

# BURKINA CONNECTION



NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF BURKINA FASO

2007 - No. 1



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 Jim Baird and Alan Johnston on the road.

## WHAT HAS, AND HAS NOT, CHANGED?

by Jim Baird, '79-'81

### It's a smaller world

In February 2007, thanks to a build-up of vacation days and the good will of my family and work colleagues, I returned to West Africa where I had served as a Peace Corps volunteer 25 years ago. Alan Johnston, a friend since that time, and I traveled together to three countries - Niger, where his daughter currently serves as a Peace Corps volunteer, Burkina Faso, where he and I were, and Mali. During our travels and since our return, people have wanted to know "What was different," "Are things better?" Such questions have prompted thoughts about change and progress and what is important about our lives and what we do with them.

Communications for us in the Peace Corps meant seeing people face-to-face, writing letters that took 2 months to arrive and maybe the chance to use a phone at the post office. Today, the human fixation with being "in-touch" has taken unimaginable strides. One hot afternoon, I was sitting under a thatched shade awning, chatting amiably with the chief of the village we were visiting. As we talked, I began to feel at home once again in the slower pace and rhythm of the African bush, when suddenly a cell phone ring tone split the air.

*continued on page 12*





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mollychambers@yahoo.com

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kristie\_mccomb@ekit.com

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jdickey@dsu.org

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gflippo@tamu.edu

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kristie\_mccomb@ekit.com

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tomv@erdc.edu

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Dianne Ferguson, '67-'69  
Spartanburg, SC  
dfergus@aol.com

# PRESIDENT'S YIRI


**W**e have been very active these last few months!

I would like to thank all of you who forwarded any announcements or responded to the calls we made to support FBF in rising to meet the project funding challenge presented to us by GlobalGiving. You can read about how your efforts made it possible for us to rise to this challenge on page 4.

I would also like to report that our membership drive went well this year. Currently, FBF has about 135 dues-paying members. And, we received \$2,160 in dues so far this year. Your dues allow FBF to continue publishing newsletters, develop new projects, and support FBF communication. So, thank you for allowing us to continue to provide these valuable services.

We have put in place a new Strategic Planning Committee. Robert Coffey, Kristie McComb, Charles Rodgers, and John Sneed have volunteered to steer FBF into 2010! To kick off their efforts, the committee began with an on-line survey of our membership.



 Molly Chambers

by Molly Chambers, '99-'01

Thank you to all who participated in the survey. Stay tuned in the next few months for the results. If you did not get any of the announcements regarding the survey, please go to <http://fbf.tamu.edu/listserv.html> to join the FBF Listserv. Don't miss out on all the FBF action!

Of course, there are other ways to stay up-to-date with FBF. Are you on myspace? So is FBF! Just follow this link to join our group:

<http://groups.myspace.com/FriendsofBurkinaFaso>

Finally, don't miss Kristie's FINAL CALL for new board members on page 14. Whether you want to volunteer for a committee or to be on the ballot for our newboard, please get in touch with Kristie at [kristie\\_mccomb@ekit.com](mailto:kristie_mccomb@ekit.com). We need all of you!

Thanks for supporting FBF in another

amazing year!

Molly

*Molly*

## FRIENDS OF BURKINA FASO

- ◆ Maintains a network of RPCVs and friends of Burkina Faso
- ◆ Provides funding and assistance to support projects in Burkina Faso
- ◆ Improves social interaction, communication, and information exchange
- ◆ Educates others about the country and culture of Burkina Faso

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# FIELD NOTES FROM MARILY

by Marily Knieriemen, Peace Corps Country Director

**G**reetings from Ouagadougou! It's April and, not surprisingly, a bit hot. I'm sure you have your own memories of the hot season in Burkina...

Since I last wrote, several Upper Volta RPCVs have been to visit. It's been great hearing about their experiences (from the '60s, '70s and '80s) and learning of their current connections with Burkina Faso. I hope that more of you have the opportunity to visit – or maintain contacts in other ways – over the next few years.

Peace Corps Burkina Faso is thriving – and growing. We have 109 Volunteers as of April 15 this year – significantly more than the 76 we had at this time last year. The map in my office shows that they are working throughout the country. The Volunteers truly work at the grassroots level, with most sites still in villages.

Our current program has four projects – Health, Secondary Education, Girls' Education and Empowerment, and Small Enterprise Development. I'd like to describe these projects for you so you have a sense of what Peace Corps Volunteers are doing in Burkina Faso in 2007.

