

Friends of Fiji

News

Summer 2005 Vol. 14 Issue 1

A NEWSLETTER FOR RETURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS, STAFF & ALL FRIENDS OF FIJI

2004 Fiji Fundraiser A Banner Success

This past year, the Friends of Fiji gathered at the New Zealand Embassy on Saturday, October 23 to raise funds for Fiji. The event was a rousing success. Led by Tommy Foster, this past year's event was particularly memorable. If you missed it, read the summary on page 2. Find out the who's who of attendee's on page 3. The silent auction brought in a tremendous result. See page 4. If you are just looking for the bottom line on funds raised, turn to page 4.

In Other News

New Fiji Ambassador

Mr Jelson Vitusagavulu is appointed Fiji's Ambassador to the United States.. See the press release on page 4.

Annual General Meeting

The Friends of Fiji gathers yearly to elect new officers and catch up on news. Couldn't attend? Get the big picture on page 6. Hear from your new president, Beth Shearer, on page 2.

Vacation for Two in Fiji

Air Pacific, the Warwick Fiji, the Tokatoka Resort Hotel teamed to donate a travel package. Read about how many times one package can be awarded in a raffle on page 3.

US Fiji Times

A man in the San Francisco Bay area is publishing the *US Fiji Times*. It is a community-oriented newspaper serving the 80,000 strong group of Fiji nationals living in the Bay area. Read more on page 8

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Computers On Taveuni

The Rotary Club has branches world-wide. Learn what two branches, one in Kirkland and one on Taveuni, have accomplished on page 4.

New England Gathering

Some of us met up in New England to celebrate Memorial Day, including folks traveling from as far away as South Carolina. To learn more about this past event or about how to sign up for next year's event, turn to page 9.

Environmental Education for Dummies

Ryan Peseckas is serving in the Lomaiviti area. He has a novel way of passing the environmental message to schoolchildren. There is no good way to explain this one. You've just got to turn to page 5 and find out for yourself.

Fiji In The News

The Earth always rotates and news never stops. Find out the latest in Fiji on page 7.

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President's Letter

The newly-seated President of Friends of Fiji is Beth Shearer. She has this address for the organization:

Dear Friends of Fiji:

I want to heartily thank Cynthia Grant for her hard work over the last two years as the President of the Friends of Fiji. She accomplished a great deal including the most successful fundraiser held at the New Zealand Embassy last fall.

As I start my tenure as the President of the Friends of Fiji, I am thinking about what we might accomplish over the next year. I believe we should continue to maintain close ties with the Fiji Embassy and Fijian community here in the U.S. We also want to keep in touch with the current volunteers in

Fiji and maintain a relationship with the Peace Corps staff in Washington, DC, both to know what is happening in Fiji and to fund useful projects.

I would like your input on our priorities over the next year. What do you think the most important tasks are for the Friends of Fiji? What do you most appreciate about the organization? Let me know what you think by e-mailing me your thoughts at beth.shearer@comcast.net.

Vinaka!

Beth Shearer

Friends Of Fiji Fundraiser Of 2004

Advancement of Peace is not achieved from the sidelines. The name of our organization is our objective. Raising funds is the means. Here reports your achievements:

October 23, 2004 was the date of the most recent, and the most profitable, Friends of Fiji fundraiser. Although the weather was cool, a Fijian dance band that came from California inspired an Island feeling. The banquet of dishes from Fiji also helped the over 200 guests imagine they were in a tropical paradise. The sale of raffle tickets, donations and money from the silent auction earned \$9300 that will support development projects in Fiji through the Peace Corps Partnership Program.

The New Zealand Embassy is a beautiful venue in Washington, DC. The large atrium style ballroom has glass on two sides opening to lush greenery. Everyone enjoyed the music and, once most people had eaten, tables were moved to make more space for the dance floor. The tralala was the most popular dance style but the occasional line was formed. It was a gay affair!

It has been the board policy that the cover charge is as small as possible so that all can afford to attend. However, it is also necessary that we collect enough to cover the costs associated with holding the event. The money collected for registration was used to pay for renting the embassy, flying the band from California and giving them meals and accommodation, renting equipment such as tables, and purchasing the food for the banquet. This year the event costs were exactly covered by the registration fees and the bar sales.

Tommy Foster was the chairperson for this very successful fundraiser. He worked for a year from lining up the use of the Embassy through driving the band to the airport. Putting on a large event like this takes a lot of planning and follow through. Supporting Tommy were all of the board members, most of whom had worked on previous events. John Smallwood worked very closely with Tommy in the early planning and handled rental equipment. Linda Ayers also work on the planning with Tommy and worked on promotion and publicity.

David Downes took complete responsibility for the raffle tickets. He got the necessary legal paper work, designed and printed them and monitored the sales. He also wrote and printed the evening program and acted as MC for the evening. Anne Baker ran the silent auction. She collected and cataloged items, prepared the displays and handled the bidding and award of items. There was a wonderful collection of items in thanks to Friends of Fiji members from all over the country trying to help by making donations.

