This is my last issue as the editor of the Friends of Mongolia Newsletter. I began working with Friends of Mongolia back in 2005 when I approached Jason Stewart (M-13), then co-director, about doing a project for FOM as part of the requirements for my masters degree. I soon discovered that the organization was a fascinating case study in dispersed collaboration. Friends of Mongolia is a virtual organization, an idea I have touched upon in other issues of this newsletter and on the website. Virtual does not mean it does not exist or somehow is an order inferior to other organizations. Rather virtual means that the collective action of the organization and our collaborative efforts are conducted because internet based communication exists in our modern age. Board members, officers, and members are dispersed over a wide geographical area, and yet the communications technology we have available to us allows us to work together for the common cause of community development, education, and cultural exchange in Mongolia and the United States.

It has been a professionally rewarding experience to work with FOM first on the masters degree project and then in the capacity of Communications Coordinator over the last three years.

In that time the organization has used its virtual quality to great effect raising money and in-kind donations for a variety of projects. Friends of Mongolia has provided scholarships to dozens of aspiring young students; it has facilitated cultural exchange opportunities for hundreds of Mongolians and Americans, including participation in cultural festivals and organizing regular public lectures; and it has provided thousands of dollars for small projects in Mongolia.

In this issue of the newsletter you will read about FOM’s continuing effort to pursue its mission to develop partnerships with the people of Mongolia in furtherance of cultural exchange and human development. This is due to the dedication of FOM’s board of directors and officers and the unwavering support of members and other donors.

Contributing to FOM is a rewarding experience. Whether it is as an officer like I have done the last three years or as a person who offers support through cash donations, the bottom line is that FOM makes things happen.

As I transition out of my position as Communications Coordinator, I am struck by how rewarding it has been to work with everyone involved with FOM. I have acquired new skills and met great new friends. I can’t help but encourage those of you looking for a new challenge, some valuable professional experience, or a way to do work that makes you feel good to find a way to get involved in FOM. The picture above is enough to remind me why I am a friend of Mongolia. And, I hope it inspires you, too.

—Brian M. White
FOM Organizes Clothes, Books, and Toys Drive for Orphans

Friends of Mongolia facilitated the collection of used clothes, toys, and books for orphans in Mongolia between October 1 – December 1, 2009, collecting many boxes of donations from around the USA. Bayarlalaa! (Thank you!) to all our generous members and other donors from all over the country who supported this drive. This effort came at a particularly hard time in Mongolia as the country suffered through one of its coldest winters in a decade. This initiative was run primarily by Sarnai Gantumur, Abhilash Mathew, and FOM Board Member Ariel Wyckoff who organized, promoted, and publicized this drive as widely as possible.

The response to the drive was enthusiastic with donations of books, clothes, and toys from members and other donors in California, Virginia, Nevada, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Wisconsin, Colorado, Arizona, Washington, and the District of Columbia. The effort by showing exceptional generosity. Nomadic Expeditions, Inc donated first aid supplies. AngloFreight Co, Ltd and Oyuntssetseg Surnee provided a 50% shipping discount. The Organization of Parents of Adopted Mongolian Children contributed clothes. P. Vijesh provide assistance with transport in California. And, J. Selenge and I. Myagmarsuren provided assistance in Mongolia. Most of the donations were shipped to The Lotus Children’s Center in Ulaanbaatar (www.lotuschild.org), arriving on January 21, 2010. Donations received just a bit after the December 1, 2009 deadline for the drive were sent to the Sun Children’s Center in Darkhan, Mongolia, and they will arrive there in a few weeks.

Lotus Center Children Look Through Donated Clothes

Donations also came from outside the FOM community. Ariel reached out to his local synagogue, Congregation Etz Hayim in Arlington, VA, whose members embraced the initiative by showing exceptional generosity. Nomadic Expeditions, Inc donated first aid supplies. AngloFreight Co, Ltd and Oyuntssetseg Surnee provided a 50% shipping discount. The Organization of Parents of Adopted Mongolian Children contributed clothes. P. Vijesh provide assistance with transport in California. And, J. Selenge and I. Myagmarsuren provided assistance in Mongolia. Most of the donations were shipped to The Lotus Children’s Center in Ulaanbaatar (www.lotuschild.org), arriving on January 21, 2010. Donations received just a bit after the December 1, 2009 deadline for the drive were sent to the Sun Children’s Center in Darkhan, Mongolia, and they will arrive there in a few weeks.