Volunteers in the **Health** project work to strengthen the management committees of rural health centers and collaborate with these committees, health center staff, and community organizations to conduct health education activities. Particular emphasis is given to HIV/AIDS, malaria and nutrition. The Ministry of Health recognizes the important contribution Volunteers have made in the reduction of guinea worm cases – from 1935 in 2000 to only 5 in 2006! Many Health Volunteers work with theatre groups, recognizing that community theatre is very popular in Burkina and is a particularly effective medium for health education. I've been impressed by the theatre presentations I've seen – and have noted just how enthusiastic the community members are who attend. We just received a letter from the Minister of Health congratulating the Health Volunteers on the work that they are doing and expressing the gratitude of their host communities.

**Secondary Education** Volunteers teach math and science, usually in rural secondary schools

where the need is greatest. They help address what has always been a serious shortage of math and science teachers but which has become even more critical with the recent opening of many new schools in rural areas. With the recent push to get more kids into school and to have more of them make it into secondary school, the class sizes, especially for 6e are often very large. But the PCVs are doing a great job of teaching – even when there are over 100 students in the class. With computers available at some schools now, the government has asked us to add an IT component to our Secondary Education program. We expect the first IT teachers in 2008.

**Small Enterprise Development** Volunteers seek to develop the business management and technical skills of artisans and entrepreneurs. They help individuals and groups to develop linkages with outside resources. In addition, many help community members start savings and credit clubs, giving particular emphasis to women's groups. Participants in the clubs are able to access resources they need to start or expand small scale economic activities.

Volunteers in the **Girls' Education** project work to achieve the project's vision of "Girls are succeeding and going further in school due to increased self-confidence, improved conditions within the school community and a more supportive community environment." Volunteers work with youth through a variety of clubs, study groups, mentoring programs, theatre, and camps. Over the next year they will be increasing their work with parent associations.

All Volunteers are encouraged to engage in cross-sectoral activities such as HIV/AIDS and life skills, improved stoves, and the production and use of Moringa to improve nutritional status.

We are now working on preparations for our 2007 training program. We are expecting 30 Trainees for Secondary Education and Girls' Education in early June and then 34 Trainees for Health and Small Enterprise Development in early October. The program continues to grow – and we hope the positive contribution that Peace Corps Volunteers are making in Burkina will continue to grow as well.

PEACE CORPS



# LET THE DRUMS ROLL FOR FBF AND "RPCVs Project!"

Many in the Peace Corps community are motivated to alleviate the worst aspects of human suffering in today's world. It is for this reason that FBF has developed its outreach program. It is also the reason that the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA), in collaboration with GlobalGiving (GG), introduced a pilot program last year known as "RPCVs Project!"

Our colleagues at NPCA approached FBF about participating in "RPCVs Project!" by putting one of our projects on the GG website. They believed that "FBF Projects" could serve as a model for other NPCA affiliate groups.

We, in turn, were impressed with GG, a non-profit organization that links individual and institutional donors with social enterprise projects in need of funding. GG has created an efficient philanthropic marketplace on the web. The system created is capable of harnessing the power of the internet, enabling contributors to make electronic payments. It is also able to tap the generosity of donors throughout the world in support of village-level development projects.

Within six weeks after having been offered the opportunity to join forces with NPCA/GG, FBF established a presence on the GG website. Committee member Suzanne Plopper, working with a proposal sent to us from NEEDED (our partner in Ouahigouya) mounted a school lunch program on behalf of *Le Collège Moderne de l'Amitié*, entitled *Noon Meal Improves Girls' Learning*.

Last November, GG issued a very generous and enticing challenge to NPCA participants of "RPCVs Project!". Affiliates were offered \$5,000 if they could meet the goal of 100 or more individual donations by December 15.

FBF quickly rose to the challenge. Not only did many of our members make donations to

by Tom Vollrath, '67-'70, Projects Chair

project #1349, the *Noon-Day Meals* program, but they got friends, family members, and business associates to make contributions as well. FBF far exceeded the 100-person goal. During the challenge period, there were a total of 180 individual contributions made to project #1349, not counting the contributions made by jewelers belonging to S.A. Gems, the corporate sponsor GG had generously assigned to project #1349!

For the 2006 calendar year, \$21,010 worth of contributions were received by GG earmarked for our *Noon-Day Meals* project! This total includes \$8,375 from 191 individual donations, \$6,750 from 27 corporate sponsors, \$885 from redeemed gift certificates issued by GG to some of our donors, and \$5,000 from the "RPCVs Project! challenge."