Teresa Saunders and Dan Junker helped Anne organize and set up the auction. Jim and Polly Reiersen were in charge of setup and decorations and did a beautiful job. The room had tapa and Fijian flags hanging from the rafters and flowers on the tables. Polly and Cynthia Grant made leis for the special guests. Beth Shearer supplied the cakes and salads and worked heavily on registration. Cynthia Grant designed, printed and sent the invitations. Fred Mosher processed the registrations and handled all the accounting. Fred, our treasurer, also keeps a storage area in his basement for Friends of Fiji supplies. He made sure that we had plates, cups, forks, napkins and serving utensils. Joe Wall ran the bar all evening and helped bring in a lot of money.

Board members Amelia Catanasiga and Teresia Owens managed the buffet. They planned the menu, recruited cooks (Amelia's husband, Kele, made the palusami) and saw that everything was delivered and served on time. Members of the Washington/Baltimore area Fijian community prepared most of the delicious food. Isoa Rambuli leads the Fijian community group called Viti DC and organizes many social events in the area. In his suburban Baltimore yard he has a true Fijian lovo where he produces baked food about 10 times a year. For the FoF fundraiser Isoa graciously offered to use his lovo and to prepare the fire and supervise the cooking. He and others from the area baked a whole pig, dozens of taro and yams, palusami and fish. Other members of Viti DC prepared huge pots of curry and rice. One woman spent an entire day frying roti. Colorful fruit salads completed an authentic Fijian feast.

A lot of work went into this event but it was truly a great party. We hope that in 2006 we will have even more of our

community in attendance.

Fundraiser Attracts Fiji, Peace Corps and NPCA Dignitaries

No single person caught the entire attraction. Here is the fundraiser from another perspective.

Fiji projects through the program. They seemed to enjoy the food, music, and bidding on silent auction items.



Peace Corps Deputy Director Jody Olsen accepts a Bilo

The Friends of Fiji was pleased to host a number of Fiji and Peace Corps dignitaries at the fall 2004 fundraiser. The Fiji Embassy was represented by Charge d'Affaires, Paula Navunisaravi (the First Secretary), and his wife, Megan. The Second Secretary, Cheryl Brown-Irava, and Embassy Staff Larry Irava and Salanieta Sucu also attended.

A large number of Peace Corps staff attended, led by Deputy Director Jody Olsen (Tunisia 66-68), who indicated in her remarks that a highlight of her visit to Fiji was the kava ceremony. (At that, the evening's emcee, David Downes, quickly produced a bilo!) Peace Corps Partnership Program staff were eager to see how much we could raise to support

The Chair of the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) Board of Directors, Ken Hill (Turkey 65-67), his wife Winnie and the NPCA President, Kevin Quigley (Thailand 76-79), represented the NPCA. Friends of Fiji is one of the NPCA's 157 affiliate groups. FoF board member and silent auction coordinator Anne Baker (Fiji 84-86) is the NPCA's vice president.

Other dignitaries included Ambassador William Bodde, Jr (Ambassador to Fiji, 1980-82), Dan Cantor (Peace Corps Fiji Country Director, 1973-76), and Brendan and Vaidehi Sargeant of the Embassy of Australia.

A highlight of the evening was the surprise attendance by former Peace Corps Director, Kevin O'Donnell. Kevin was the first Director to have first been a country director (Korea 1966-1970). The fourth director in the agency's history,



[Left to Right] Winnie Hill, Ken Hill, Jody Olsen and Kevin O'Donnell

Kevin was appointed by President Nixon in July 1971 and served until September 30, 1972. Kevin was in town on other business and contacted Jody Olsen, who even surprised him by bringing him along to the fundraiser.

Raffle Grand Prize. Given Twice!

Still more about the fundraiser. In particular, how some of the funds were raised:

Eseta Vere, the winner of the Grand Prize Fiji Vacation in the Friends of Fiji raffle drawing on October 23, 2004, asked that we give her prize to the driver at the Fiji Embassy in Washington, Lalthan Zuala Phillips. Ms. Vere's son, Paula Navunisaravi, is the Charge 'd Affaires of the Embassy.

Mr. Phillips, whose family is originally from Northeast India and who has never been to Fiji before, will enjoy round-Summer 2005

trip air transportation on Air Pacific between Los Angeles and Nadi, plus several days accommodations at two hotels - the Warwick Fiji at Korolevu, Sigatoka and the Tokatoka Resort Hotel at Nadi Airport.

The raffle raised over \$6700 for Peace Corps Partnership projects in Fiji, to be developed and implemented by communities with whom current PCVs are living and working.

Congratulations to Ms. Vere and Mr. Phillips and many thanks to Air Pacific, the Warwick Fiji, the Tokatoka Resort

Hotel and to the hundreds of people who bought raffle tickets!

Silent Auction Brings in Record Amount

No gunusede at the fundraiser. Instead, we have the silent auction. Read on:

The silent auction always includes a wide range of items up for bidding, from small Fiji memorabilia to large museum-quality pieces of masi. This year's collection exceeded all previous silent auctions in the number and quality of items and in the number of donors, many of whom dug into their personal collections to offer up items for the cause. There was something for everyone: jewelry, celebratory sulus, placemats and table cloths, books, posters and artwork,

donated services, and many different types and sizes of tapa cloth.

The silent auction this year netted over \$1,400. Thank you to all donors and bidders! A special thanks also to Dan Junker and Teresa Saunders for their help in cataloging the items and coordinating, setting up, and running the auction itself.

