



# BURKINA CONNECTION

A NEWSLETTER BY AND FOR THE MEMBERS OF FRIENDS OF BURKINA FASO

## TWO ADDITIONAL WELLS INSTALLED IN MANGA TO HELP DISPLACED

by Leslie Berger, '81-'83



Wells installed in Zoundweogo help supply water to displaced populations living in the area.

Over the past two years the Friends of Burkina Faso has provided funding to the Red Cross based in Manga to install two new wells to boost clean water supplies for Internally Displaced Persons (IDP). The cost of each well was \$8,000. This article provides a brief update for these two well projects.

According to estimates by UNHCR, the rise in terrorist activity in Burkina Faso has led to 1.4 million people fleeing their homes in search of safe locations (UNHCR - Burkina Faso). While the local people in the area have welcomed the IDP to the area, the influx of people has put an extra burden on local infrastructures such as water supplies. This project has filled a need to boost water supplies for both people and livestock.

The Red Cross, who are well established in the Zoundweogo region, have done an excellent job managing these two projects (wells installed in Binde and in Gogo) to bring additional water supplies to the region. They have been actively involved in the following activities over the past two years:

- Agreeing with local communities and working with water specialists to agree on best location for each well to best match water availability and water needs,
- Identifying and commissioning local well diggers in two locations,
- Mobilizing local communities to clear the road to allow drilling equipment to get through,
- Manage the contractors during the drilling activities,
- Working with the local community to set up management committees in each area to ensure the smooth functioning of each well. This has included collecting funds to cover the cost of potential breakdowns.
- Providing progress reports to the FBF Projects committee to help in monitoring and evaluating these projects.

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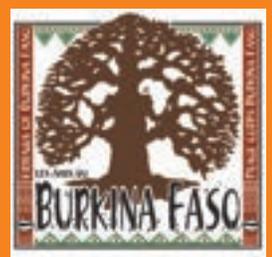


**CALL FOR PROPOSALS**  
SEE PAGE 7 FOR DETAILS

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FOR UPDATES ON OUR CURRENT PROJECTS AND MORE, FOLLOW US ON :





Emile Rouamba, the lead partner from the Red Cross, has provided a recent update on the two well projects:

According to Emile, the two wells are functioning smoothly with management committees now well established and able to collect funds to deal with possible mechanical breakdowns.

In Kaïbo, commune of Bindé, the total number of IDPs using this well is 251 people..

In Tansablego, commune of Gogo, there are 720 people using this well.

The wells are also serving the needs of IDP's who are raising livestock in the area. Having clean water for the goats, cattle and donkeys has helped to reduce the incidence of disease in the animal population and has boosted the productivity of the producers.

The availability of additional clean water supplies has reduced the pressure on the local population to manage the needs of all inhabitants.

## CONSTRUCTION COMPLETE

FBF partner, ADC Délwendé completed construction of its new training center in February. ADC Délwendé will use this space to train participants in pagne-making and host community training activities.



NEW MAILING ADDRESS

**Friends of Burkina Faso**  
**PO Box 33212**  
**Bloomfield Hills, MI**  
**48303-3212**



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## PRESIDENT'S YIRI

By Kristen Combs-Bicaba, President, RPCV '98 -'01

Hello my fellow FBFers!

Back in November 2014, as the new Newsletter Officer, I put together my first *Burkina Connection* for Friends of Burkina Faso. Then President, Mike Lavoie, shared a Moore saying in his President's Yiri which has stuck with me:

**Kuilga san golom, bi nyebga golom.  
If the creek zigzags, the crocodile zigzags.**

At the time, Burkina was on the cusp of a period of significant change which continues today. The creek in Burkina has continued to zigzag – further than many of us could have imagined – and Friends of Burkina Faso has also had to zig the zags along with it.

2023 started off with your newly elected Friends of Burkina Faso Board in place. We are excited to welcome **two new members to the Board, Souleymane Diallo**, Vice-President, and **Brad McKim**, At-Large Member / Legal Counsel. Please read more about our new and current Board Members on [page 6](#).

Along with welcoming new members to our Board, we said farewell to three long-term Board members.

- **Aaron Buchsbaum** served on the Board since 2014, as Communications Officer, Technology Officer, and then President. He helped drive us forward through major transitions in Burkina and navigate our initial Humanitarian Relief fundraising campaign.
- **Faissal Ouedraogo** joined the board in 2016 and served as Vice President and President. He provided project oversight and coordination with partners in Burkina. We are grateful for the “boots on the ground” during this time period.
- **Suzanne Plopper** also transitioned from her role as Treasurer. Suzanne served as Treasurer for nearly 20 years and holds a wealth of knowledge and background for FBF and the Board. Not only was Suzanne a steadfast Treasurer, but she also spearheaded our Girls' Education projects in Burkina.