*"For the 2006 calendar year, \$21,010 worth of contributions were received by GG earmarked for our Noon-Day Meals project!"*

The funds FBF/NEED has received via the GG route have already made a big difference. Lacine Sawadogo, the school director of *Le Collège Moderne*, recently informed us that 82 percent of the students successfully completed coursework in the first trimester of this school

year, compared to 60 percent last year when there were no school lunches.

GG takes 10 percent of all contributions flowing through their channel to cover overhead costs. FBF, by contrast, does not deduct administrative fees from donations that are channeled directly to our Treasurer and designated to support our outreach program. This said, there are many payoffs linking specific FBF projects to GG, as is evident from our experience this past year. For this reason, the Committee would like to be able to take advantage of the GG limit that allows groups such as ours to have two projects at any one time posted on their website. We hope to launch a second project, preferably one in which a track record has been established giving us confidence in the local administration, on the GG website in the near future.







# YUMMY DUMMY CHOCOLATE CO. SUPPORTS GIRLS' EDUCATION

**A**t a craft fair in December, I tasted some exceptionally good dark chocolate!

Upon reading the wrapper, I discovered that it was made by a local company founded and owned by seven girls, ages 8-13, and that the company contributes 10 percent of its profits to support children's, and environmental charities.

What a "win-win": great dark chocolate made by young women entrepreneurs and benefiting good causes! I shared with them

by Suzanne Plopper, Manager, NEEDED Project information about the lambs' project and the following month, FBF/NEED was a recipient of their generous profit-sharing.

Check them out at

[www.yummy-dummy.com](http://www.yummy-dummy.com) and learn more about the company, about the quality and availability of their chocolate, and about their support for the lambs' project! The company motto:

"Man cannot live by chocolate

alone – but girls can!"

*"Man cannot live by  
chocolate alone –  
but girls can!"*



© The girls of Yummy Dummy Chocolate Co.

## LE PENSIONNAT NOTRE-DAME DES ANGES

by Suzanne Plopper, Manager, NEEDED Project

**O**nce again, *Le Pensionnat Notre-Dame Des Anges* in Montreal has contributed generously to NEEDED's école mouton project. The students and staff organized a *dîner de la faim* whereby the children gave up their lunch and their school donated the cost of their lunch to FBF. The \$955 will enable 19 girls to enter primary school next year and to complete at least ten years of schooling. Many many thanks to the students and staff of *Le Pensionnat Notre-Dame Des Anges* for your generosity!



# BURKINA FORTY YEARS LATER

by Bob Coffey, '67-'69

My wife and 21 year old daughter have always wanted to go, and my nineteen year old son was a good sport about it. Our December trip to Burkina was everything we could have hoped for and more. Some of the "more" comes from the challenges tossed our way, but the greater part comes from the reward of meeting the upright people again and being able to show my family the depth of their character.

The debut was inauspicious with luggage lost in LA (living for a week in one set of clothes), nasty contagious vomiting and diarrhea (from a U.S. virus, not a Burkinabé bacteria), and a middle-of-the-night gunfight a half block from our hotel in central Ouaga as the Police took on the Army. Oh yeah, then our carefully-shopped-for

chauffeur's 11-year-old daughter died unexpectedly just as we were about to depart from Ouaga for Ouahigouya and we had to redo in an hour the process that had taken most of our first day.

Even that showed the strength of the Burkinabé, as Amadou, his Mossi face contorted with grief, insisted on making sure we had a sturdy, comfortable vehicle and reliable driver before he allowed himself to leave us to return home to Koudougou to grieve with his family.

While we still had future flat tires, a balky starter motor and some more effects of the U.S. gastroenteritis to deal with, our luck, for the most part, turned as we left a bustling Ouaga and the kind reception we received there from Ambassador Jeanine Jackson and Peace Corps Director Marilyn Kneriemen.

Up north, Laciné Sawadogo and his charming wife Ahoua were warm hosts as we had delightful meals together, saw Ahoua in action at her Maternité and toured the FBF supported girls' middle school founded by Laciné and his NEEDED colleagues of *mouton projet* fame. From there we went to Bobo via Dedougou.

Once in the country, Burkina looks to me just like it did 40 years ago. Donkey carts are still rare. Goods to market still go mostly on the

heads of statue straight ladies in mixed bright prints or on bicycles stacked to astonishing height.

From Bobo, Kristie McComb's dynamic friend Haoua treated us to a trip to Padema, where she currently works as a cotton cooperative accountant and organizer. There we visited with a friend of hers who has organized successful micro finance cooperatives among local men (a rare accomplishment), and we talked with cotton farmers about the three-year-old demise of profit in cotton since globalization and U.S. farm price supports have knocked down the market price.

