of the U.S. government (it had previously been an agency within the State Department). During President Ronald Reagan’s administration in the 1980s, the size of the program and number of volunteers dropped, but new initiatives, especially to promote food security, were launched in the Caribbean, Central America and Africa.

The organization continued to evolve with the times. In 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union,

# Peace Corps: The Next 50 Years

Aaron S. Williams



Peace Corps Director Aaron Williams meets with school children in Thailand.

*The Peace Corps will continue to meet the world's challenges with innovation, creativity, determination and compassion. Aaron S. Williams is director of the Peace Corps. He served as a Peace Corps volunteer in the small town of Monte Plata, Dominican Republic, from 1967 to 1970.*

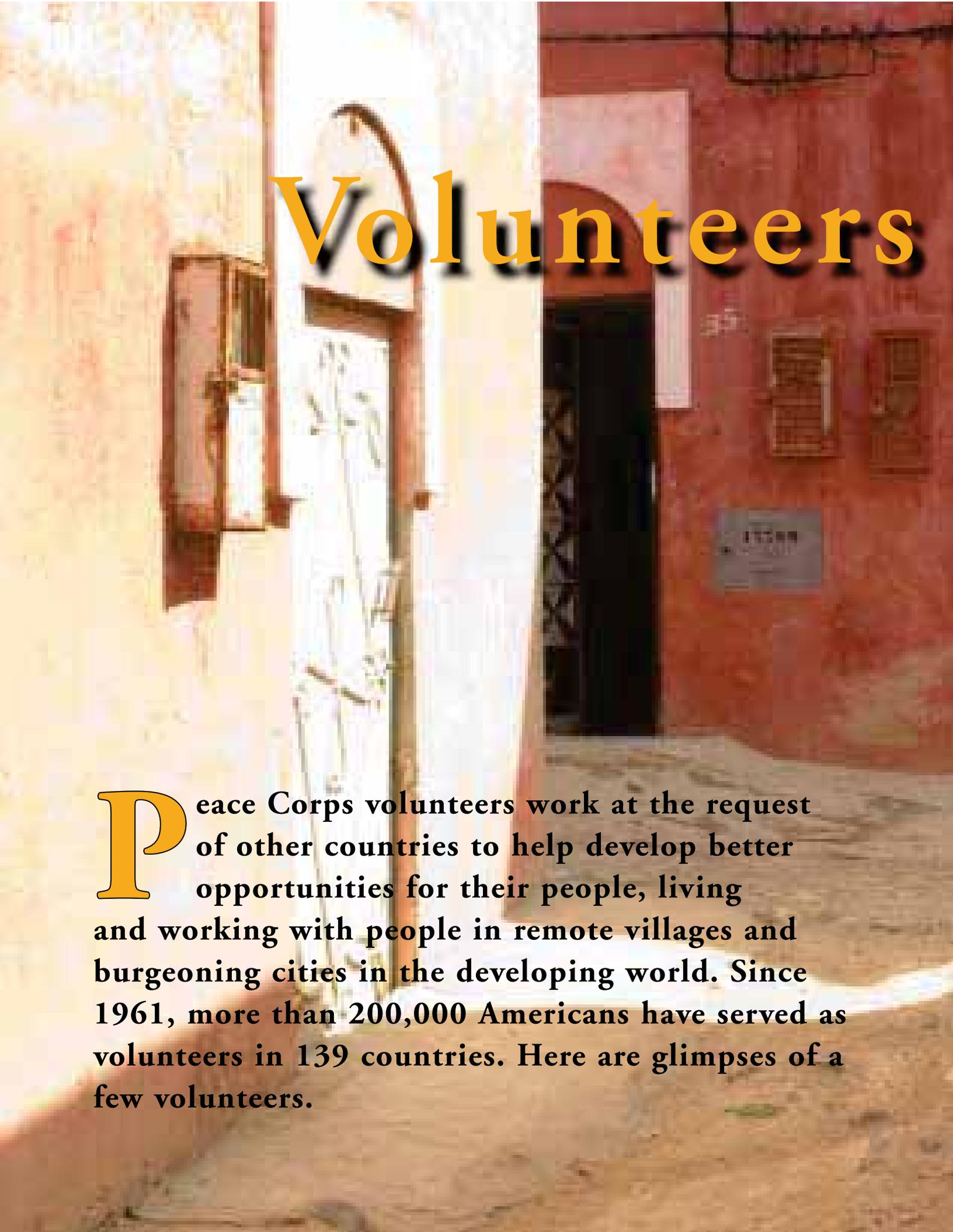
Fifty years ago presidential candidate John F. Kennedy arrived at the University of Michigan's campus to deliver a campaign speech. It was late — nearly 2 a.m. — and the students were tired. But in Ann Arbor that cold October night Kennedy issued a daring challenge to the students:

