
The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

Volume 22 Issue 3



November—December 2007

45th Anniversary of Peace Corps Niger

Peace Corps Director Tschetter Visits Niger & Joins the Celebration

Peace Corps Niger Director Mary Abrams sent the following account of the fete and the Director's visit:

Peace Corps Niger rather naively took on the task of hosting the Peace Corps Director to help honor their 45th Anniversary of uninterrupted service and the swearing in of 40 new Volunteers. It just sounded like such a good idea – who would have guessed it would have been such an adventure.

Director Tschetter came to Niger with his Chief of Staff, David Liner; his Confidential Assistant, David Miller; the Press Director, Amanda Beck; and the Director of the Office of Private Sector Initiatives (OPSI), Michelle Cangelosi. None of these people had been to Niger before and most of them struggled to imagine the life of a Peace Corps Niger Volunteer in the bush might be like. We were determined to show them all. In addition to the Director's entourage, I drove and translated for them and one of our talented Volunteers, Brittany Gallagher, was the official videographer. We were almost always accompanied by a member of Peace Corps Niger's senior staff as they are the ones that make it all happen so we wanted them to show off their work. (Continued on page 4)



Peace Corps Director Ronald Tschetter with Peace Corps Niger Staff

45th Anniversary of Peace Corps Niger



Letter from the President

Dear Friends of Niger,

It has been a great joy to celebrate with Peace Corps this year, 45 years of continuous developmental service with the people of Niger, building positive relationships in Niger, and weaving the threads of a global family. Let's toast together to the past 45 years and hope for at least another 45 years of collaborative service, friendship, and peace.

Friends of Niger hasn't yet a history of 45 years as an organization. Our history has had some starts and stops, some set backs and some successes. To help us continue into the future, one idea the FON Board of Directors had was to raise awareness of and support for FON by better articulating our advocacy goals, especially our commitment to the development efforts that uplift and celebrate Nigerien women. Our advocacy work and discussions led us to a fuller and richer understanding and articulation of who we are as an organization. Now in its final draft, the Board of Directors looks forward to sharing with you our FON mission, vision and advocacy goals in the next issue of the Camel Express.

A commitment to Niger and her people will continue to be the focus of our FON mission and vision. One way to support Niger and as a part of the 45th anniversary celebration, the FON Board of Directors launched an appeal earlier this year to raise funds for the Peace Corps Niger Young Girls' Scholarship Program. I'm happy to report that we met our goal and exceeded it by raising over \$4,000! Wow! I want to sincerely thank all of you who donated and to remind everyone else that next year's fund drive has already begun –so please consider a donation to this very important program.

All the best wishes for Happy and Peace Filled New Year, 2008!

John

Renew your **Friends of Niger** membership for the year 2007 or join us for the first time. You'll find the **FON 2007 Membership & Order Form** on page 11.

Board of Directors Friends of Niger

John W. Soloninka, PRESIDENT

*

Gabriella Maertens, VICE-PRESIDENT

*

Penni St. Hilaire, RECORDING SECRETARY

*

Larry Koff, TREASURER

*

Vacant, MEMBERSHIP

*

Judd Lyon, ADVOCACY

*

Steve Bushell, WEBMASTER

*

Sue Rosenfeld, NIGER LIAISON

*

The Camel Express is the periodical newsletter of **Friends of Niger (FON)**.

FON can be contacted via the post at
P.O. Box 5823

Washington, D. C. 20016-9998

Or by e-mail at

j.soloninka@sbcglobal.net

and you will find **FON** on the web at the
following Internet address

www.friendsofniger.org

Editor: Jude Andreasen

Please send address changes and corrections,
as well as any queries to **The Camel
Express** at the address above.



Chris Burns, APCD for Natural Resources Management at PC/Niger, sent the following summary of the festivities.

Peace Corps/Niger Celebrates its 45th anniversary

The balloons arrived at the 11th hour, 2 days prior to the event – the last hold-out preparatory detail after months of planning. 500 red, white and blue balloons with Peace Corps' logo silk-screened onto them. They arrived just days after the new American and Peace Corps flags. Not a detail was overlooked in preparing for our 45th anniversary, a celebration of 45 years of uninterrupted service and partnership with the people of Niger.

The event, on Tuesday, September 25, coincided with the visit from Peace Corps Director Ronald A. Tschetter and his team from Washington (see CD's letter on p. 1) – the first visit to Niger by a Director since 1994. The night before, 20 Volunteers hyperventilated in the bureau's conference room, inflating every single one of the balloons. The day of the event, Volunteers were out in hordes tying the balloons to anything they could – trees, railings, window bars, CD Mary Abrams' arms, etc.)

