

SERVAS AND PROBLEM SOLVING

The Comox Valley (B.C.)

Servas Hosting Project

Summer 2003 saw the fulfilment of an interesting pilot project bringing together Servas Canada members in Seattle, Vancouver and on Vancouver Island with Servas travellers from Central America. The idea originated at a gathering of the Comox Valley Servas hosts in 2002 when someone pointed out that most of us have the opportunity to travel overseas, including developing countries, and stay with Servas hosts. In contrast, people from developing countries can rarely if ever afford to visit us. The discussion led to an invitation being sent to Servas hosts from Central America to come to Canada. The Board of Servas Canada generously helped to cover the travel costs while Comox Valley hosts raised funds to defray the costs incurred during the visit.

The lucky participants were David and Raquel Espinoza from Honduras, who have been hosting Servas travellers in their own country for many years. David, a medical doctor, and Raquel, a social worker, run a rural medical clinic for the poor. They also sponsor other projects such as developing a 'School for Excellence' to help bright elementary school students and a *Madres y Bebés* health project. Most of their time and money have gone into these projects so they never even dreamed of travelling or taking a holiday, especially abroad!

The Espinozas were first welcomed by hosts in Seattle. They then took the train to Vancouver and met many hosts in this area before travelling over to Vancouver Island to stay with hosts in Victoria, Duncan and the Comox Valley. In all, they stayed in 11 different homes and were invited to three well-attended Servas gatherings.

Their British Columbia experience included craft fairs, a quilting bee, meeting with doctors at a local hospital and lots of sightseeing, a tour of the West Coast of Vancouver Island. In exchange, the Honduran couple prepared taco feasts for their hosts, showed pictures of their home and children, their clinic and their own country and left maps and information about Honduras to encourage exchange visits.

An unexpected benefit of this project, which may stimulate other Servas groups, was the opportunity for networking. David spent time sharing ideas with a Nicaraguan doctor who is doing development work in his own country. In Comox Valley he also learned more about a Nicaraguan fair-trade coffee project supported by a local development group. He hopes to use this knowledge to introduce changes in the coffee marketing practices in his own part of Central America.

Every Servas member who participated in this pilot project has felt very uplifted about the outcome. All who met and hosted this delightful couple realized that this was a win-win situation. For most Canadian hosts it was the first time they had ever hosted members from a developing country and the experience gave them food for thought. Some are keen to support the projects that David

Aids Free Africa

I was introduced to Servas by a friend in 1988 when travelling in the United States. I am German Citizen, now living in New York. As a peace organization Servas has NGO (Non Governmental Organization) status at the United Nations (UN). As a representative of Servas to the UN in New York I attended the two most recent annual DPI/NGO (Department for Public Information) conferences on "Human Security and Dignity" and "The Millennium Goals".

At the conference Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva told us his successful fight against AIDS by ordering its existing pharmaceutical industry to produce anti-retroviral HIV/AIDS drugs. He caused the release of patents from protection. He succeeded to lower the death rate caused By HIV/AIDS to drop dramatically. Of the 300,000 people in the developing countries on anti-retroviral therapy (AVT) half of them live in Brazil.

Fast forward: My response to hearing this incredible news is that I founded AIDS free AFRICA.

I am a Chemist. Most Chemist wish for a Nobel Prize in Chemistry - I am very I want a Peace Nobel Prize. Like Bob Luitweiler once said, when you think peace - something happens. I found people in Africa that are welcoming my idea to train people there on how to produce AIDS drugs. Thanks to a very generous CEO of a US Bio-generics Company I have access to the technology, thus we will set up production. My firm belief is that countries have to be able to produce their own drugs. Anything produced outside the country is too expensive and would be "aid" instead of empowerment. AIDS drugs don't cure, but they prolong life so that parents can see their children grow up and children can learn from their parents how to farm and build shelter. AVT will slow down the increasing number of orphans. Today a teacher dies every day somewhere in Africa. It was no accident that the United Nations Security Council was holding an emergency session on HIV/AIDS. This is a threat to security and the survival of a continent. 8500 people die daily. Knowing they could be alive if given 2 pills a day, called me powerfully into action. I am humbled beyond words to be able to dedicate the rest of my life to empower people in Africa.

That is what peace can do - this is what SERVAS helps inspire in its members. And I am 100% sure I am not the only SERVAS member. Let's hear from others what SERVAS has inspired in your community.

Rolande Hodel, New York US

and Raquel are involved in while others are contemplating a trip to Honduras to help in the clinic there. Such personal connections have enriched the lives of both the guests and their hosts. So it seems that hosting people from the developing world as a way of fostering international peace and justice makes good sense.

Servas Canada