Among the first actions of the new Board, we **updated our bylaws** to help navigate what the future may bring for Burkina and Friends of Burkina Faso. Please read more about these changes on [page 8](#). We look forward to adopting the updated bylaws in our June Board meeting. Once adopted, our Board will focus on realigning Board roles to current needs. We're excited for the flexibility this will provide the Board to address the organizations needs with the aim to better serve Burkina Faso.

Meanwhile, our **Projects Committee** worked on refining the proposal and funding process implemented last year (see the [2021 Volume 2 Burkina Connection](#) for details). These updates will ensure consistency in the proposals submitted and implementation oversight of FBF-funded projects.

Throughout the zigs and zags life has thrown our way, we are proud to have such a robust and dedicated membership. We appreciate your feedback and ideas as we navigate the future while we remain unwavering in our efforts to support grassroots projects in Burkina Faso.



# UV1 REUNION IN MONTEREY

By Tom Vollrath, RPCV '67 - '69



Bottom Row: Dan and Barb Brady, Karen Wilson, Susan Hyde, Tina Shaffer, Charles Rodgers; Next Row (from the middle): Suzanne Plopper, Windy Singley, Laurie Schneider, Linda and John Sneed, David Ippel; Top Row: Jim Hyde, Buck Lyon-Vaiden, Linda Gerra, Bob Coffey, Bob Singley, Bill Schneider, Charles Plopper, Jonathan Campaign

In the Spring of 2020, the first group of U.S. Peace Corps volunteers, who began their service in Upper Volta in 1967, had planned their 5th UV1 reunion at Folly Beach in South Carolina. However, the event was canceled at the 11th hour due to the Coronavirus epidemic.

Last Fall, Suzanne and Charlie Plopper seized the initiative, queried volunteers and staff in our Peace Corps cohort about our interest in a UV1 reunion in the Monterey CA area in the Spring of 2023. Given positive responses by many, the Ploppers gathered and circulated information about lodging, catered food options, and excursions that the group might want to take along the California coast. Timing and location decisions were collectively made by those expressing interest in attending the reunion

The 28 of us who attended the reunion spent a wonderful 4 days together in-and-around the Monterey/Pacific Grove area. The first excursion was a catamaran, 7-mile-long journey down the Elkhorn tidal slough at Moss Landing where we sailed adjacent to sea otters and saw numerous waterbirds, including packs of feasting pelicans. This was followed by a visit to Point

Lobos State Reserve, one of the most beautiful and rugged sections along the Californian coast. Another adventure was a visit to the Ano Nuevo State Reserve (north of Santa Cruz), home to the largest congregation of elephant seals. The cancelling of a whale watch trip due to high winds and waves enabled everyone to enjoy a walk along the beautiful coast of Pacific Grove.

My favorite excursion was our visit to the Monterey Bay Aquarium. The aquarium features impressive displays of fauna and flora including 80,000 plants and animals, such as kelp forests, leopard sharks, tunas, jellyfish. The aquarium has achieved much success rehabilitating the population of sea otters--a keystone species that was facing extinction in the in the Monterey Bay. It has also developed an awe-inspiring scientific research program that is discovering previously unknown deep-sea animals, many of whom have yet to be named. For example, numerous new (very small) species of jellyfish are located in the aquarium's newest exhibition, called the "Deep: Exploring Our Undiscovered Ocean".

On the last day of the reunion, Suzanne reported that there

was \$2,688 of unspent funds earmarked for the reunion, due to the cancellation of our planned "whale watch" event because of dangerously high winds (and to the over-generosity of our food vendors the first three days and our collective decision to do "leftovers" the last night). In response to Barb and Dan Brady's suggestion, which everyone seemed to agree with, the \$2,688 has been donated to the [Burkina Faso Girls' Education Fund](#) for a postsecondary education/training scholarship. Since the cost of a midwifery or nursing scholarship is approximately \$4,100 depending upon the exchange rate at the time funds are sent in August, our collective contribution will provide over half of a midwifery (or nursing) scholarship for next year. For those of us who are familiar with the quality of maternal and child health services so many years ago, the government of Burkina Faso has made in recent years a concerted effort to upgrade the quality of training of midwives (to the level of a university degree) and to post trained midwives to more and more rural clinics in Burkina. Thank you UV1 "reunion-ers" for lending your support to this effort!