FOM Co-Organizes Lecture at Johns Hopkins University

Mongolian Minister of Education, Science, and Culture Otgonbayar visited Washington, DC at the end of January to drum up support for an expansion of cultural and educational exchanges between the United States and Mongolia. During his visit Johns Hopkins University’s School for Advanced International Studies (SAIS) hosted a lecture he gave on Mongolia’s economic and social transition since 1990. Friends of Mongolia along with SAIS, the American Center for Mongolian Studies (ACMS), North America-Mongolia Business Council (NAMBC), and Chinggis Khaan Foundation organized the event which featured a small reception after the lecture.

Minister Otgonbayar gave those in attendance a spirited assessment of Mongolia’s growth in the last two decades using a wide range of historical anecdotes to support his main thesis that the story of Mongolia at first blush seems fantastic and miraculous but upon closer examination reveals an independence and national pride hard fought for and won. He expressed optimism entering a new century that Mongolia will continue moving steadfastly forward keeping the “miracle” story alive.
FOM Facilitates “Great Silk Road Day” Exchange

Neither snow, cold, nor the early weekend hour could keep away an intrepid group of young explorers. The promise of the blue skies and beautiful prairie steppe as far as the eye can see was calling them—Mongolia!

About 30 students from the Burgundy Farm School in Alexandria, VA attended a two-hour event hosted by Arlington’s Mongolian School of the National Capital Area (MSNCA) as part of their course component on “The Great Silk Road” on Saturday, January 30, 2010. RPCV Hector Gonzalez, MSNCA’s Munguntsetseg Frankosky and Nyamsuren Dash, and Ariel Wyckoff of Friends of Mongolia facilitated this event.

The Burgundy students had previously visited the Saudi Academy as their journey across the Silk Road had taken them to the Mid-East in the curriculum, before arriving at their final destination, Mongolia.

The events began with the students taking a simulated airplane flight to Mongolia hosted by the lovely Mongolian flight attendant, Principal Munguntsetseg Frankosky, who then showed a brief 10-minute video overview of some of the natural and historical attractions of Mongolia. The students were then escorted into the school’s multipurpose room for a round-robin of 10-minute educational sessions and activities on various aspects of Mongolia history and culture.

These stations were manned by MSNCA students and teachers in traditional dress. They provided the Burgundy students first-hand knowledge about Mongolia’s distinct characteristics and unique cultural traditions. The Burgundy students learned about traditional script, and they had the chance to trace their names in paint using this style. They learned about Mongolian clothes and tried some on to have their pictures taken. The students also learned about several traditional Mongolian instruments including the famous morin khuur or “horse-head fiddle.” Life in rural areas being such a critical part of Mongolian heritage, the students also learned about the traditional Mongolian nomadic home called a “ger” and learned to play the game which requires sheep ankle bones, called “shagai.” Capping it all off was learning about the sports festival, “Naadam” where they saw two MSNCA students demonstrate a wrestling match!

The activities ended with sampling some excellent Mongolian food along with a musical concert performed by the Mongolian students.

MSNCA is a critical partner in promoting Mongolian cultural heritage in the US. Those interested in learning more about MSNCA should contact FOM at admin@friendsofmongolia.org.
Q & A Time: RPCV Anne Riordan M-14, 2003 – 2005

Anne Riordan is a Project Specialist with the Association of University Centers on Disability (AUCD) in Silver Spring, Maryland. She works with both the National Service Inclusion Project (NSIP) and University Centers of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) Technical Assistance projects. Prior to working for AUCD, Anne was a Fulbright Fellow in Mongolia, where she conducted research on Mongolian teachers’ perceptions of disability in the classroom. She completed a master’s degree in Special Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2008. Anne graduated from DePaul University, Chicago with a degree in Secondary Education in 2003, and served in the United States Peace Corps, Choibalsan City, Mongolia 2003-2005. She currently resides in Washington DC, and is Co-Director of Friends of Mongolia. Ariel Wycoff sat down with Anne to ask her questions about her experience in Mongolia.