Their thoughtful analysis has so far failed to find a crop or venture where they can successfully compete for cash in the global market. They talk more now of turning to production of food stuffs and biofuels that can be sold and consumed locally.

We were certainly impressed at how thoughtful and articulate they were on these subjects, and were impressed as well that they never asked for help except to solicit ideas for how they could do something different themselves. It was a fine introduction for us to the ongoing dilemmas facing a subsistence farming village whose people want to survive, hopefully, with enough to buy school supplies for their kids.

Then on to Loropeni where we had the pleasure of meeting M. Togo, a friend of many RPCV's and another FBF grant applicant. As in the other encounters with FBF correspondents, I was extremely impressed by the energy and character of Togo and his colleagues in Loropeni and Gaoua. These are all such inspired people and so easy to like. I got a personal walking tour from Togo through compounds on the way to see their current gardening project and half-built cattle shelter. That camaraderie of village life you remember so well was everywhere. The smiles and warmth were every bit as evident as the poverty and malnutrition. For a few hours I was a PCV again, and it was good to be back.

We're home now, but, as you can imagine, in our minds and our emails to Burkina the odyssey goes on.

*"Our December trip to Burkina was everything we could have hoped for and more."*





# DATLINE OUAGADOUGOU, MARCH 2007

I'm writing this message from the city where it all began for me – Ouagadougou. It was here that I was a Peace Corps volunteer from 1973 to 1976, certainly three of the best years of my life. It was in Ouaga that I met Kay, a serendipitous encounter that would lead to marriage, two wonderful sons, and a life-long honeymoon. It was here that my plans and ambitions for the future were greatly transformed, and my life forever changed. It was here that I took my first step on that less traveled road, the one Robert Frost promised would make all the difference.

Was he ever right. My Ouaga experience was but the first chapter in a travel guide that has taken me and my family around the world.

I've returned to Ouagadougou on temporary duty, to help the embassy fill in some staffing gaps and to handle a couple of major programs – the Pan African Film Festival and a VIP visit by the CEO of the Millennium Challenge Corporation.

What I have discovered over the past three to four weeks is that the Ouagadougou about which I waxed so eloquent in the opening paragraph no longer exists. Somewhere along the line the Ouaga I knew 35 years ago moved from reality to memory, from the here and now to the back then and when. The small, dusty, easy-going city I knew – the home of BraVolta and capital of La Haute Volta – has been replaced by a large, sprawling, noisy Brakina-drinking metropolis in Burkina Faso. The Voltaïques of my time have become today's Burkinabè. The red/black/white flag of Upper Volta is now a two-striped, one star *drapeau*. The old Peace Corps office has become a Language Center, the Princess

by David "Bowtie" Andresen, '73-'76

Yanenga quartier where I lived is gone – razed to the ground and waiting some future development, the Bois de Boulogne is an enclosed communal park, my beloved Croix du Sud and Etoile bars *ne sont plus*, the highway between Ouaga and Kaya a toll road! I've heard it said change is bad, and that the old days were the best of times, while the present stinks and the future threatens. Not sure I completely agree, but it does seem to me that the beer was colder and the brochettes tastier back in 1973....

All this said, there are still some great memories to be awakened and experiences relived on a return visit. Whether you call them Voltaïques or Burkinabè, the people you meet in Ouaga and *en brousse* are still wonderful – open, welcoming, friendly, blessed with a sense of good fun and hope. L'Eau Vive and Ricardo's continue to offer good meals and even better company. I



David "Bowtie" Andresen

had forgotten just how dry, dusty and breezy the winter months are here – lips chap, eyes redden, and your skin gets gritty. I'm happy to report *le pays profond* remains relatively unchanged and timeless – at least to this city slicker. Baobabs everywhere with their strange and ominous shapes, fields strewn with brooding boulders, you still see bunches of corn hung out to dry in village trees, as always the goats along the road are pregnant. Here – in the flat, dusty, dry-strawed and barren looking countryside – here my past and the present merge, and I can revisit/live those precious Peace Corps days of mine.

The circle is complete. I have returned to Ouagadougou, from whence it all started. When I leave Abidjan this summer, I will retire from the foreign circus and begin a new book.

OUAGADOUGOU



# INTRODUCING... FRIENDS OF AFRICAN VILLAGE LIBRARIES

Since 2001 Friends of African Village Libraries has been operating in the province of Tuy in southwestern Burkina Faso. In six years, FAVL has established and successfully operated seven village libraries in Burkina Faso and Ghana.