Continued on next page



## UV1 REUNION CONTINUED

Tina Shaffer provided (as Wendy Singley put it) "a thorough summary chronicling our glorious few days together." It reads as follows:

*I will be ever grateful to Suzanne and Charlie for their fabulous organizing and ideas; Bob Coffey for bringing us together by zoom with those unable to attend and providing all the audio/visuals on a big screen; Suzanne for sharing her ongoing work educating girls and women in BF; Bob Coffey and Charles Rodgers for their description and pictures of the well digging they are still doing in Loropeni. Deborah North Coffey, Laurie Schneider, Linda Sneed, Barb Brady, and Fran Rodgers for their generous labors in the reunion kitchen; and for the carpool drivers who got us where we wanted to go, en masse!*

*We all agonize about the hideous things being done to the Burkinabe people now. Yet Tom Vollrath describes an FBF that continues to be viable, with a talented new Board, working to do whatever projects can still be carried on in Burkina communities.*

John Sneed got us going as Friends of Burkina Faso and gave us a vehicle to still make a difference. Thank you, John!

I'd like to add to Tina's statement appreciation to Jim Hyde who created a post-reunion photo album on Google to which Jim and others in our group are now able to share their photos taken at 2023 Monterey reunion.



**National  
Peace Corps  
Association**



Does this postcard look familiar to you? If you're a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer and your address is current with the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA), you've most likely received a few of these.

The NPCA is partnering with Publishing Concepts (PCI) to produce and publish a book of Peace Corps stories.

PCI began contacting RPCVs in April 2023 and received over 1,300 responses within the first two days.

You can contact PCI directly at 1-800-982-1590 / [customerservice@publishingconcepts.com](mailto:customerservice@publishingconcepts.com).

Learn more about this opportunity to document and share your Peace Corps service story on the [NPCA website](#).





## NEW BOARD MEMBERS JOIN FBF

We're excited to welcome to new Board members to our 2023 Board! Please extend your welcome to:



### **Souleymane Diallo, Vice President**

Souleymane is a Burkinabe who served as an education programming staff for 11 years with the Peace Corps in Burkina Faso. He is currently the Education Specialist for USAID in Burkina Faso. Souleymane has been in the Education field for more than 22 years, with a focus on Youth Development and Girls' Education. He served as Program manager for both Emergency and Development projects with Catholic Relief Services. He started his career as a teacher in rural Burkina Faso.



### **Brad McKim, At Large Officer / Legal Counsel**

Brad was a lawyer for 30 years and through his work and love for travel, has visited all 50 states and over 75 countries. He has published a book, *A Presidents Story*, and his other passions include fly fishing and songwriting with an album available online, *The Road*. He lives in Wyoming with his first passion, his wife Kay. He visited Burkina Faso in 2013.

- Lives of 10 Million Children on the Line as Conflict Rates | [UN News](#)
- Festivals are a Form of Defiance for West African Cities Facing Terror | [Bloomberg](#)
- Yale Architecture Names New Scholarship in Honor of Francis Kere | [Archinect.com](#)
- Ken Elliott: Australian Hostage, 88, Freed by al-Qaeda Militants | [BBC](#)
- Men in Military Uniforms Killed at Least 60 People, Burkina Faso Says | [New York Times](#)
- 40 Killed This Week in Burkina Faso | [VOA News](#)
- FESPACO: Tunisian Thriller Takes Top Prize | [BBC](#)
- France's Operation Sabre in Burkina Faso: From a Quiet Arrival to a Bitter Withdrawal | [Le Monde](#)

Following Board Elections, some former Board Members transitioned to new roles while others maintained their prior positions:

- **Kristen Combs-Bicaba**, President / Interim Newsletter Officer
- **Kristin Lavoie**, Treasurer
- **Leslie Berger**, Secretary
- **Caroline Chambre Hammock**, Project Officer
- **Jennica Betsch**, Technology Officer
- **Etienne Yonli**, Membership Officer

Want to learn more about our Board Members? Read complete bios on our [website](#).



EYE ON AFRICA | France 24 - Watch this short piece on the 28th edition of FESPACO recently held in Burkina.



**GET INVOLVED!**  
**Board and Committee members needed!**

As we finalize changes to our bylaws and Board roles, we are looking for new Board and Committee members. **If you're interested, please reach out by emailing [president@friendsofburkinafaso.org](mailto:president@friendsofburkinafaso.org).**



# CALL FOR PROPOSALS

**PLEASE SHARE WITH YOUR FRIENDS & NETWORKS!**

The FBF Projects Committee is currently accepting proposals for consideration for 2023 grant funding. Projects must be related to community development or humanitarian assistance.

For more details and application guidelines, visit our [website](#).

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE DETAILS](#)



*FBF Treasurer, Kristin Lavoie, took her school's hat day to the next level.*

## A TASTE OF BURKINA IN DC

By Jennica Betsch, RPCV '16 - '17

I've been eager to expand my Burkinabé network since moving to Washington DC a year and a half ago, and the city's Passport DC event seemed like the perfect opportunity.