We are already collecting items for the next silent auction. Donations may be sent anytime to silent auction coordinator Anne Baker. (See her contact information on the last page of this newsletter.)

Finance

Fred Mosher is your Treasurer. He reports on the Fundraiser by the numbers.

Friends of Fiji's sixth biannual fundraiser was a big success all around, including in the area of dollars raised. The raffle of the Fiji Vacation-for-Two, sponsored by Air Pacific, Tokatoka Resort, and the Warwick Fiji, netted \$6,734.20. The Silent Auction conducted during the Fiji Evening featured a wide range of items, many direct from Fiji, and brought in \$1,442.68. Income from registrations for the Fiji Evening were matched by expenses associated with the event,

but our cash bar gave us another \$1,275.30. Straight donations towards our cause totaled \$1,190.52. Add these all up, deduct expenses for the invite mailing, and put in a couple of bucks from our treasury to round things off, and the final result is that Friends of Fiji raised \$9,300.00 for Peace Corps Partnership development projects in Fiji. A big Thank You to our fundraiser co-chairs, Tommy Foster and Linda Ayers, and to everyone else who helped and participated, and thereby made this our most profitable fundraiser yet!

Appointment of New Fiji Ambassador to the US

The following press release was issued by the Fiji Government.

May 26, 2005, 11:00

The Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Hon Kaliopate Tavola today announced the appointment of University of Sussex educated Mr Jesoni Vitusagavulu as Fiji's Ambassador to the United States.

This followed the granting by the U.S State Department of the agreement earlier requested by the Fiji Government for Mr Vitusagavulu's appointment. He will also be accredited to Canada and the Republic of Cuba.

Mr Vitusagavulu is currently the Managing Director of the Toptier Management, a management consultancy and investment company that he founded.

He was the Chief Executive Officer of the Fiji Islands Trade and Investment Bureau(1996-2003).

He held various senior management positions in Fiji's National Airline, the Air Pacific from 1990-1996, only leaving the airline whilst holding the appointment of General Manager Commercial, one of only 4 GM positions.

For twelve years he served in various capacities with the Fiji Development Bank. He was Manager Special Project with the Bank when he left in 1990 to join the Air Pacific.

With his extensive Banking background, Mr Vitusagavulu currently serves on a number of boards. He is currently the Board Chairman of the Agricultural Marketing Authority, the Food Processors (Fiji) Limited and the Kontiki growth fund.

He is also a Board Director of the Fijian Trust Fund Board, Kadavu Holdings limited and Kadavu Development Company.

Mr Vitusagavulu is a member of the Prime Minister's "Think Tank" advisory Group.

He is married to Silina and they have three daughters.

Computers for Taveuni

The following is a press release issued by the Kirkland Rotary Club:

Kirkland Rotary Club Provides Computer Labs to Taveuni Schools

In today's world, computers are indispensable as educational tools. Unfortunately, the price of a computer is still outside the reach of many around the world. This creates a technological gap between societies in which computers are

readily available and societies that don't have access to computers.

The Island of Taveuni is one of the 332 islands that form the country of Republic of Fiji Islands in the South Pacific Ocean. Partly because of its location, the Fiji Islands are in one of the most protected parts of the world. But, this protection comes at a cost to local children who are not involved with the technical advancements of the modern world. Fijian schools are challenged to provide access to

modern educational tools, including computers, for their children.

To overcome this challenge, the Kirkland Rotary Club, in collaboration with the Ballard High School in Seattle, Washington, Mount Rainer High School in Des Moines, Washington, Taveuni Rotary Club of Fiji, Rotary District 5030 and Rotary International has made arrangements to provide a total of 160 networked computers under the Computers for the World (C4W) Program.

Kirkland Rotary Club spearheaded the project and received grants from Rotary District 5030, Rotary International and the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation. Kirkland Rotary Club has raised \$19,000. The funds will pay for purchasing and shipping 160 new/refurbished PCs, monitors, printers, and networking peripheral equipment. These computers will be built, tested and installed on-site by the

traveling Ballard High and Mount Rainer High School students in the Bucalevu and Holy Cross High Schools, and East Indian (K-8) School. Total number of students in these schools is around 1,500. In the future, additional computers will likely be installed under the C4W program for community center access in the town of Somosomo and in neighboring villages where electricity is adequate to support computer technology

While this project provides new computers and educational opportunities to Taveuni children, it also provides an opportunity to our high school children to acquire high-level computer skills and to gain exposure to other countries.

On April 18th, the C4W Club students will load computers, monitors, and peripherals into a 20-foot container that will travel first by truck and then by ocean cargo vessel and ferry. The container is scheduled to reach Taveuni Island in early June. Once the container is delivered, the Ballard and

Mt. Rainier students along with their chaperones will fly to the island where they will become guests of the Taveuni Rotary Club while building the three school computer labs.



To help pay for their travel costs, the C4W club students organized an e-cycle fund-raising event with InterConnection, a local recycling center. The event was co-sponsored by the Ballard and Emerald City Rotary Clubs.