They each hold approximately 1,000 books aimed at pre-school and primary school children, secondary school students, and literate adults. A paid librarian operates the library for 20 hours each week. The libraries are open to the public, and subscribers have the right to take home books for two weeks after paying a very modest annual fee (\$ .20 for children and students, \$ .40 for village residents, and \$ .60 for government officials per year).

FAVL funds the refurbishment and maintenance of a locally donated building for use as a library, pays for initial and periodic training of librarians, pays the salary of the librarian (equivalent to one-half the salary of a primary school teacher), funds initial and ongoing purchases of local books by African authors, and ships appropriate donated books from the United States. Four libraries are equipped with solar panels permitting evening reading hours.

Survey research findings from Burkina Faso indicate that reading of books among 10<sup>th</sup> graders has doubled (from six to 12 books per year, on average) in villages with FAVL libraries compared with villages without libraries. With committed financial and organizational support from FAVL, village communities are effective partners in establishing and running libraries at low cost.

Village residents, especially educated women, can be recruited and trained to be effective librarians, and many members of village communities, including especially

by Michael Kevane, President of FAVL

female secondary students, will use libraries to increase their reading. This success has been accomplished with no paid support staff in the United States; until now FAVL has relied on volunteers for management and fundraising.

FAVL's overriding philosophy is that public libraries are not just collections of books and reading spaces, but institutions. The most valuable thing that FAVL creates is a sense of durability and successful local management. FAVL does not believe that opening a library for two years and then allowing it to fall into disuse can be called a success! FAVL has a long-term commitment to ensuring that libraries remain open and staffed with engaged, reliable, and trained librarians and that when adults return to their home village decades later their children can participate in the same story hours that they enjoyed in the village library.

When FAVL establishes a village library, it requests a significant contribution from the village community. Usually this means the donation of an old building in the village center that is suitable for conversion for use as a library. Providing this concrete resource involves village residents in negotiations and discussions about the role and importance of a library.

*continued on page 9*



Boy reading a cartoon at the Bereba village library. (photo by Tiril Skarstein)





Village leaders then have a stake in the successful operation of the library, and leaders active in obtaining the building often become the core of the village library committee. This committee is entrusted with overall and day-to-day supervision of the library. Libraries and books belong to the village collectively. FAVL partners, to the extent possible, with local non-profit organizations and village committees that oversee day-to-day library operations. In Ghana, FAVL has established a partnership arrangement with the Center for Sustainable Rural Development (CESRUD), a local Ghanaian non-governmental organization based in the town of Bolgatanga, to manage the libraries of Sumbrungu and Sherigu in cooperation with village committees.

FAVL currently has a budget of roughly

\$30,000 per year, with funds originating mostly from private, individual contributions. A typical library costs \$5,000 to set up, and operating costs are roughly \$2,000 per year for salaries, maintenance, and stocking of new books.

FAVL President and Vice-President, Michael Kevane and Leslie Gray, are currently in the middle of a six-month stay in Burkina Faso. Leslie has a Fulbright scholarship to continue her research on cotton farming, and Michael is doing lots of FAVL work and also continuing his research on, what else, the impact of libraries on reading and also the current political situation in Burkina Faso.

For more information, please visit the website: [www.favl.org](http://www.favl.org), or contact FAVL directly at: P.O. Box 90533, San Jose, CA 95112.



## VILLAGE LIBRARIES



⊗ Ambassador Jeanine Jackson receives a blanket from the Bereba village librarian KOURA Ivette, following a presentation of books donated by the U.S. Embassy. (photo Michael Kevane)

⊗ Ambassador Jeanine Jackson poses with librarian SANOU Douanko at the Bereba village library with books donated by the U.S. Embassy. (photo by Michael Kevane)

⊗ Bereba village librarian SANOU Douanko reads a book during story hour. (photo by Tiril Skarstein)



# HARNESSING WATER ON LAKE BAM

by Tom Fox, FBF Project Manager of APRODES

**F**BF provided funds to purchase irrigation equipment enabling 70 women in two villages near Kongoussi, namely Loulouka and Koumbanago, to harness water from Lake Bam for the purpose of growing onions and an assortment of garden vegetables.

The director of *Action de Production pour le Développement Economique et Social* (a.k.a. APRODES) Kinda Boukary recently informed us that the formation of the women groups is already showing payoffs. The women are working cooperatively harvesting their onions.

They have also used their dues to fund needed repairs to the motorized pumps and to purchase cement to repair heavily used drainage channels.



*Irrigation equipment on Lake Bam.*

# SOWING SEEDS FOR A BETTER FUTURE

by Marianne Bailey, FBF Project Manager of KOUWANRE

**L**ast fall, FBF approved a project to finance a community garden for Association Kouwanre, a group that houses and provides support for HIV/AIDS widows and orphans in the village of Wangala, part of southeastern Burkina's Zabre district.