The air was frenetic on Tuesday morning; the weather stifling. Volunteers and their APCDs were busy putting the final touches on their project display stands. The 5-foot tall paper maché giraffe was moved to a nearby baobab tree so she could be feeding during the event. 10-meter long banners highlighting the event were hung for passers-by to see. Couches were pulled outside, out of the hallways, for the VIPs. The office had been freshly repainted and adorned with new wall hangings. We were ready to showcase our work.

When the doors opened at 09.00h, guests arrived to hear Volunteers and Nigeriens playing their respective instruments in harmony. Volunteers Kurt Garretson, Josh Anderson and Colin (Seabass) Massey provided a pomp and circumstance welcome, with drums, traditional violin, guitar, mandolin and banjo.

The "official" speeches began at 09.30h, with Training Manager Tondi Mahaman MC'ing the event. Volunteer Danielle Sewell started off the words of thanks, providing a heartfelt perspective on what 45 years of service means to the current Volunteer corps. CD Mary Abrams followed up and took a moment, mid-speech, to recognize all past and present staff on-hand, as well as returned Volunteers from Niger-past. RPCVs in attendance included Dr. and Mrs. Kirker from Maine-Soraa, Diffa Region, in the late 60's, and Kelly Bishop who finished his service in 2006. Five neighboring country P.C. staff members were in attendance, each of whom had a connection with PC/Niger, either as a Volunteer or staff member. They included: CDs of Benin (Sheryl Cowan), Togo (Brownie Lee), Burkina Faso (Marily Knieremann), and Mali (Kateri Clement), and Administrative Officer for Benin (Anne Martin). (continued on page 8)

A view from above.



Ag PCV Natalie Beck spotting giraffes at the NRM stand.





Cutting the ceremonial anniversary cake.

The team arrived late on a Friday night and left the following Tuesday and in those four short days they packed in a lot of experience. They managed to travel about 500 kilometers and visit 28 Volunteers, met the President of the Republic, the US Ambassador, and the FAO's representative to Niger. Director Tschetter also got sick (undoubtedly Burkina bugs, that's our story and we're sticking to it), gave out staff awards to the hardest working staff in Peace Corps, cut PC Niger's birthday cake, and wore a grand boubou made of 45th Anniversary pagne material to the swearing in. So here is the short story.

After arriving late, the Director was anxious to be off the next morning early for Birni N'Gaoure in the Dosso Region. There he met local dignitaries and was interviewed by a couple of Volunteers on the Birni radio station. The Volunteers translated the interview into Zarma much to the delight of everyone we saw for the following two days. The Director also visited a Volunteer working at a feeding center for malnourished children and then was hosted by her village for lunch.

We headed down the infamous Falmey laterite road, stopping to see a well-pulley project funded by Rotary International and a women's cooperative grain and fertilizer bank funded by the Peace Corps Partnership (run out of the Office of Private Sector Initiatives and a place people can find PC projects to help fund). Unfortunately the Ramadan fasting (oh did I forget to mention it was Ramadan) and heat (oh yes, it was also the mini-hot season) made the communities quieter than normal but Nigeriens still turned out to warmly welcome Director Tschetter.

We spent the night in Deytegui Moussa, with three Volunteers, a Zarma community of about 100, some drummers and singers, and a zillion West African stars scattered across the sky. The Director seemed completely at ease with the pit latrine and bucket shower amenities and joined the women in pounding millet, the men in dancing to the drums, and the kids in giggling. He also ate all the fabulous Nigerien meals the village prepared – dinner of stewed sheep, rice, and tuwo and breakfast of millet beignets and tuwo with sauce from the night before. He was an amazing trooper sleeping right through the 3h30 pan-drumming to wake all fasters for the pre-sunrise breakfast.

On our way back to Niamey, we stopped to visit a Volunteer working on giraffe conservation just south of Niamey. With the local wildlife guides, we were able to find a small herd of giraffes in just a few minutes. The group was completely taken with the tall, graceful creatures who are protected enough now that you can approach quite close. Many a photo was taken to show that small glimpse of Niger's wildlife.