To find out more about:

- Computers for the World Taveuni Project, please contact Daniel Bartel from Kirkland Rotary Club at (206) 310-5766

- Computers for the World Program, please contact Robin Dubrin at (206) 660-8669 or visit

<http://emeraldcityrotary.org/c4w/>

- Ballard High School C4W Club activities, visit

https://www.edline.net/pages/Ballard_High_School/Classes/c4w

PCV Peseckas ‘Single Handedly’ Transforms Environmental Education

Source – *Fiji Times*
Sept 16, 2004

Over the years, many United States Peace Corps volunteers have come and gone from our shores, most leaving behind an impression or legacy with the people of their host-community. One such volunteer in Levuka, though not nearly finished with his service, has already begun to shape the lives
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of children on his island. Working through the Lomaiviti provincial office, Ryan Peseckas has revolutionized environmental education as we know it, all with an unlikely helper: his ventriloquist dummy.

“I became easily frustrated when talking to local school children about their environment,” Peseckas notes. “They just didn’t seem to listen to me. I could sense that they were a

bit intimidated. That's when I came up with the idea for a dummy – a smaller version of me that the kids can relate to." The dummy, named 'Ratu Peseckas,' became an instant hit with the kids. Little Ratu has spent the past month teaching youngsters about the fragility of their local reefs, leading nature treks into the Ovalau highlands, and organizing numerous beach clean-ups.

"It's made entirely of coconut husks," Peseckas says of the dummy. "I was able to rub various powders and ointments into the husk to give it a life-like skin tone. I had a friend of mine create smaller replicas of all my clothing, so Ratu dresses the same as me every day."

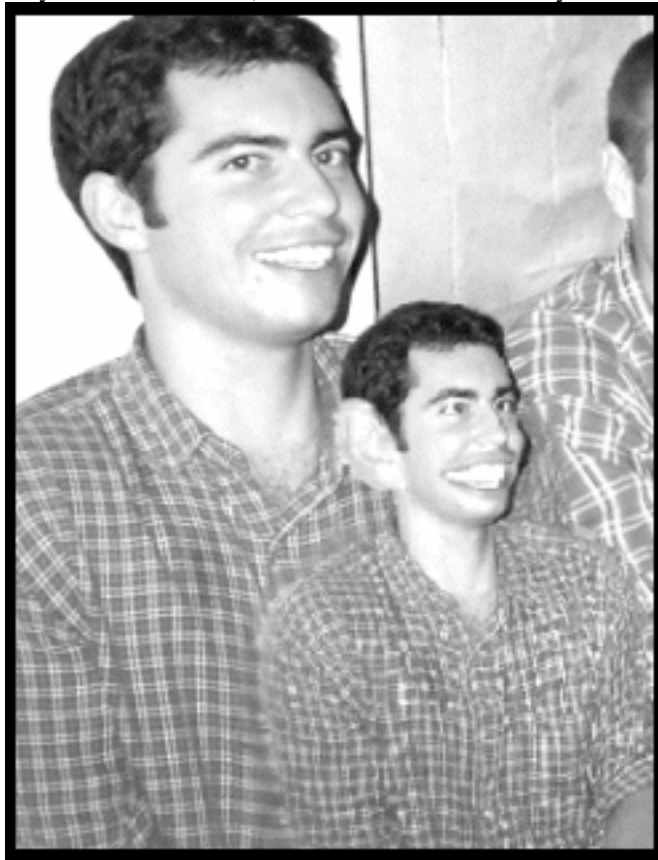
According to Ryan, the dummy's reputation has surpassed his own. Neighbors invite the dummy over for tea or grog almost nightly. "They always seem disappointed when I show up alongside the dummy, like I'm tagging along or something. I think people have forgotten that I actually operate little Ratu" Ryan explains. This fact is perhaps no more obvious than at Levuka Primary school where each morning, the students call out in greeting, "Yadra Ratu Peseckas!" This is followed by a much less excited obligatory greeting, "Io, io Ryan." Ryan doesn't mind that he has yet to share his dummy's fame. "Little Ratu is like Santa Claus to these kids. I don't want to restrain their imaginations, nor do I want to diminish their educational experience."

It is said that when speaking through the dummy, Ryan has gained considerable respect around the Provincial Office. Ryan now carries Ratu Peseckas with him everywhere he goes, though it sometimes means double bus fares.

As a secondary project, Ryan has used the dummy's status to lead a series of international summits regarding the preservation of Pacific Cultural Heritage Sites – with Old-Town Levuka on top of the agenda. The dummy has also raised F\$3.2 million for local charities. "Ratu Peseckas has really changed the direction of my volunteer service," Ryan stressed, as though it weren't obvious.

Though he spends endless hours each night practicing his ventriloquist technique, the live Peseckas still moves his lips slightly while projecting the dummy's voice. "It's not as easy

as it may look," he tells aspiring ventriloquists. "The continual practice can be tedious, so I must remind myself each night that I am doing this for the people of Fiji and the environment which I love so dearly." Ryan is truly a noble servant to our country and our great mother earth. He is not only a model volunteer, but a model for all humanity.



Ryan's ventriloquist dummy (a miniature likeness of himself) has become the voice of environmental education throughout the Lomaiviti group.