The garden was a dream of the group's dynamic president, Madame Marguerite Dipama, who saw that the group's nutritional status, income generation, and marketing knowledge would be greatly enhanced by a market garden program.

The Association, under Madame Dipama's leadership, had already done some income-generation projects, in addition to programs on AIDS and female excision prevention. They were eager to start a *jardin maraichère*. FBF stepped in to provide funding for tools, a donkey, seeds,

and cement to repair the well and build manure pits (another NGO provided fencing). PCV Rebecca Egner served as our liaison to the Association and has done a great job in reporting back to us.

Ground broke in January and the gardeners got to the hard work of gardening. Crops planted included gumbo, hibiscus, onions, cabbage, lettuce, peppers, carrots, and tomatoes; and the women have been trained in potato cultivation. Because not all of the fencing has been

delivered, there are only ten gardeners working one hectare at present; and a run-in with some local pigs provided a temporary setback. They are now replanting some lost crops and planting their first crop of potatoes, and looking forward to expanding the garden to accommodate a full 40 gardeners.

*"They are...looking forward to expanding the garden to accommodate a full 40 gardeners."*





# A WONDERFUL AFRICAN SUCCESS STORY

I worked in Burkina as a secondary school mathematics and science teacher from 1984-1986 in Baskouré, about a hundred kilometers east of Ouaga. Séminaire St. Augustin was a lower secondary school that was adding upper secondary grades, one year at a time. With only a few exceptions, the students were farmers' kids, though only several of them were from Baskouré. Others came from as far as 80 kilometers away.

I kept up correspondence with my school for several years as the return mail slowed to a trickle and my students and fellow teachers moved on. I assumed that I would never see any of them again. I also assumed that their lives would be tightly circumscribed, both occupationally and geographically, not for any lack of ability or desire, but due to an absence of opportunities.

Then, last summer, one of my former students found me. He was in McLean, Virginia for the summer, trying to improve his English, and saying mass at St. John the Beloved church. He is now Father Alphonse Kabore and lives in Rome while he pursues a doctorate in theology at the Vatican. Father Kabore also speaks at least four other languages.

He gave me a quick summary of the fates of my other former students. He could not place 14 of them, but here's what some of the others are doing: 21 are priests, 15 are teachers, and three

by Richard Phelps, '84-'86

are university professors. Among the rest are two doctors, two lawyers, two accountants, two diplomats (one for Burkina and one for the Vatican), one school principal, one businessman, one customs official, and three working in telecommunications, a non-governmental organization, and the military. Nine more are currently enrolled in doctoral programs in Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and the United States.

I was dumbfounded. These boys had next to nothing. School facilities were spartan. The boys slept in bunk beds in two large rooms without screens. They grew their own food and received some donations from European charities and the U.S. Food for Peace program. They got by with torn-up and marked-up hand-me-down textbooks donated from France. Amenities consisted of a few soccer balls and a dirt field. The regimen of Séminaire St. Augustin consisted of study, work, and, as it was a religious school, the practice of their faith.

Once, 20 years ago, a student in Alphonse Kabore's class asked me which were the better students: those I knew in America or those I knew in Africa. Without hesitation, I identified the latter. How could that be, another student inquired, given that America is so rich and successful.

"Because life there can be too easy," I replied.

SUCCESS STORY



Puzzles are a big attraction at the Beraba village library. (photos by David Pace)





Jim sharing photos from the "Bon vieux temps" with Dedougon live-in host and one of his "compound kids" 25 years later.

The chief excused himself politely and went back to where his "mobile" was carefully perched in a particular spot to get optimum reception. After a few minutes he returned, saying that the call was from some of "his people" currently living in Kayes, Mali, some 800 miles away. Cell phones were everywhere—in the cities especially, but also in villages. We found Internet cafés in towns of any size. We updated our families on the trip, checked the weather and searched for friends we'd known 25 years earlier at reasonable cost though tapping our feet impatiently at the "slow" connection!

In 1980, Americans didn't go to West Africa (except aid workers and Peace Corps Volunteers). Now affordable air travel means that the parents of today's Peace Corps Volunteers not infrequently visit their children during their tour. Not to be outdone, several African parents we met on our trip described their own visits to see children living and working in the States. (Both sets complain about extreme temperatures—cold or hot). Having met West Africans in the U.S. over the years, Alan and I left on our journey carrying packages and letters to deliver to several families. Abdou is a friend of several years who works at my local supermarket in Takoma Park, Maryland. When we arrived in Niger's capitol, Niamey, we found him at home on vacation and met his friends and family. Then, 12 days and 800 miles later in Bamako, Mali, we attended his wedding to a Malian woman whom he had met in the same supermarket six years earlier.

