This year marks the 10th anniversary of Friends of Mongolia. That is an amazing fact, indeed. Ten years ago a group of M-7 volunteers fresh from their service in Mongolia decided to found an organization for Peace Corps Volunteers by Peace Corps Volunteers. Since that time the membership in the organization, as well as its pool of significant stakeholders and donors, has grown to include people of all stripes who have an interest promoting educational and cultural exchange between Mongolia and the United States.

I began working with Friends of Mongolia 3 years ago, and the thing that impressed me most about the organization is the simple fact that it brings people together in a common cause that in many ways is only possible because of the time we live in. Each and every person who works for Friends of Mongolia volunteers their time, skills, and effort. Managing an all volunteer organization is a tremendous feat in any circumstances, but it is even more difficult when your volunteers are literally spread across the globe. Through a combination of regular outreach activities, tele-conferencing, and strong commitment of our volunteers, Friends of Mongolia has built itself into an organization with a track record of making a meaningful and positive impact on the lives of countless people.

In this issue of the FOM Newsletter there are more examples of everyone’s dogged effort to turn membership dues, donations, and well wishes into real outcomes for communities Friends of Mongolia serves. In 2008 the organization raised approximately $40,000 to fund numerous projects touching the lives of hundreds of Mongolians and Americans. It is something that everyone should be proud of, from members to donors, officers to board members.

Friends of Mongolia has been around for 10 years. That in itself is cause to celebrate given it is a grassroots volunteer organization. But, in the organization’s 10th year it will also play an integral part in ensuring as many as 30 students attend college in Mongolia, several communities are able to improve some aspect of their lives, and Mongolians and Americans alike learn more about each other’s culture and society. So happy birthday FOM, and congratulations to everyone who has brought the organization this far!

—Brian M. White
FOM Scholarship Applications for 2009-2010 Academic Year Available

Friends of Mongolia is pleased to announce the fourth year of the FOM Scholarship Program. Applications in English and Mongolian are available on the website.

Mongolian citizens under the age of 25 with family residences outside Ulaanbaatar are eligible to apply for the program to receive tuition scholarships up to 800,000MNT to attend colleges or vocational schools anywhere in Mongolia including Ulaanbaatar. More information about the terms and conditions of the program are contained in the applications.

Deadline to submit applications: JULY 1, 2009

www.friendsofmongolia.org

2008-2009 Academic Year FOM Scholarship Awards Ceremony

Friends of Mongolia held an awards ceremony for the 18 recipients of FOM Scholarships for the 2008-2009 academic year in February. US Ambassador Mark Minton, Public Affairs Officer Marissa Maurer, and the Croft Family were on hand at the ceremony to present certificates to the students. The FOM Scholarship Program grew significantly in 2008, and for the first time scholarships were offered to both boys and girls from rural communities.

The program has benefited tremendously from support from Khan Bank which has consistently contributed funds for 6 scholarships each year. The Croft Family (Layton, Allison, Chandamon, and Sky) also have consistently supported the program, giving funds to support 4 scholarships in 2008. The remaining scholarships in 2008 received funding support from the Munson Family, M-7 RPCV group, FOM members, and individual donors.

The annual cost of college in Mongolia continues to rise, but scholarships still average around $650 per year per student. That is a number that boggles the mind, because even modest contributions can have a significant impact on the lives of young Mongolians.

The students in attendance at the ceremony expressed their gratitude for the many people who have contributed to their educations. They were also happy to have a chance to meet the ambassador, as well as meet each other for the first time as a group. As the 2009-2010 academic year approaches, Friends of Mongolia is preparing for the next scholarship competition. However, for the time being everyone at Friends of Mongolia would like to extend their congratulations to this year’s cohort of FOM Scholars.
Scholarship Recipient Pens Poem About Friends of Mongolia

Three time FOM Scholarship recipient У. Ерүүльт (O. Yeruult) recently penned a poem about Friends of Mongolia in appreciation for all the organization has done to support his education. He presented the poem to Co-Director Sadie Munson printed and framed.

Recipients of FOM Scholarships who make good grades (B average or better) are eligible to continue receiving their scholarships until they graduate. In the fall Yeruult begins his senior year, having received support from FOM since starting college in 2006. The poem is presented below untranslated.

Монголын Андууд

Өндөөгийн өчүүсгөөн хорвоод
Өдөрөг хүчлээр нээгэн нөхөрлөсөн
Өгсөн уруудах энэхэн орчлондoot
Өр нимгэн бидний андууд
 Монлөнөн Андууд Бидний андууд
 Мохощгүй зүтгэл бидний уриа

Хүрэн ус нь цэцгээсэн тэгээд
Хүмүүн орчлонд итгэлээр нэгдээд
Хүрээгүй ортод хамтдаан өмчүүсөн
Хүсэлтэй жигүүртэй мөнхийн андууд
 Монлөнөн Андууд Бидний андууд
 Мохощгүй зүтгэл бидний уриа

Суул замналтай залуу насанд минь
Сэтгэлийн дэмэр цацлаа оргосон
Сурахын төлөөх арнүү хүсэлтэй
Сайхан залуусыг итгэлээр тэгтээд
 Монлөнөн Андууд Бидний андууд
 Мохощгүй зүтгэл бидний уриа