“How many of you who are going to be doctors ... are willing to spend your days in Ghana? How many of

you are willing to work in the Foreign Service and spend your lives traveling around the world?” Kennedy asked the students.

Kennedy's off-the-cuff speech lasted only a few minutes, but in that short time he described a vision for young Americans to serve their country by serving abroad. That vision lives on in the more than 200,000 Americans who have served as Peace Corps volunteers in 139 countries since 1961. And, while the world has changed significantly since the Peace Corps' founding 50 years ago, the mission of promoting world peace and friendships remains the same.

Today's volunteers meet the world's challenges with innovation, creativity, determination and compassion. And they have tools unimagined when I was a Peace



# Volunteers

**P**ace Corps volunteers work at the request of other countries to help develop better opportunities for their people, living and working with people in remote villages and burgeoning cities in the developing world. Since 1961, more than 200,000 Americans have served as volunteers in 139 countries. Here are glimpses of a few volunteers.

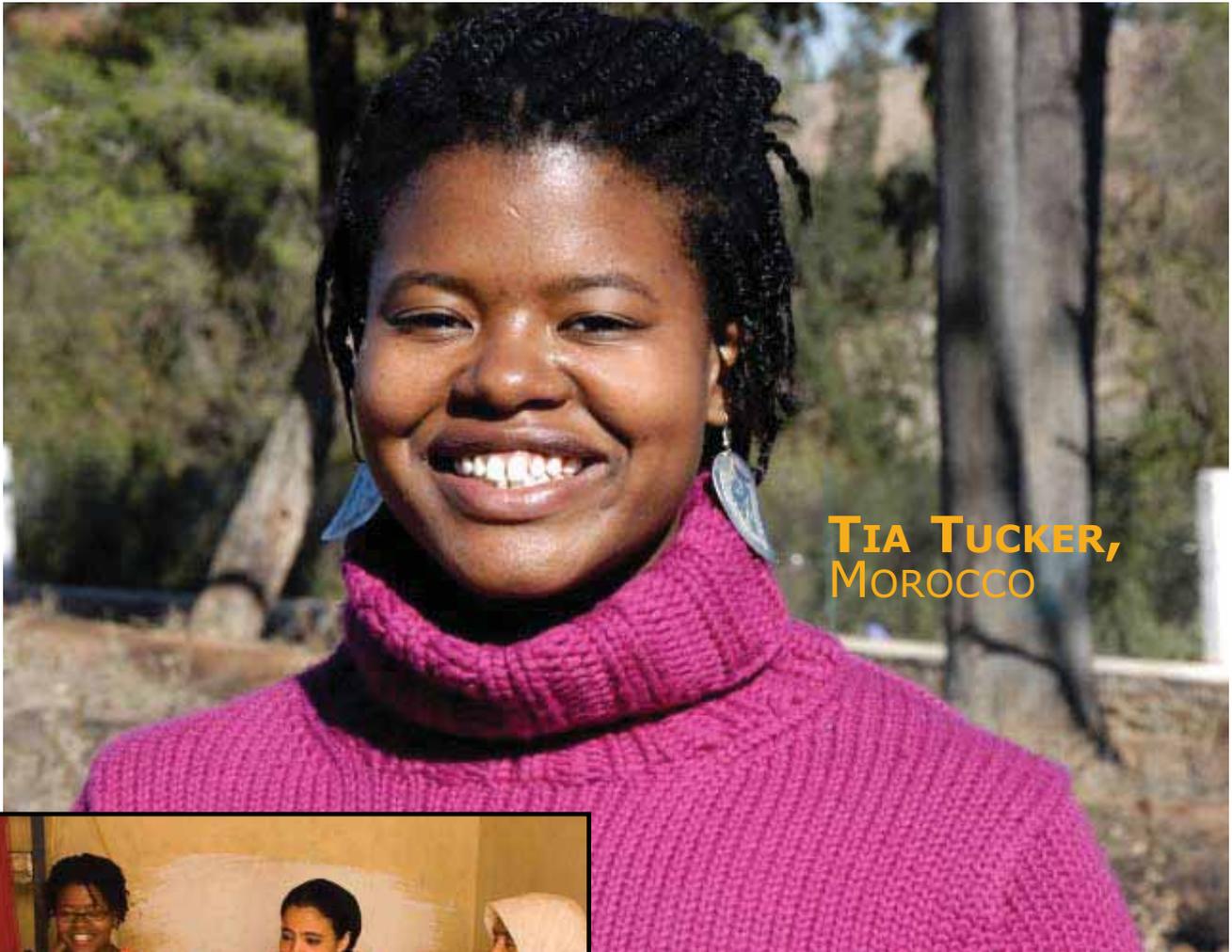
**KATHLEEN FRASER,  
PANAMA**



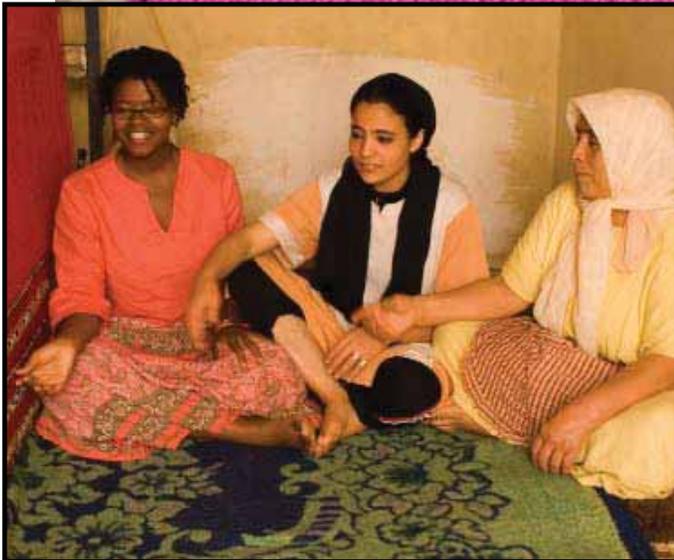
**Her business skills helped lift the income of coffee growers.**



After working for two years in the U.S. financial sector, Kathleen Fraser of North Carolina was able to apply her business skills as a Peace Corps volunteer in rural Araglacias, Panama. During her time there, she worked with a small group of women to build and maintain beehives and sell honey to the tourist market. Fraser also helped coffee producers earn more money from their crop by toasting and grinding the beans instead of just selling the raw coffee cherries. “There are a lot of intermediaries involved in the coffee chain,” she said, “so the higher up that they can be on that chain, the more money they can earn.”



**TIA TUCKER,**  
MOROCCO



She let people know  
that they had a voice.

Besides teaching English in Tiflet, Morocco, Tia Tucker of Louisiana worked closely with women in the community. During her time in Morocco, Tucker worked with a women’s sewing group and advised a women’s weaving co-op. She taught the women about nutrition, exercise and disease prevention, but also helped them realize that women can have a voice — that they can impart useful knowledge. “They think, ‘I know something, and I can share it with somebody else. Just because I didn’t finish high school or just because I am a girl doesn’t mean I am not important,’” she said.