Q: Anne, in a previous Friends of Mongolia newsletter (posted at www.friendsofmongolia.org) we interviewed Brian Baumann, who was an M-1 – meaning he was in the first training group of volunteers to arrive in Mongolia. You were part of the M-14s, a good 13 years later. Can you tell us a bit about your experience as a volunteer? Was it what you expected? What surprised you about life at your post?

A: I was a teacher trainer in Choibalsan City, Dornod Aimag. In my group most of the teacher trainers were sent to Aimag centers, and sadly no one wanted Dornod. Apparently, Dornod has a reputation for being ugly and windy. Little did everyone know that the steppe can be beautiful (when the winds aren’t raging). Additionally, living about 500km from Russia and 200km from China has it’s perks—namely vegetables, cheese, hot water, and pretty consistent electricity. After about 3 months other volunteers were jealous. In Choibalsan I worked at secondary school #8 with 5 English language teachers who had limited English language proficiency. We created an English language resource room with a small grant from the US Embassy in Mongolia. In addition to my teaching, I taught an aerobics class for nurses at Dornod’s hospital, held a bi-monthly English language club for English speakers in Choibalsan, and assisted in a grant writing seminar with other PCVs and VSOs for NGOs in Choibalsan.

Life in Choibalsan was challenging at times. I lived in an apartment alone, which had pluses and minuses. I learned quickly that I was actually never really “alone” because my apartment building’s jijuur (door person) kept very accurate tabs on where I was at all times. Luckily the teachers I worked with took me into their families and we keep in touch to this day. Day to day living took more time, but I was never in a hurry. I did become very good at baking bread over those 2 years, and everyone benefited from that.

Q: What was the most memorable experience in Mongolia? Was there any particular project or achievement that you remember with pride?

A: I know for most of us RPCVs the stories you tend to remember and re-tell are the really crazy ones…like driving for 12 hours in the bitter cold and only going 90 miles and then running out of gas and sleeping on the floor of some random herder’s ger. Yeah, that happened. But at my job at the school I was always amazed by my co-workers dedication to learning English. The teachers I worked with had families, ran their households, were often the sole breadwinners, and somehow they made time to study and really improve. They were an inspiration to me.

Q: What was the hardest part about serving in Dornod, Choibalsan?

A: The hardest part was when the electricity would go out! Just kidding. Honestly, Choibalsan itself is a pretty nice town when it comes to places to live in Mongolia. I think the most difficult things for me were the short days and seemingly eternal nights in the winter months. I think George Economides (M-13) used to say, “if you sleep 12 hours a day, you are only here for one year.” When it’s -30F and dark at 4pm, it’s easy to sleep a lot!

Q: You returned to Mongolia through the Fulbright Program despite having already endured two years of wind, cold, and other hardships out in Dornod. Why? What is it that drew you back to the country? And can you tell us a little bit about the Fulbright Fellowship project you did on Mongolian teachers’ perceptions of disability?

A: When I finished Peace Corps in 2005, I was accepted to the University of Wisconsin-Madison for a Masters degree in Special Education. For the beginning of my degree I was interested in cultural perceptions of disability. During the course of my studies I started reflecting on my time in Mongolia and the perceptions of disability that I had personally encountered. One encounter really stuck with me.
The *jjuur* in my building had a granddaughter who was about 13 years old. She was often helping her grandma clean the building. This 13 year old girl had a cleft palate which left her with a speech impediment and maybe a slight cognitive impairment. She had never attended school. When I asked her grandmother about this, she said “she’s stupid and no one can understand her.” Initially this made me very upset, but then I started thinking about my own knowledge of disabilities, how and where I got that knowledge and I understood that my own perceptions were a part of me, and a part of my American upbringing. I remembered there were some students at my school in Choibalsan with physical impairments who were treated no differently, but then there were other students that the Mongolians called “slow” who were included in the classroom, but often passed on from grade to grade. These cases made me think about inclusion and what it means to be included.