Annual General Meeting 2005

Fortunately there was a winter storm in the Washington, DC area on January 22, 2005 and the annual general meeting of the Friends of Fiji had to be postponed until March 5. This was indeed fortunate because on March 5, Peace Corps/Fiji Country Director Mark Lewis was in town and was able to attend the meeting. He brought a great PowerPoint presentation about the current program and volunteers, shared his own thoughts on the start-up of the new program and answered questions from those eager to learn more (i.e. most of those present).

Held at the home of David and Willa Downes (Fiji I) in Fairfax, VA, the evening also included the traditional potluck

dinner which was, as usual, not only abundant but delicious in lots of different and wonderful ways. The Catanasiga family brought yaqona to share with all those who hadn't had a bowl in quite a while and, in fact, with a few visitors who had never had the pleasure.

The "excuse" for the evening (as if we really needed one) was to elect the next Board of Directors. By tradition, all those receiving at least one vote are elected. Thus, it was a tightly contested event. Those elected included: Beth Shearer, Cynthia Grant, John Smallwood, Jim Reiersen, Fred Mosher, David Downes, Teresia Owens, Anne Baker, Amelia Catanasiga, Linda Ayers and Dan Junker.

Board Officers 2005

At the April 3, 2005 board meeting officers were elected for the current year.

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Beth Shearer, President

The new president served in Lambasa from 1970 – 1973 as an English teacher at All Saints Junior Secondary School and spent three months at the University of the South Pacific working on a variety of projects.

Teresia Owens, Vice President

Teresia was born in Nasese, Suva and grew up in Suva. She met her husband Wes in Fiji and they were married in Pago Pago, American Samoa in 1979. During the next several years while Wes was working on the NASA Geodynamics Project they lived in Washington DC, California, Colorado, Israel and Tahiti. They took a break from NASA and worked on a US Air Force job in New Zealand from 1982-83. Since 1985 they have lived in Maryland. Teresia has worked as a Documentation Coordinator at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland from 1989 to the present. Teresia is a founding member of Viti DC and longstanding member of the Friends of Fiji. She has served as President of Viti DC and has held board positions with Friends of Fiji as well. Currently she is the manager and treasurer of the Viti DC Netball Association.

John Smallwood, Secretary

John and his wife, Betty, served in Fiji with the Peace Corps group FIJI IV, from 1969 to 1972. They were elementary teachers on Gau Island in Lomaiviti.

Fred Mosher, Treasurer

Fred is married to Alice Alexander (Fiji XXX 1977-1979) and has served as our Treasurer and Database Manager since helping Alice found the Friends of Fiji in August, 1991.

Jim Reiersen, Web Master

Jim taught physics at the University of the South Pacific as a PCV 1973-1975. Has been on the Friends of Fiji Board forever.

Cynthia Grant, newsletter manager

Cynthia Meadows, (Fiji IX 1971-1975) served as a secondary school math teacher at Koro Junior Secondary School and at Lelean Memorial School. After three years teaching, Cynthia helped train the education group that arrived in late 1974.

David Downes, newsletter editor

David (Fiji I - 1967-69) served as a secondary school English teacher in Navua and on the PC/South Pacific staff in Suva and Honiara, Solomon Islands (1973-1975). He worked for PC/Washington until 1985 and is a past president of Friends of Fiji, having been one of the founding board members.

Dan Junker, newsletter production editor

Dan (Fiji 56 1984-1986) taught Secondary School on Kandavu and Taveuni. These days the Friends of Fiji board keeps him chained up down in the basement churning out newsletters. He is well fed but wonders whether Reagan is still in office.

Amelia Catanasiga, member

Amelia was born on Ovalau, Fiji. She was educated in Suva at the Fiji Technical Institute. In October, 1973 she joined the Fiji Peace Corps staff and over 13 years worked herself up to the position of APCD Administator. She held this position for another 12 years and was the last person in the office when it closed March, 1998. She and her family then moved to the United States in the same year and live in Fairfax, Virginia. She is married to Kele and has two children, Kele, Jr, and Va. Kele and his family (2 children) also live in Virginia. Va lives in Sydney, Australia. She has served on the Friends of Fiji board for 5 years.

Linda Ayers, member

Linda served from August 1972 to November 1974 as a Community Development/Home Economics instructor at the South Pacific Commission's Community Education Training Centre (SPC C.E.T.C.) in Suva. She lives in Arlington Virginia with her husband, Peter Vitaliano, and two sons, Michael & Matthew Vitaliano.

Anne Baker, NPCA Liaison

Anne (Fiji LVI 1984-86) taught form five Physical Science and form six Physics and Mathematics at Lomaivuna High School. Upon completing her volunteer service, Anne then trained the incoming Peace Corps education volunteers in Fiji LXII. She is now the Vice President of the National Peace Corps Association.

Fiji In the News

These news items summarize prominent news articles found on the *Fiji Times* web site and related links.

Reconciliation Bill

The proposed Promotion of Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill would establish an independent commission that could give amnesty to participants of the May 2000 coup and could provide financial compensation to those who suffered. The bill has been controversial. Some businesses support the idea that they could be compensated for damage to property while others think that the bill might be used to excuse perpetrators from personal responsibility for their crimes. Although the proposed independence of the commission is Summer 2005

designed to remove politics from the review process, some fear it gives absolute control to a few.