The afternoon was unfortunately when the nasty Burkina Bug caught up with the Director so we left him in the good hands of one of our PC Medical Officers and finished the days events. In the afternoon we visited the National Museum with a couple of Volunteers who are helping artisan cooperatives in Niamey and Tahoua improve their marketing strategies. That evening we all (except the poor Director) ate BBQ prepared by the Niamey Region Volunteers with all the Volunteers and staff at the Peace Corps Office. Special guests at the BBQ and throughout the remainder of the 45th celebrations were the CDs of Benin (Sheryl Cowan), Togo (Brownie Lee), Burkina Faso (Marily Kniermann), and Mali (Kateri Clement) all of whom have Niger connections as well as Dr. and Mrs. Kirker (Maine Soroa in the late 60s) who are back in Maine helping with a medical clinic. Needless to say it was a wonderful night of laughter and conversation.



Wodaabe dancers at the anniversary celebration.



PCV John Anderson with master drummer Oumarou.

Monday morning found Director Tschetter well enough to meet with Ambassador Bernadette Allen, a great Peace Corps supporter, but not quite well enough to make the trek out in 115 °F heat to sign an agreement with the FAO's representative. So we left some of the group at the hotel and David Liner, Michelle, and I headed out to Winditan, just this side of Balleyara. We toured the young farmers' training center (an improvement on the style popular in the 1980s) with two Volunteers who work there demonstrating sustainable development methods such as rain harvesting, solar energy, and composting toilets. The visit was capped by signing the agreement between Peace Corps Niger and the FAO to continue such collaboration. The trip was followed by a quick stop and tour of the Hamdallaye training center where the staff had really spiffed up the grounds and the Trainees had actually waited for us to have their afternoon cookie and coffee break.

The next day was the Big Day and fortunately the miracle drugs had worked their wonders on Director Tschetter. In the morning we celebrated the 45th Anniversary, complete with balloons, banners, cake cutting, speeches, and displays. In the afternoon we enjoyed a visit to President Tandja who had many memories of Volunteers from his days as *Prefet* of Tahoua and kind things to say about President Kennedy. We then met with all the staff at Peace Corps Niger which featured the appropriate Nigerien exchange of "gifts" - true gifts of Nigerien handiwork for the Director and his staff followed by awards from the Director to certain staff for their extraordinary efforts. It was the staff who presented Director Tschetter with his *grand boubou* that later became his evening attire. The Director then met with the Volunteer Advisory Committee to hear the concerns and ideas of current Volunteers. And suddenly it was time to head to the Ambassador's residence for the swearing in of the 40 new Volunteers - 14 Education, 13 Health, and 13 Municipal and Community Development. But first - Director Tschetter suddenly decided, he had to put on his *grand boubou*. He turned out to be a pretty quick change artist, so before you knew it he was looking fabulously El Hadj-like. He definitely turned heads at the ceremony.

And just as quickly, we were back at the VIP lounge at Hamani Diori International airport. As we walked in, the local newscast was playing scenes of the Director speaking at the swearing in, David congratulating the FAO representative and all of us cutting the 45th Anniversary cake. The team was tired but very happy with the experience. Peace Corps Niger was honored to have hosted the team and we were also tired and happy to have the plane lift off. Like all the best adventures, it had been a grand but intense experience.



Volunteers with Director Tschetter

Friends of Niger and the Young Girls' Scholarship Program Form a Fruitful Partnership

**Donations from PCVs, RPCVs, and Friends of Niger
Ensure the Continued Education of Bright Nigerien Girls**

Thank-You!

A sincere thank-you from Friends of Niger and Peace Corps Niger goes out to all who contributed to the Peace Corps Young Girls' Scholarship Program campaign. A combined total of over \$4,000 has been received to date (November 15, 2007) from the following donors:

Anonymous

Frances Abrams, in memory of Robert Abrams

Jude Andreasen (81'-83')

Mary Jo (79'-81') and Peter (77'-81') Cashel-Cordo, in honor of their 25th Wedding Anniversary

Jean and Chuck Cecil (96'-99'), in memory of Jeremiah Mack

Mary Lou Cronin (76'-79')

Shari Exo (87')

Major Elisha Gray (66'-68')

H and J Fund of the Pittsburgh Foundation

Terri Hallenbeck (83'-85')

Harriet Isom (65'-67')

Matthew R. Kenney (87'-90')

Marily Knieriemen

Larry Koff (64'-66')

Paul Lorenz (72'-74')

Gabriella Maertens (64'-72')

Jane Huser Maxwell (67'-69')

Alaine Nijenhuis (87'-89')

Frances Raycroft (86'-87')

Mimi Haelsenbeck Rich (65'-67'), in honor of Niger IV PCVs

John Soloninka (90'-96'), in memory of Leocadie Agloboe Songbe

Penni St. Hilaire (67'-68')

Walter Tavaska (69'-71')

Angela Toczek

Neal Turner

Janet Wilgus (87'-89')



Friends of Niger and the Young Girls' Scholarship Program Form a Fruitful Partnership

**Donations from PCVs, RPCVs, and Friends of Niger
Ensure the Continued Education of Bright Nigerien Girls**



**Annual Conference Helps Girls
Connect with Peers and Mentors**



**Generous Contributions
from FON Ensures
Continuity for Higher Education
and the
Future of Niger**

How You Can Help

Contributions to our ongoing support for the Young Girls' Scholarship Program of Niger should be made payable to **Friends of Niger** and sent to: **YGSP c/o FON, P.O. Box 33164, Washington, DC, 20033-0164** or sent along with the **Friends of Niger 2003 Membership & Order Form** (see page 11).