### A woman's place

While West African women have been anything but shy and retiring in everyday life, their status has always been greatly inferior to that of men on big issues such as access to education, inheritance or decisions about work, marriage, and child bearing. Empowering women has long been recognized as crucial to improving their own health and that of their children, expanding economic activity, slowing population growth, etc. So we noted with great interest some striking changes. We saw women in the military and police uniforms and business attire. Girls and women were much in evidence on busy city streets riding motor cycles and bicycles, carrying backpacks off to school and behaving in ways that would have been scandalous 25 years ago, such as holding hands with a boy, wearing pants, having a drink at a bar. We heard and saw references to women's projects and advancements in the media and on billboards. In Ouahigouya, we visited *Le Collège Moderne de l'Amitié*, a private middle school supported by NEEED where, by intention, girls made up over 96% of the students. The English language teacher, a woman from the town who had recently graduated from the University of Ouagadougou, told us she had sought the job because of the school's commitment to female education. We wondered together how the boys in attendance might turn out differently from preceding male generations.

### Population

The population of Burkina has doubled since we were there. It now stands at 13 and a quarter million and is growing at nearly 3 percent per year. It will double again in 26 years if women continue to have an average of six children in their lifetimes as now. Everywhere was more crowded. All three capitals and the provincial cities we visited had grown enormously, adding neighborhoods and roads, sprawling over the landscape. Traffic jams occur regularly as bicycles, motorbikes, cars, and trucks compete with pedestrians and donkey carts on the streets. Outside each town and village we saw massive piles of firewood, chopped in the bush, waiting to be burned in ever more cook fires to feed the nation.

According to a U.S. government's own assessment, Burkina could save more than \$20 million in health and education expenditures by 2015, and

*continued on page 13*



avert 4,962 maternal deaths and 240,753 child deaths simply by meeting the current demand that couples have expressed for information and services allowing them to decide the number and spacing of their children. Although Burkina has worked hard to make family planning services available to the population, much remains to be done.

### **The West African welcome**

West Africans, and Burkinabé in particular, are known for their warmth, welcome of visitors, kindness, and concern. In this region where people have freely traveled and traded for centuries, the first thing offered when you visit someone's home is a cup of cool "Dunan Ji" or "Traveler's Water." Get lost or have a flat tire on your bicycle and people appear to help. Daily greetings in the street can take several minutes as someone asks about your family, spouse, children and you ask about theirs. Blessings are offered as you part: "May God give you a fine day," "May we see each other again." You respond, "Amina (Amen)" or "If God wills it."

After 25 years, the cadence of this interaction remains much the same. We were welcomed everywhere. People were delighted by our story of return and thanked us for coming to "greet them" again. We took part in the good-natured teasing and chatting for hours on end that come from a culture where conversation is the main source of entertainment. There was more pestering in the cities than we remembered, as unemployed young men vied for the tourist's attention. Yet even these hustlers could be diverted by a greeting in their language or when, as their elders, we chided them for being impolite.

### **Public health and sanitation**

Poor sanitary conditions continue to contribute to elevated levels of diarrheal diseases. In rural areas, just 6 percent of people have adequate sanitation (as defined by the United Nations) and only 42 percent in urban areas. Many people lack even pit latrines, and small children routinely go wherever it is convenient. Diarrhea is responsible for 19 percent of deaths in children under five and 9 percent for all ages.

We found it disheartening that so little progress has been made on this front in 25 years. The problems are complex and interrelated—requiring changes in habits and beliefs and attitudes, and enough money amid so many other

priorities. But it seemed to us like an avoidable tragedy. Why do these conditions remain acceptable? Why are local leaders not simply saying, "Enough is enough!" Sadly, it is probably because, just as in this country, the problems of the poorest—the least powerful, the least apt to argue or make demands—are the last to be addressed.

### **Peace Corps generations**

We had the pleasure and privilege to spend time in the company of a number of the current generation of Peace Corps volunteers. These engaged and engaging young men and women seemed completely familiar to us and accepted our credentials as former volunteers instantly. We slipped easily into swapping stories about the rigors and faux pas of life in the bush and plunged into late night debates about how community development happens and whether or not volunteers really make a difference in two short years.

The volunteers we met were high school teachers, health educators, and extension workers in agriculture, natural resources, and micro-business development. They showed the hallmark traits of Peace Corps, wearing their experiences as a badge of honor, demonstrating an earnest commitment to make some part of life in the world better for their effort.