Farmers

Although sugar production is high, production costs are beginning to exceed sale prices. European Union policies are changing the rules so that developing countries will not continue to receive special prices for their goods. This is expected to result in lower earnings for cane sugar and molasses. The president of the Fiji Tourism Resource Owners Association suggested that farmers look for alternative crops, especially those that could take advantage of the rise in tourism. He said that the tourism industry imports food that could be produced locally.

Language Education

It is expected that the Education Department is going to require that the Fijian language and culture be taught in all primary and secondary schools. This is designed to ensure that the Fijian language does not die out. Many indigenous Fijians speak English at home to help their children do better at school. Consequently Fijian children no longer grow up proficient in Fijian. The Minister of Education, Ro Teimumu

Kepa, said that they would later look at teaching Hindi, Rotuman, Urdu and Tamil languages.

New US Ambassador to Fiji

President Bush has nominated Larry Miles Dinger to be the next Ambassador to Fiji. He would replace Ambassador David Lyon. Mr. Dinger served as Deputy Chief of Mission in 1996 and was the Charge d'Affaires from 1998 to 1999.

Bay Area Man Gives Fijians a Voice

By Michelle Meyers, STAFF WRITER, The Argus

Publisher says he wanted to bring together community.

Hayward is considered the capital of the United States' Fijian community and is now home to the country's largest Fijian newspaper, The *U.S. Fiji Times*, said publisher Rocky Ali Buksh.

Buksh, a San Mateo resident, explained that up until the 1990s, San Bruno was considered the local Fijian capital city. His uncle settled there in 1953, and Fijian stores started to multiply. Slowly but surely, as property values rose, word spread that homes were more affordable on the other side of the San Francisco Bay, and Fijians flocked to Hayward, he said.

There are now some 80,000 Fijians living in the Bay Area, Sacramento and Modesto, Buksh said. About 30,000 live in Hayward, he said.

After watching the community grow for 26 years, Buksh, a newspaper enthusiast, decided in late 2003 it was time to launch a Fijian publication. The first issue of the free monthly paper was published in February 2004.

"I wanted to bring together the community," he said.

The *U.S. Fiji Times*, a spin-off of The *Fiji Times*, offers a mix of Fiji-related news, ranging from local Fijian youth

sports to financial news about the Fijian dollar to celebrity news about Britney Spears honeymooning in Fiji. The November issue included a supplement on the Diwali Hindu festival.

The paper's content comes from an all-volunteer staff, including one local writer and one who writes from Fiji. The publication has grown in circulation from about 2,000 copies to 10,000. It started with 10 advertisers and now has 30. Subscribers span the globe, with many living in Canada, which is home to some 200,000 Fijians, Buksh said.

Despite its success, Buksh struggles monthly to make a profit. Although he is interested in returning to his homeland, he expects the paper to continue to grow, even if it is under someone else's leadership.

"It's a very community-focused paper," said Hayward Real Estate broker Nick Khelawan, one of the paper's advertisers. Khelawan heads up the Hayward-based Fiji Cultural and Sports Association and helps run the annual Fiji Festival.

The Fijian community is a melding of different races, religious and life experiences. Many Fijians are natives of India who were brought to the island to work on sugar cane plantations under slavlike conditions.

Some fled the island as a result of a 1987 military coup, others because of a 2000 government decision to start taking back farmland.

Buksh runs the paper primarily out of his home. To contact him, call (510) 733-9287.

Notes From the Web Master

Jim Reieron manages the Friends of Fiji web page at <http://www.fofiji.org> Here are some of his recent discoveries.

Mark Lewis, the Fiji Peace Corps Country Director, has assembled 3 CDs of Fiji pictures.

The pictures have been uploaded onto <http://www.fiji-peace-corps.us/>. The August '03 - June '05 album on <http://www.fiji-peace-corps.us/> now contains over 1800 photos documenting Fiji Peace Corps Volunteers. Thanks to Mark and Bill Sharp, the site's administrator. Also, thank you, Fiji Volunteers, for your service and for your photography.

The movie "The Land Has Eyes," filmed in Rotuma, was shown May 20 at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. If it comes to a theater or film festival near you, I highly recommend it. More information Summer 2005

can be found at the website

<http://www.thelandhaseyes.com/index.html>.

The Sex Lives of Cannibals: Adrift in the Equatorial Pacific, by J. Maarten Troost. It's not about sex or cannibals, but it's a good read. The author describes two years spent on Kiribati while his wife worked there for an NGO. He does a great job of capturing the humor and frustrations of island life.

Looking for a reason to go to Fiji? Beachcomber Island Resort invites you to the second annual 2.8km ocean swim to be held Saturday 6 August, 2005 in the coastal waters surrounding the island. Contestants will swim from the Nukasiga sand bar to and around Beachcomber Island. The inaugural race in 2004 featured 42 swimmers from 8 different countries. For more information go to <http://www.beachcomberfiji.com/resort/swim.html>.

If you need help remembering Beachcomber Island, a collection of websites with maps of Fiji can be found at

http://www.embassyworld.com/maps/Maps_Of_Fiji.html

Memorial Day New England Gathering

Fred Mosher reports on a recent gathering:

Thirty-two Friends of Fiji's gathered at the home of Lou Guarino (Fiji XXX) and Anne Mulvaney for our annual New England gathering over the Memorial Day Weekend. Guests joined us from as far away as South Carolina! As usual, the food was awesome and everyone had a good time reflecting

on their years in Fiji, current events related to Fiji, and what's happening in our lives today. A big Vinaka Vakalevu to Lou and Anne for being such gracious hosts! (If you don't live in New England, but would like to receive a flyer announcing next year's gathering, please send an email to that effect to femosher@erols.com.)