**JARED THARP, SENEGAL**



## An urban agriculturist grows food for the poor and sick, seizing new ways to provide therapy.

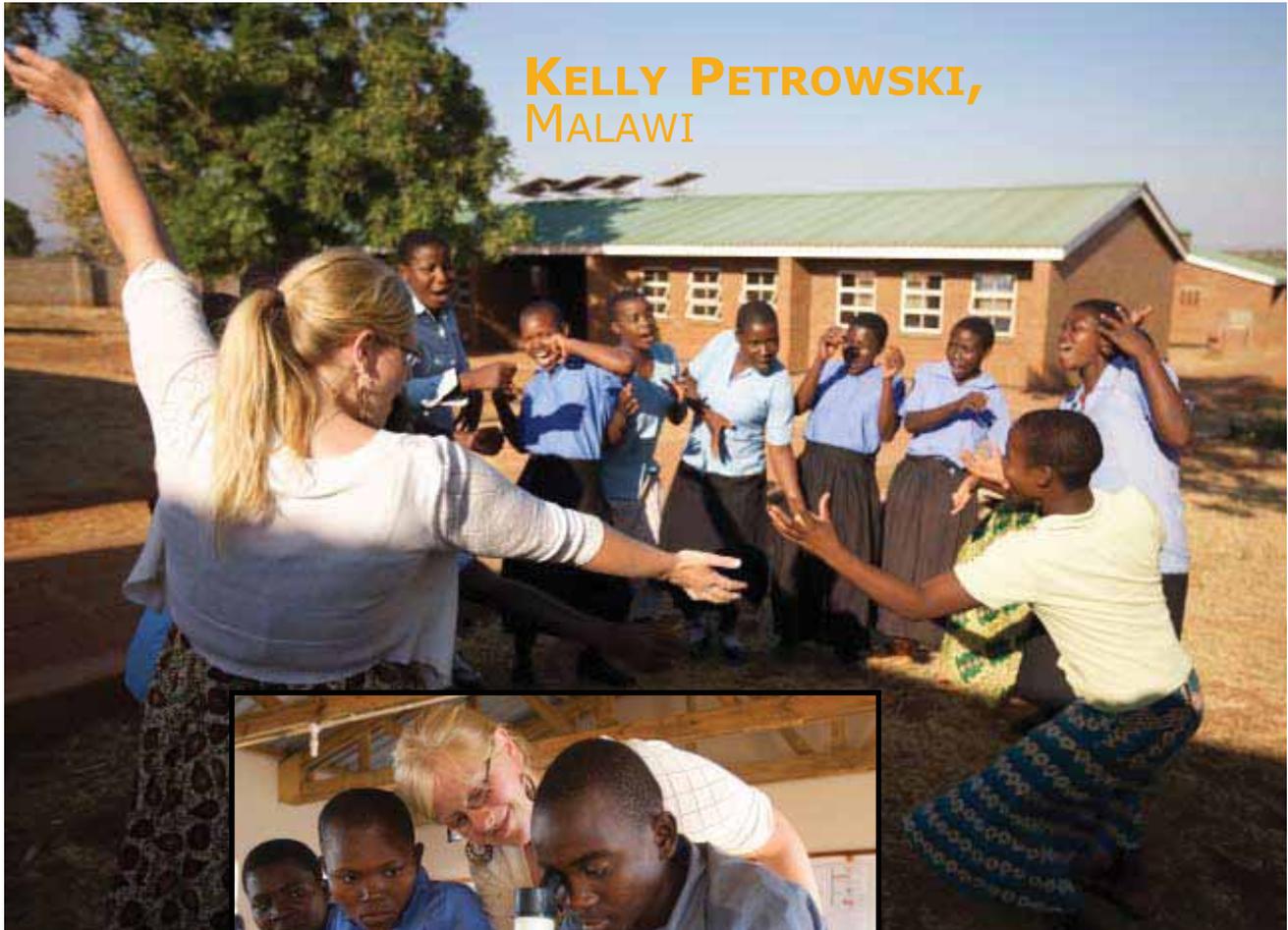
Californian Jared Tharp worked as an urban agriculturist in Dakar, Senegal. He and three local assistants worked in a garden at a hospital to provide free food to poor patients in the infectious disease ward. About two-thirds of those patients had HIV/AIDS and suffered from poor nutrition; most could not afford the regular hospital meals. At the same hospital, Tharp worked in another garden for the psychiatric ward. That garden not only produced food for patients, but also provided patients with therapeutic activity.

## Rachelle Olden, Dominican Republic



### Young people get a lesson in making healthy choices.

Some young women in Santiago, Dominican Republic, got a lengthy lesson about healthy living from Rachelle Olden of South Carolina. Olden taught them about avoiding HIV/AIDS, making healthy decisions and building self-esteem. The young women went back to their neighborhood schools, youth groups and community centers and shared what they had learned. At one of those community centers, Olden encouraged some boys and girls to paint a mural about this initiative. “This is a mural for *Escojo mi vida*, and *Escojo mi vida* means ‘I choose my life,’ which means I choose what decisions I make — I make my own healthy decisions and I protect myself from HIV and AIDS,” she said.