Once I realized that no one had really looked at the issue of disability in Mongolia, it seemed natural for me to go back. In 2007 I received a Fulbright Student Fellowship to conduct research on Mongolian Teachers’ and Stakeholders’ Perceptions of Disability in the Classroom for my masters thesis. This was the first exclusively qualitative study of its kind in Mongolia. For the sake of brevity, I can say that cultural perceptions of disability greatly impact whether or not people with disabilities are included in schools and in society. Additionally, understanding how and where Mongolians are getting their information on disability and how beliefs are shaped can help us to understand the current situation and make lasting change for the future. I was able to present my research at the American Center for Mongolian Studies in UB and “Contemporary Mongolia Conference” at the University of British Columbia in November 2008. The full text of my thesis is hosted on the ACMS website at: [http://www.mongoliacenter.org/library/docs/theses/Anne_Riordan.pdf](http://www.mongoliacenter.org/library/docs/theses/Anne_Riordan.pdf).

I must say that my life as a Fulbright was much different than my life as a PCV. I had a nice UB apartment and a pretty decent pay check. My time in Peace Corps really did help my research. I was able to make contacts more easily, and the fact that I had actually worked in a Mongolian school gave me some cultural currency. During my Fulbright I conducted research in UB, Choibalsan and Hovd. The volunteers in Hovd were gracious enough to let me stay at their apartments. It only cost me a few heads of broccoli, some tofu and miscellaneous vegetables that I brought to them from UB during a cold Hovd November.

Q: Does your current position at AUCD have any Mongolia or other international focus?

A: My current position does not directly have an international focus, although I work with several University Centers on Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) that do international disability research, and we have some international affiliate Universities ([www.aucd.org](http://www.aucd.org)).

Lucky for me I was voted in as the co-director of Friends of Mongolia which helps me to keep in touch with current events in Mongolia, support currently serving Mongolia PCVs and help support Mongolia’s future with our scholarship program and community development grant program.

Q: You are still actively involved in helping promote educational development in Mongolia and intercultural understanding between the US and Mongolia through Friends of Mongolia. Do you envision any potential projects related to disability awareness in education?

A: Universal Primary Education is one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). That goal includes Education for All, including students with disabilities. Mongolia has signed on to work toward the MDGs so I anticipate that disability issues will become more important as they receive more attention and funding. As for FOM, we strongly encourage currently serving PCVs with disability related projects to apply for small grants funding. Perhaps in the future we will create a scholarship to promote students with disabilities in higher education.

Q: Do you plan to go back to Mongolia in the future?

A: I now feel like Mongolia is my second home. I have a feeling I’ll go back sometime in the future.
Mongolia-based Co-Director Stays Busy through the Fall and Winter

Co-Director Jessica Pic kept busy through the fall and winter overseeing transfers for funds to scholarship recipients of the Girvin Scholarship Program and awardees of the Friends of Mongolia Community Development Grant competitions.

The Girvin Scholarship is in honor of Matthew Girvin who was a UNICEF employee who died tragically along with several colleagues in a helicopter crash while working in Mongolia in 2001. Friends of Mongolia has assisted in administering the scholarships since 2006 in cooperation with the UNICEF office in Ulaanbaatar. The program is aimed at supporting students earning degrees in health or social work.

The Friends of Mongolia Community Development Grant program has been active since the spring of 2007. During the fall FOM organized a grant proposal competition, receiving numerous applications to conduct a variety of community projects. FOM selected 2 projects for funding. One for a computer center in Sukhbaatar Soum in Selenge Aimag. The other grant went to expenses organizing an English seminar for Khazak speaking teachers in Bayan Ulgi.

The next call for grant proposals will occur in March. Applications from Peace Corps Volunteers, community leaders, and others looking to improve educational conditions in rural and ex-urban areas in Mongolia are welcome. The Girvin Scholarship program is funded by the Girvin Family, and the Community Grant program is funded by donations and membership dues paid to Friends of Mongolia.

JOIN THE FOM TEAM!!

Friends of Mongolia needs you!

**Mongolia Based Co-Director Position Open**

Friends of Mongolia is currently seeking someone living in Mongolia to volunteer as Co-Director of the organization. FOM is all volunteer, but the professional experience is immeasurable. Those interested in learning more about this opportunity to lead this dynamic organization should contact Anne Riordan at ariordan@friendsofmongolia.org.