NPCA News

Anne Baker keeps us abreast of the wider doings within the Nation Peace Corps Association. Here is the latest

Log on to the new NPCA Online Database

Following a long transition process (with some of it still ongoing), the NPCA has switched from an in-house, server-based database to a web-based system. For NPCA's 157 affiliate groups, including Friends of Fiji, this means more direct access to group member data and expanded capabilities.

We encourage our members to log onto the new system to check your records. Once you log on, you can update contact information, Peace Corps service information, program preferences (e.g., the NPCA activities in which you are interested), and your personal username and password. In particular, we urge you to add and/or update your email address, as this will allow us to better serve you, should we need to contact you with urgent information. Of course, you

can also join (or renew) NPCA and FoF! Please note that you need to make the updates in only one place, as any changes made on the NPCA website are then available to FoF for our database.

Please log on today! Simply go to the NPCA website at www.rpcv.org and click on "join/renew".

Daily Press Clips now on NPCA Website

Looking for news of Peace Corps Fiji? One potential source is the NPCA website. Each day, the NPCA receives news clips that mention the Peace Corps. This clipping service picks up news from all over the world - print, radio, websites, etc. - which the NPCA then uploads to its website. Simply click on the News link from any page of the NPCA website, www.rpcv.org to access these news clips. Simply open the document and do a find for "fiji". Please note that the NPCA will keep only the last two week's worth of news clips online. FoF webmaster Jim Reieron will periodically copy any news items related to Fiji to the FoF website (www.fofiji.org).

Peace Corps Staff

Here is a snap shot of the Peace Corps Staff

Peace Corps Headquarters Staff

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Post Staff

Mark Lewis, Country Director* (He will be departing the week of July 4th)

Maj Fischer, Administrative Officer

Steven Zodrow, Associate Peace Corps Director /
Programming and Training

Mita Bera, Program Manager

Josephine Piukala, Peace Corps Medical Officer

Lesu Waqa, Assistant Training Manager

*The new Country Director for Fiji will be Oghale Oddo. He is currently the Administrative Officer for PC/Swaziland, was previously the AO for PC/Jordan, is an RPCV Jamaica. He will be traveling to Fiji with his wife and 2 young sons.

Itukutuku Ni Leqa

Friends of Fiji has learned of the passing of members of the Fiji and Peace Corps communities:

Carl Lewis

Fiji RPCV Carl Lewis (husband to Litiana and father to Leilani, Tina and Inia) died on February 6, 2005. Carl and Liti were host to many a FoF Memorial Day weekend

gathering when they lived in Connecticut, before relocating to Nevada.

At the viewing at the family home, Carl was dressed in a bula shirt and sulu vakataga, complete with salusalu, etc. He always looked well dressed vakaViti, and that was his parting presentation to the world. Carl will be missed from coast to coast, and beyond.

Francis Thomas

Fiji RPCV and retired Rear Admiral Francis J. Thomas, a decorated hero of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, died January 21, 2005. He was 100 and had suffered a stroke two weeks earlier.

An Aloha, Oregon resident since 2001, Thomas is best known for commanding the battleship USS Nevada's ultimately unsuccessful run for deep water as enemy torpedo bombers tore a hole in the ship's side and set it afire. For his actions that day, Thomas won the Navy Cross, second only to the Medal of Honor. "I'm the only officer," he is quoted as saying, "ever to be awarded the Navy Cross for running a ship aground."

During his retirement, Thomas and his wife, the former Elizabeth Schoch, who predeceased him, were Volunteers in Fiji. Thomas taught world history, and his wife taught biology.

Survivors include his sons, Timothy of Kansas City, Mo., Brian of Aloha and Jeffrey of Brooklyn, N.Y.; four grandsons; and two granddaughters.

Levani Damuni

Levani Damuni (husband to Donna) of Boston suffered a fatal heart attack while in an airplane flying from Hawaii to California on February 21, 2005.

Ray Stein

Fiji RPCV Ray Stein, 51, passed away on March 20, 2005 at his home in Sitka, Alaska. He had served for four years as a Volunteer in Fiji and had traveled and lived in New Zealand, Australia, Japan, China and Thailand. He is survived by his wife, Aporn U-Ngern, and two sons, Richard, 17, and Robert, 15.

Maris Rombout

Maris Rombout (Maris Blinn Fiji '86--'89) of Leesburg, FL died May 10th 2005, from a staph infection contracted during back surgery several years ago. Maris was a nurse and loved her 3 years in Fiji. Her sense of humor and love of life endeared her to all who knew her. She and her husband, John, made a return visit to Fiji. He said it was the highlight of his life.

Bligh Water

If you look at a map of the Fiji Islands, you'll see the strait between Vanua Levu and Viti Levu is called "Bligh Water"



So exactly who is this 'Bligh'? Is it that Captain Bligh? The one petulantly calling Mr. Christian to task aboard a ship of the British Admiralty?