We took them out to dinner and bought rounds of drinks. We listened late at night to hopes and fears, and tried not to offer too many suggestions. They made us proud of the best parts of our country and of our own service to it. We connected each other to the generations of Americans who have taken this step into the unknown and learned so much about themselves and the world in the process.



☞ Taking volunteers out to dinner in Ouahigouya.





FRIENDS OF BURKINA FASO  
LES AMIS DU BURKINA FASO



## CALL FOR CANDIDATES

Friends of Burkina Faso will hold elections for its Board of Directors this July.

**D**o you have good project management skills? Do you have experience with Board governance? Are you interested in giving back to Burkina Faso with your time and energy? Do you enjoy making connections and facilitating communication within a community of like-minded folks? If so, please consider putting your volunteer spirit to good use with Friends of Burkina Faso.

We would like to invite FBF members who are current in their membership status to consider serving on our Board or on one of our committees such as the Projects Committee which oversees the implementation of FBF-funded community projects.

Please contact Kristie McComb, current Vice president and Membership Chair, if you are interested in serving or if you would like more information about the possibilities, expectations, and duties. The term for the Board of Directors is two years in length beginning in August of 2007. Kristie can be reached at [kristie\\_mccomb@ekit.com](mailto:kristie_mccomb@ekit.com).

Intentions to serve on the Board must be received via email by June 30, 2007.

We can not successfully run this organization without the time, effort, and commitment of members just like you. We sincerely hope you will consider how your skills, experiences, and volunteer spirit can contribute to the success of Friends of Burkina Faso in the future!

## NEW MEMBERS

The Projects Committee welcomes new member Robert Coffey

**B**ob Coffey was among the first volunteers to go to Upper Volta in 1967 where he served as a well-digger. Stationed in Tenkodogo, he developed a widespread reputation among his peers and within the local community as being *le mécanicien extraordinaire!* This coming July, Bob will be retiring from a medical career in which he has specialized in respiratory diseases and sleep apnea. Bob writes that he still loves fixing motors of all kinds. "It's a lot like medicine, but easier to replace parts."

Welcome our two new editors: Richard Phelps and Nancy Weis-Sanfo

**R**ichard P. Phelps served as a math and science teacher in Baskouré (near Koupéla) in 1984 to 1986. He has since worked at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in Paris, the U.S. General Accounting Office, Westat, and the Educational Testing Service; is author or editor of four books, several statistical compendia, and dozens of articles in scholarly journals, mostly related to education research.

**N**ancy Weis-Sanfo served as a community health Peace Corps Volunteer in Niou from 2002 to 2004. She trained local health workers, co-evaluated family planning and HIV/AIDS educational programs, and helped develop a youth theatre group to serve as an education resource. She also produced and edited a community health worker training manual, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health. Nancy received a B.A. degree in Journalism from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.





# RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP FOR 2007

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ I would like to renew my FBF membership for 2007 (\$15 a year).  
☐ I would like to join the National Peace Corps Association (\$35 a year).  
☐ I would like to make an FBF Project Fund contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_.  
☐ I would like to make an FBF Newsletter Fund contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_.

How would you like to receive the *Burkina Connection* newsletter in the future?

- ☐ I would like to continue to receive the *Burkina Connection* by post-mail.  
☐ I would like to save FBF postage and receive the *Burkina Connection* by e-mail.

Please mail this entire page with payment to:

**John Dickey**  
Treasurer, FBF  
2622 Gramling Court  
Davis, CA 95616

Make checks payable to FBF.

Contributions are tax-deductible.

We welcome your suggestions and your active participation.

Thanks! Puus baarka wusgo!



## ORDER YOUR OFFICIAL FBF T-SHIRT



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Price per shirt: \$17

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Make checks payable to FBF.

Thanks for your support!



**RENEW NOW FOR 2007**



# FBF LISTSERV

- ❖ Are you looking for travel partners/travel tips for a return trip to Burkina?
- ❖ Do you want to locate long-lost Peace Corps friends?
- ❖ Are you recently-returned and looking for a mentor in your field?
- ❖ Do you have an interesting news article about Burkina to share with our members?
- ❖ Are you doing some exciting Burkina-related work that might interest our members?

If yes to any of these, our listserv is a great place to exchange information!

To join, please visit: <http://apache.tamu.edu/fbf/listserv.html>.



## BURKINA CONNECTION



NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF BURKINA FASO



C/O Suzanne Plapper  
P.O. Box 395  
Chester, CA 96020

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