Chris Burns on The Festivities— continued from page 3

Director Tschetter was next in line, offering his thanks to Niger for hosting the Peace Corps for all these decades, and to the staff and Volunteers for their unbending dedication. U.S. Ambassador Allen followed-up with thanks from the American people and then passed the microphone to President Tandja's special *conseiller*.

The formalities behind us, the three Volunteer musicians played for the crowd, again along with their Nigerien counterparts. Then eight Wodaabe dancers got the crowd chanting just before the ceremonial cake was cut by Director Tschetter.

The rest of the event, people had the opportunity to walk around to each display stand and take note of Volunteer work in the following sectors: Agriculture, Natural Resources Management, Education, Health, and Municipal Community Development. Displays also included cross-sector work like Gender and Development, HIV/AIDS education, and Information & Communication Technology and radio work. There was even a display stand for the Training team, highlighting photos of Volunteers and training staff going back twenty years. Speaking of photos, a slideshow ran of photos from Volunteers who served in the 60's, 70's, 80's, 90's and today (a special thanks to everyone who contributed these gems).

By the end of the afternoon, in true Nigerien fashion, every balloon had popped from the intense heat of the sun. The event received a lot of local press; hopefully we can find a way to get some of the footage on the FON website. All in all, it was a wonderful event to celebrate a remarkable milestone.



Director Tschetter with Health PCVs Noah Mann & Kelly Devine.

Protection of the River Basins & Rural Economy—Niger & Nigeria

8 July 2007, by By Ousseini Issa in Niamey - IPS. Nigeria and Niger have more than a border in common; they also share a number of river basins that are under threat, and the responsibility for conserving them. "The degradation of land in the trans-frontier river basins of Niger and Nigeria has advanced to the point that it is undermining local and regional economies, and increasing the vulnerability of rural communities," Souley Aboubacar, Nigerien co-ordinator of the joint programme, told IPS.

Now, an initiative is underway to conserve four river basins -- Komadougou Yobé, Tagwaï-El Fadama, Gada-Goulbi, and Maggia-Lamido -- the 'Ecosystems Integrated Management Project' (Projet de gestion intégrée des ecosystems, PGIE). The PGIE is intended to restore the ecosystems of the four basins and slow desertification, rehabilitating 48,000 hectares of degraded land and reducing rates of sedimentation by about 35 percent -- notes documentation for the project.

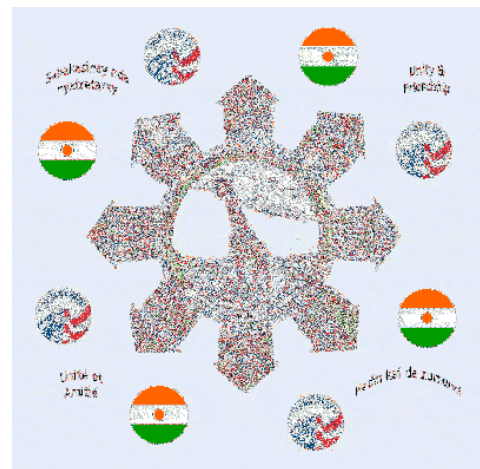
"These regions overflowed with a mosaic of ecosystems of great biodiversity, (and) plants...about 400 species adapted to the Sahelian environment," says Emmanuel Oladipo, PGIE regional co-ordinator. With the shortage of arable land and grazing areas in trans-frontier regions, the project also aims to help communities make sustainable use of natural resources and share these equitably.

The border situation has led to a worsening of poverty amongst people in the river basins, leading to tensions over use of the few remaining natural resources, says Seidou Amadou, principal technical counselor of the PGIE. Communities will be directly involved in implementing the project through attending to degraded land, and helping to conserve biodiversity, according to Oladipo: "From now until the end of the project, in 2013, we also expect at least 50 percent of communities to master good practices for management of natural resources."

