



**Happy Anniversary VISTA:**  
A Legacy 44 years in the making!



**VISTA and Peace Corps:**  
Alums tied together in mission and action...

**VISTA Viewfinder**  
Issue 9: August 19, 2008

**VISTA: Volunteers In Service To America**  
Since 1964, 175,000 Strong



# VISTA viewfinder

1 VISTA since 1964

2 Volunteers in Service

3 175,000 Strong

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## SNAPSHOTS

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Dear VISTAs and Friends,

This Wednesday, August 20, 2008, marks the 44th anniversary of passage of our VISTA legislation. At 180,000 strong, VISTAs and alumni have been continuously fighting poverty for 44 years.

You are part of the great legacy of national service that brings opportunities for education, housing, health care, jobs, and so much more to low-income families and individuals throughout our country. Thank you for your service and dedication to VISTA and to them.

Every day, VISTAs across the country are working on a common goal: to empower communities to eliminate poverty. I look forward to celebrating 45 years of service next year!

Sincerely,

Jean Whaley  
VISTA Director

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## **VISTA, Ohio Benefits Bank, Dayton** By Charles Stough



I was among the earliest Peace Corps Volunteers, 1964-66 in Panama. It was a time of great upheaval in U.S. society -- civil rights, women's liberation, consumerism, antiwar activism, the sexual

**of the Month:**

If you were creating a play list to represent VISTA, what songs would you include?

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FAQ

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revolution, environment, music, mass media -- all were in revolution. Volunteerism was the way many of us participated. I ran a house-building co-op that built 44 homes, using pressed-earth bricks that the villagers and I made.

VISTA was founded later. We overseas Volunteers, having learned other languages, living in sometimes unhealthy or hostile places, thought of VISTAs as "weekend campers." VISTAs could live at home and couldn't get involved in politics. In contrast, in Panama I participated in several events of civil disobedience, such as marches on the alcalde's office. It was how things got done in many countries -- including the U.S., witness the civil rights and anti-war marches on Washington.



After a career in journalism, my retirement to art and writing was interrupted in 2007 by a call from an executive of the local Episcopal diocese, inviting me to participate in the Ohio Benefit Bank (OBB). I became a VISTA. My year resulted in more than 140 OBB counselors assigned in three counties.

But clearly the revolution is over in both VISTA and Peace Corps. Both services work closely with established charities and agencies, with a premium on calm and decorum. We don't march on city council meetings to get funds, we apply for grants. Today's volunteers get pay and benefits that we wouldn't have thought of in 1964. Today's projects in both services tend toward process instead of activism.

I recall an in-service training (IST) session during my VISTA service in which the speaker extolled shining one's shoes and never complaining. I was thinking how many thousands of years people wore shoes that hurt, until finally in about my grandfather's time someone noticed that right and left feet are shaped differently. If only someone

had complained sooner.

I was amused by a parallel between early Peace Corps and modern-day VISTA service. In 1964, host countries were often suspicious of us “Yanqui” interlopers parachuting in to set things right in someone else's nation; in Dayton, the OBB was also greeted with suspicion and hostility by a few very territorial social service bureaucrats. In both positions I applied the same technique: If you can't move an obstacle, go around it.

Peace Corps and VISTA service both have an important effect on volunteers after their service tours. We learn that there is satisfaction in sacrifice. We also emerge energized and educated in what needs to be done. For becoming a better prepared participant in democracy, I'm grateful.

## **VISTA, 1992-1993, North Dakota**

**By Eileen Conoboy**



“Follow your bliss.” That concept was foreign to me as I drove westward from Virginia to North Dakota to join my cohort of VISTA trainees back in 1992. Sitting in a Bismarck coffee shop a few days later with people of all backgrounds, listening to a VISTA trainer expound on the importance of doing what you love, I was fascinated by this idea that you could follow a deliberate course in life and do what makes you happy.

As a VISTA in a small North Dakota farming town, I trained volunteers, wrote grants, accompanied battered women to the courthouse and hospital, and worked with community groups to raise local awareness of domestic violence. The focus of the assignment was grim enough but the mission was uplifting, and the realization that I had skills that could make things a bit easier on people around me surprised and invigorated me.

I learned to work with people from all walks of life as a VISTA, and I came to appreciate the shades of gray through which so much of life transpires. I marveled at the cultural differences that distinguished rural North Dakotans from their east coast counterparts, and I learned it's not just in the movies that people bake pies to welcome their neighbors.

As my year in VISTA came to an end, I considered re-upping and spending another year on the plains. Instead, I decided to take it a step further and apply to the Peace Corps. Soon I found myself living in a mud hut in West Africa, speaking Bambara and working to prevent malnutrition among women and children in Mali. The skills I learned in VISTA – flexibility, self-motivation, and problem-solving, among them – were put to good use as I parlayed my domestic grassroots experience into an international development setting.

For me, VISTA was the perfect precursor to the Peace Corps. Both programs forced me off of auto-pilot and allowed me to become a part of something much bigger than myself.

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## Frequently Asked Questions:

### **Q: What is the Viewfinder?**

*A: VISTA means view-looking out on a broad expanse. The viewfinder, a toy that all generations of VISTAs recognize, was a kind of binocular that focused on points of interest, highlights, and snapshots in living color. The VISTA Viewfinder surveys in the landscape and zeroes in on service.*

### **Q. Why the Viewfinder?**

*A. Here's your direct link to connecting with other VISTAs, learning what they are doing, and helping to spread the message of VISTA and national service!*

### **Q. How can I contribute?**

*A. Have a story to tell? Submission ideas? Contact [vistaoutreach@cns.gov](mailto:vistaoutreach@cns.gov). Use the Viewfinder to highlight your VISTA service and share your experiences with others across the country!*

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