**KELLY PETROWSKI,  
MALAWI**

## A science teacher motivated her students by making class fun.

The only science teacher for more than 300 students at a secondary school in rural Malawi, Kelly Petrowski of Illinois taught biology and physical science. The school had no electricity or running water, but it did have science books, microscopes, glassware and chemicals. When she arrived, all that equipment was sitting in boxes without instructions. Sorting through the boxes to set up a lab was a challenge. Even more challenging was getting students to show up for class, but she won them over by doing some fun activities. “A big thing for me is that the students are becoming more motivated,” Petrowski said.

## PATTY AND HARVEY GAGNON, KYRGYZ REPUBLIC



Teaching English through  
American pop songs and  
dance.

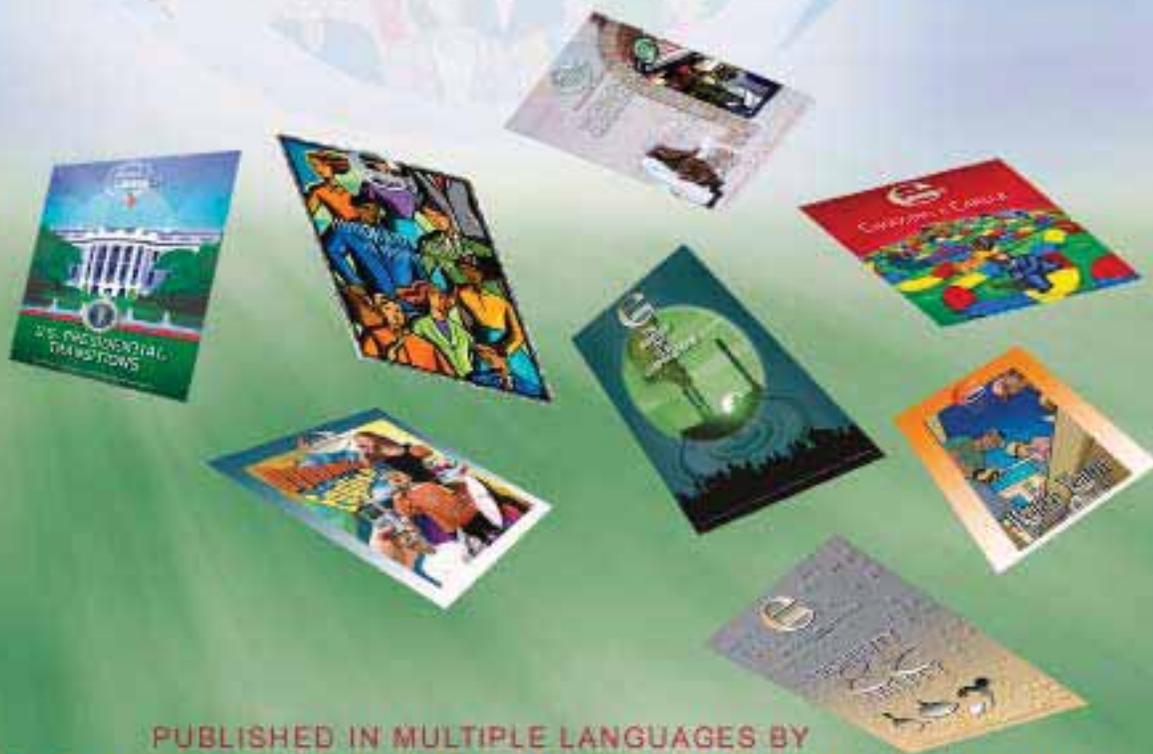
Retired couple Patty and Harvey Gagnon from Michigan came to the Kyrgyz Republic to have an “adventure on the roof of the world.” She taught English to pupils from the first grade through the ninth. He worked as a business facilitator. “I try to help people either find grants, donors, loans, whatever it takes to get their project going,” he said. She baked cookies for the children — “I’ve never seen cookies go so fast,” she said. And with Harvey’s participation, Patty taught songs and dances. The children especially wanted to learn the lyrics of American pop songs.

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# ENGAGING THE WORLD



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