**Communications Coordinator Position Open**

Friends of Mongolia is currently seeking someone to volunteer as Communications Coordinator. Individuals with experience writing newsletters and managing websites are particularly needed. Those interested in learning more about this opportunity to gain valuable professional skills should contact Anne Riordan at ariordan@friendsofmongolia.org.

Don’t Forget to Renew Your Membership

Membership dues are a significant source of FOM’s annual revenue. Members are the backbone of the organization, so please don’t forget to renew your membership. There are several membership types which you can select at www.friendsofmongolia.org/join or using the next page.

Consider becoming a special member:

- Иргэн (Citizen): US $35.00
- Гэр бүл (Household): US $50.00
- Баг (Village): US $75.00
- Сум (County): US $100.00
- Аймаг (Province): US $150.00
- Нийслэл (Capital): US $250.00
- Улс (Nation): US $400.00
Friends of Mongolia Membership and Donation Form

Your Contact Information

Name: ________________________________
Address: ________________________________
Phone: ________________________________
E-mail: ________________________________

Why Membership?
Membership Dues are an important source of funds. Your membership dues are what make FOM possible. In addition, membership allows you to stay directly connected to Mongolia and PCVs.

Membership Options

☐ $25 FOM Individual  ☐ $45 FOM Family (2 Individuals)
☐ $50 FOM/NPCA Joint Individual  ☐ $50 FOM/Mongolia Society Joint Individual

Donation Options

General Donation  Community Grant Donation  Scholarship Fund Donation
☐ $10  ☐ $10  ☐ $10
☐ $20  ☐ $20  ☐ $20
☐ $50  ☐ $50  ☐ $50
☐ $100  ☐ $100  ☐ $100
☐ $250  ☐ $250  ☐ $250
☐ ________  ☐ ________  ☐ ________

Total Amount Enclosed $________

Please make checks out to Friends of Mongolia.

US Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 53314,
Washington, DC 20009

Email Contacts:
admin@friendsofmongolia.org

You can also join FOM and donate online at www.friendsofmongolia.org/join.

Thank you for your contribution to Friends of Mongolia!

Friends of Mongolia is a US Registered 501(c)3 not-for-profit, education organization. Donations and membership dues may be tax deductible.
Friends of Mongolia (FOM) is an incorporated 501(c)3 not-for-profit, education organization operating in both Mongolia and the United States. It is an affiliate of the National Peace Corps Association and its membership includes both Americans and Mongolians. It is organized and operated exclusively for charitable, educational and developmental purposes. Friends of Mongolia exists to develop partnerships with the people of Mongolia in furtherance of cultural exchange and human development.

Holiday Fundraising Campaign Contributors

Just before the holidays FOM sent out letters to members and other supporters with an appeal for donations. FOM’s board of directors and officers put their money where their mouths are and pledged to match the first $1,500 in donations. Everyone responded in a big way, and $3,500 was raised during the campaign to fund scholarships, grants, and outreach activities for 2010. Thank you to everyone below for your generous support of Friends of Mongolia.

Janice Gonzalez (Улс Member)
Patrick Sommerville (FOM Board)
Jason Stewart (Улс Member)
Pyramid Granite
Ariuntuya Tsend-Ayush (FOM Board)
Brian White and Sarah Munson (FOM Officers)
Barbara Ann Klein (Аймаг Member)
Matthew Anderson (Сүм Member)
Scott Weinhold (Сүм Member)
Catherine C Chun (Сүм Member)
Ronald C. Stewart (Сүм Member)
Juan Fernandez (Сүм Member)
Ariel Wyckoff (FOM Board)
Marta M. Pereyma (Сүм Member)
Nanci M. Paulson (Гэр Бүл Member)
Joshua Schramm (Гэр Бүл Member)
Janice Brummond (Гэр Бүл Member)
Kathy Vu (Гэр Бүл Member)
Karen M. Nelson (Гэр Бүл Member)
David E. Heffernan (Гэр Бүл Member)
Debra Kay Smith (Иргэн Member)
Roger Fernandez (Иргэн Member)
Batshur Gootiiz (Иргэн Member)

And, of course, all of Friends of Mongolia’s Members, Thank You!