The project is being carried out in 24 pilot villages in the two countries, and will affect over 12 million people, mainly crop and stock farmers. The basins cover a surface area of approximately 100,000 square kilometres and traverse the states of Borno, Yobé, Gigawa, Katsina and Sokoto in Nigeria -- and the regions of Tahoua, Diffa, Zinder and Maradi, in Niger. Aboubacar puts the cost of the project at 29 million dollars. It is jointly financed by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and Niger and Nigeria.

Like the Colorful Anniversary Cloth You See on the Front Page?

Pagnes are still available for \$4.50 each (2 yards) plus shipping. See basic commemorative anniversary cloth design at right. Contact Chris Burns directly at CBurns@ne.peacecorps.gov and he'll let you know the cost of shipping and where to send the check. Go to the online newsletter at www.friendsofniger.org to see it in color.





Ag PCV Alex Towns showcasing her women's cooperative's sesame oil.



More
Photos of
the 45th
Anniversary
Celebration

Program & training Assistant Haoua Noma showing off the Natural Resource Management (NRM) display stand.



Safety & Security Coordinator Kabirou Amusa with his three children.



The new flags near the VIP couches for the dignitaries under the tent..

Photographs of the 45th Anniversary provided by Suzannah Johnston, Christopher Burns and Jennifer Burns.

FRIENDS OF NIGER 2007 MEMBERSHIP & ORDER FORM

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City/ State _____ Phone (h) _____

Zip _____ Phone (w) _____

E- Mail Address _____

Connection to Niger (RPCV, etc.) _____

Dates in Niger _____ Location in Niger _____

Program or Involvement in Niger _____

*Membership Dues & Contributions Help Fund **FON** Activities - including **The Camel Express**,
the **FON website**, the **FON Archives**, and **Projects** such as Those Listed Below.*

The Friends of Niger is a tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3).

Membership and contributions to Friends of Niger are fully tax deductible.

Please Check Appropriate Boxes

- ☐ Enclosed is \$20 for an Individual Membership in FON
☐ \$55 to cover Individual Membership in both FON & NPCA
☐ Enclosed is \$35 for a FON Family Membership (2 Members at One Address)
☐ I am a current Niger PCV, entitled to Free Membership
☐ I am a New RPCV, entitled to a 1-Year Free Membership

New and renewing members are entitled to one FREE copy of *Brother from Niger*

Format Choice: DVD _____ VHS _____ No Thanks _____

- ☐ In Addition to my Membership, I have enclosed
a General Contribution of _____
- ☐ Instead of Joining FON at this time, I have enclosed
a General Contribution of _____
- ☐ I want to support FON's Young Girls' Scholarship Program activities
with a Contribution of _____
- ☐ I want to support FON's Microcredit in Niger activities with
a Contribution of _____
- ☐ I want to support FON's Appropriate Technology activities
with a Contribution of _____
- ☐ I want to support FON's Youth Education activities
with a Contribution of _____
- ☐ I want to support the FON Chewable Vitamin Campaign
with a Contribution of _____
- ☐ Please send _____ copies of *Brother from Niger*/DVD
Format Choice: DVD _____ VHS _____
at \$20 (2 for \$35) (Shipping Included) _____
- ☐ Please send _____ Friends of Niger T-Shirts
at \$18 each (Shipping Included) _____
T-Shirt Sizes: S _____ M _____ L _____ XL _____

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED _____

Make Check or Money Order Payable to Friends of Niger and mail with this form to:
P. O. Box 5823, Washington, D. C. 20016-9998



FON Participation Menu

Indicate your interest with a check mark. Or add something new at the bottom. Tell us how to reach you on Page 11.

- ☐ Will help set up local FON group
- ☐ Would participate in local FON group
- ☐ Will be local FON contact person
- ☐ Would be FON contact person for potential PCVs to Niger (contact us at the address on page 11 or via e-mail at j.soloninka@sbcglobal.net)

Other _____

Inside *THE CAMEL*...

- Page 1 - 45th Anniversary & Director's Visit**
- Page 2 - Letter from the President**
- Page 3 - APCD Chris Burns recounts the day**
- Page 4 & 5 45th Anniversary & Director's Visit**
- Page 6 & 7 Young Girls' Scholarship Program**
- Page 8 - Anniversary Festivities**
- Page 9 - Protection of the River**
- Page 10 - Photos of the Festivities**
- Page 11 - Membership Form**

Editor: Jude Andreasen

An electronic full-color version of this newsletter and previous editions can be accessed @ <http://www.friendsofniger.org>



Friends of Niger

P.O. Box 5823

Washington, D.C. 20016-9998



Address Correction Requested