According to their website, "Passport DC is a month-long journey around the world highlighting DC's thriving international diplomatic community and its lively and varied culture." Embassies open their doors or set up tables at a local university to share their culture, art, cuisine, and more with the public.

As soon as I arrived at the event, hosted at the University of DC this year, I spotted the unmistakable (and unmissable) Burkina Faso table, covered in a tablecloth of the red and white traditional women's pagne, identical to a dress gathering dust in my closet that my host family had made for my Peace Corps swearing-in ceremony long ago. The table held all sorts of familiar memorabilia - a pointed Peul hat, carvings of Africa's 'Big 5' mammals, more pagne, beads, leatherworks, and a huge flag with that yellow star right in the middle.

With all the enthusiasam of an RPCV, I stuck out my hand to the first person I saw and greeted him with a classic, "Ne y windga". As anyone who has been to Burkina Faso would be able to tell you, our mutual enthusiasm and excitement only grew from there, as he was at first stunned to hear Mooré come out of this random girl's mouth, and then quickly turned to call more and more people over to test my limited language skills.

I ended up indulging in this Burkinabé dream for a full hour, showing off my kegaba dancing skills and commiserating over just how deeply one can miss a simple bowl of attiéké. Burkina Faso and my Peace Corps experience can seem so far away, so long ago, but this was a great reminder that the experience continues to shape my life and connections to that time will continue to be made.



*The Embassy of Burkina Faso to the USA shared their time with Jennica Betsch, FBF Technology Officer, at the Passport DC event on their Facebook page.*



## ABOUT US

Friends of Burkina Faso is a 501(c)3 nonprofit affiliated with the National Peace Corps Association. We maintain a **network** of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) and friends of Burkina Faso. We provide funding and assistance to **support projects** in Burkina Faso. We strive to **improve social interaction**, communication and information exchange. We **educate** others about the country and culture of Burkina Faso.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

#### President

Kristen Combs-Bicaba, RPCV '98-'01  
Email

#### Vice President

Souleymane Diallo  
Email

#### Treasurer

Kristin Lavoie  
Email

#### Secretary

Leslie Berger, RPCV '81-'83  
Email

#### Technology Officer

Jennica Betsch, RPCV '16-'17  
Email

#### At-Large Member / Legal Counsel

Brad McKim  
Email

#### Projects Officer

Caroline Chambre Hammock,  
RPCV '02-'04  
Email

#### Membership Officer

Etienne Yonly  
Email

#### Interim Newsletter Officer

Kristen Combs-Bicaba, RPCV '98-'01  
Email

#### FBF Project Committee

Leslie Berger  
Desiré Bansé  
Drissa Dao  
Jimmy Kolker  
Elisabeth Nebie  
Mead Over

#### Friends of Burkina Faso

PO Box 33212  
Bloomfield Hills, MI 48303-3212

[www.friendsofburkinafaso.org](http://www.friendsofburkinafaso.org)



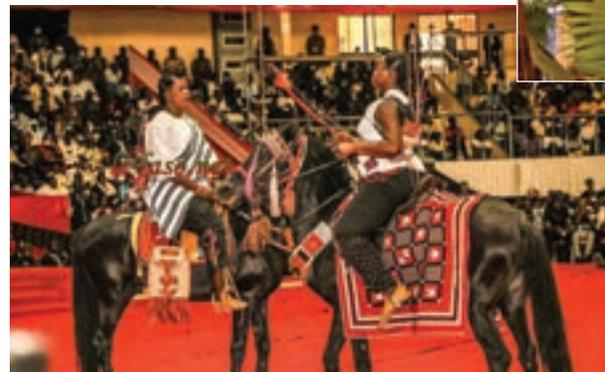
## BYLAW REVISIONS

Over the years, the Board has discussed needed updates to our bylaws to modernize and help the organization become more agile in responding to the needs of a growing nonprofit and our partners in Burkina Faso.

With this in mind we proposed the below updates to our current bylaws

1. Eliminate membership categories that had not been used in recent history and did not seem appropriate for the organization we are today.
2. Allow Board flexibility in the number of Board members, requiring at least seven members while aspiring to nine.
3. Provide Board flexibility in required officer positions. A President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Project Officer are required positions, while other roles can be assigned, created, or adapted given the organization's needs.
4. A preference that the Board President serve at least one term in another Board role in order to serve as Board President
5. A provision to have at least one Board member living in Burkina Faso, whenever possible.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact [president@friendsofburkinafaso.org](mailto:president@friendsofburkinafaso.org).



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Some recently shared images from *Le Burkina Faso est Chic* Facebook page: (Top) Quaga by Night, (Left) FESPACO Opening Ceremony.