In a word: Yes.

He was the first Brittan to navigate these waters, but the circumstances were astonishing. For the whole story, we need to back up a bit. First of course, the Fijians themselves arrived, about 1500 or so years ago. This was part of a larger wave of settlement of the Pacific Islands. Fast forward to the late 1700s.

The British are latecomers to the area, but Captain Cook had captured the imagination of England with an account his of voyages of discovery across the Pacific. These were as

singular then as landing on the Moon was in our own times. Among his officers is Lieutenant Bligh.

In 1783, Joseph Banks, an English naturalist with plenty of political connections, petitioned the British Admiralty to commission another voyage. Collect living breadfruit trees in Tahiti. Trans-ship them to the West Indies where planters intend them to be the foundation of groves upon which to build a fortune.

Times had changed though since the Cook. Stories of a Tahitian paradise in Pacific waters is yesterday's news. War is brewing against the Dutch. Admiralty reluctantly agrees to the voyage but makes clear that it is just as important for Bligh to chart the militarily significant narrow passage between the northern tip of Australia and the southern islands of Indonesian archipelago.

It is said that Admiralty's indifference to the voyage was its undoing. Though Bligh was given command of the *Bounty*, he himself was still just a lieutenant. Because some he commands were nearly the same rank and seniority as he, they felt Bligh barely has right to tell them what to do at all. Nor was Bligh detailed any Royal Marines for the voyage. (Marines are the captain's personal security force aboard ship.)

On the other hand, some say Bligh was an unbearable martinet. He lent money to his officers during stopover in southern Africa, but needed them mercilessly about the debt later. He played favorites among the crew. Mr. Christian himself was among the favored until the last fateful month of the voyage.

Some attribute the mutiny to the long stay over in Tahiti. There were many months of island life and light duty while breadfruit trees were potted and stabilized in nurseries and while waiting for favorable weather in the straits north of Australia. Officers and crew had ample time to make friends among folks living in Tahiti and even start families.

Returning to the hard discipline of cramped quarters, bad food and whippings for shipboard transgressions was bleak.

Fletcher Christian instigated the mutiny two weeks after departure from Tahiti, on the way to Australia.

Half of the crew remained loyal to Bligh, but mutineers had the drop on them. They had the muskets. Bligh along with 19 loyalists were put to sea aboard the Bounty's launch.



Scale Model of the Bounty Launch

As a token, they were given some water and food. Still they all expected to die at sea. Bligh had other plans. His particular specialty being navigation, he charted a course from just West of Tahiti, through Fiji, and finally to East Timor in the Indonesian archipelago. This is a 3000 mile journey. Along the way he continued his log, taking measurement of latitude and drawing charts of the lands he passed, so we know today exactly where he passed.

First he sailed for Tonga, stopping off to take on drinkable water and plantains. We have only his report of the encounter. It began well enough as a shore party looking for water. They met a local chieftain and his village. The villagers had heard of Captain Cook. The episode turned badly though. They ended up on the beach being stoned by villagers. Most escape back to the launch. One was killed by the islanders during the retreat.

After Tonga, he passed through Fiji. Here is an excerpt from his log. This is the very first record of British passage through Fiji. The story picks up with their launch being seen by Fiji Islanders, who have sent out canoes to investigate:

All the afternoon we had light winds at north-north-east: the weather was very rainy, attended with thunder and lightning. Only one of the canoes gained upon us, which by three o'clock in the afternoon was not more than two miles off, when she gave over chase.

If I may judge from the sail of these vessels they are of a similar construction with those at [Tonga] which, with the nearness of their situation, gives reason to believe that they are the same kind of people. Whether these canoes had any hostile intention against us must remain a doubt: perhaps we might have benefited by an intercourse with them, but in our defenceless situation to have made the experiment would have been risking too much.

I imagine these to be the islands called Feejee as their extent, direction, and distance from [Tonga] answers to the description given of them by those Islanders. Heavy rain came on at four o'clock, when every person did their utmost to catch some water, and we increased our stock to 34 gallons, besides quenching our thirst for the first time since we had been at sea; but an attendant consequence made us pass the night very miserably for, being extremely wet and having no dry things to shift or cover us, we experienced cold and shiverings scarce to be conceived. Most fortunately for us the forenoon turned out fair and we stripped and dried our clothes...

At noon I observed in latitude 16 degrees 4 minutes south and found we had made a course from yesterday noon north 62 degrees west distance 62 miles; longitude by account from Tofoa [an island in the Tongan group] 7 degrees 42 minutes west.

The land passed yesterday and the day before is a group of islands, 14 or 16 in number, lying between the latitude of 16 degrees 26 minutes south and 17 degrees 57 minutes south, Three of these islands are very large, having from 30 to 40 leagues of sea-coast.

In the last two paragraphs, Bligh aptly describes passage between Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, and by the Yasawa group, through those waters that now bear his name.

Friends of Fiji News is published by Friends of Fiji, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose goals are to keep Fiji RPCV's, staff, and friends in touch and informed about current affairs in Fiji and to raise funds for worthy projects in Fiji. Our general correspondence address is: Friends of Fiji, 10413 Kinloch Road, Silver Spring, MD 20903. Email us at femosher@erols.com, or visit our website at www.fofiji.org.

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