У. Ерүүльт

2009.4.23

Officer Receives Honors

On March 19th, 2009 Sadie Munson, the Mongolia based Co-Director of Friends of Mongolia, was recognized by the Omnogobi province, Hanhongor village government for her work with the Gobi-to-Ohio project in a ceremony in Ulaanbaatar. Sadie was awarded a plaque for being one of “The Nine Famous Citizens of Hanhongor village for 2008.” The assistant village director presented her with the award on behalf of the students who traveled to Middletown Ohio to perform in the Middfest cultural festival and their families. Sadie was also awarded a gold medal from the Hanhongor School of Performing Arts for her work with the school and students.
Members and Supporters Come Together to Support Scholars

On February 25, 2009 Friends of Mongolia (FOM) held a happy hour fundraiser at the favorite RPCV haunt -- Haydee’s Restaurant -- in Washington D.C.’s Mount Pleasant neighborhood. Friends of Mongolia officers and members wore their finest Mongolian clothes to celebrate the Mongolian New Year and to give the other guests a taste of Mongolian culture. The event was well attended and included former RPCVs who had served in Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Asia as well as members of the international development community, friends, and family of FOM members. One of the highlights was the silent auction. Competition was stiff as guests bid over Mongolian prints, ankle bones, wallets, and various other items generously donated by FOM supporters. Haydee’s restaurant also contributed 30 percent of all sales that evening to FOM. Between restaurant sales, new memberships, and general donations and the silent auction, FOM received $1,390. The purpose of the event was to raise money for FOM’s scholarship program. Given the relatively inexpensive rates of tuition in Mongolia each and every contribution to the program has a significant impact. The money raised at Haydee’s Restaurant amounts to 2 full tuition scholarships. That means that just by coming together and giving $20, $50, or $100, each person in attendance set in motion the potential to positively impact the lives of 2 students in the coming year. Thanks to everyone who came, donated, and helped out!

If you were unable to attend the fundraising event but you would like to contribute to the program, please donate today online or by using the form on page 7. All donations to FOM are tax deductible.

Community Development Grant Program Funds Several Projects

Friends of Mongolia began a community development grant program in the spring of 2007 to assist small projects in Mongolia. Since that time FOM has awarded approximately $4,000 in small grants to support a variety of projects aimed at education and public civic improvements. Grants have ranged from $100 to over $1,500, and their main purpose is to fill funding gaps in community led initiatives. Often small amounts are needed to make a significant impact, and this program has worked to do just that. Peace Corps volunteers (PCVs) and their local counterparts have been the predominant applicants for funds, but the program is not limited to communities with PCVs. It is open to all communities requesting funds for projects with a strong educational and public civic component.

Recently FOM provided funds of $1,600 to Chuluunkhoorot Soum in Dornod Aimag to refurbish the school’s math classroom, creating a much more suitable environment for studying. FOM provided very small grants of $100 to PCVs in Zavkhan and Khovd Aimag to establish a tourism website about the provinces in cooperation with the local tourism agencies. The sites are available at http://www.zavkhan.com/ and http://www.gohovd.com/. And, two other communities in Khovd Aimag received grants of approximately $400 each to improve English education in the province.

Applications for the program are reviewed on a biannual basis with deadlines of March 31st and September 30th. Grants average $600, and community groups may request up to $2,500 for their projects. All applications are reviewed by the officers and board of directors of FOM. Applications are available by contacting FOM at admin@friendsofmongolia.org.

Those interested in supporting the program can donate on the FOM website or by using the on page 7. Donations of any size are greatly appreciated, and FOM has made good use of donations as small as $100 and as big as $10,000. Although, we certainly would accept more than $10,000 if the opportunity presented itself.
Elections Held for New Board Members and Officers

Friends of Mongolia held elections in early February for members to select new directors and officers to oversee the organization. Directors are elected to three year terms, and each officer serves for one year. Their terms begin March 1, and each person serves voluntarily.

This year's Board of Directors:
Alphonse LaPorta  
Lara Ho  
Ariuntuya Tsend-Ayush  
D. Enkhbaatar  
Ariel Wyckoff  
Patrick Sommerville

This year’s Officers:  
Diana Fernandez - Co-Director  
Jessica Pic - Co-Director  
John Kinsella - Treasurer  
Anne Riordan - Membership Coordinator  
Brian White - Communications Coordinator  
Sarah (Sadie) Munson - Ex-Officio

This year’s Appointed Associates:  
Ganbat Munkzul (Zula) - In-Country Representative  
Jenny Cole – Membership Program Associate

Nominations for board and officer positions are accepted each year in December. Friends of Mongolia is always looking for more help, so we hope to see you listed here next year.

FOM Outreach Programs in the US and Mongolia

Community outreach is a major part of Friends of Mongolia’s work, and during the winter and spring everyone remained busy organizing and participating in different events that promote awareness of Mongolian culture and history. As mentioned in other parts of this newsletter, FOM organized a happy hour and fundraiser event in the Washington area and an awards ceremony for the FOM scholars in Ulaanbaatar over the winter. FOM also participated in the Taste of Mongolia fundraiser event which is organized each year by the Mongolian School of the National Capital Area in Washington, DC. FOM donated $500 to the school and had several representatives on hand to participate in the festivities.

One of FOM’s scholars, O. Yerult, also was inspired during the spring to organize a essay writing contest in his hometown of Mogod Soum in Bulgan Aimag to introduce Friends of Mongolia to his former schoolmates. Yerult visited the 9th and 10th grade classes and introduced them to Friends of Mongolia’s various programs. All the 11th grade students and some parents met in the student development hall where he spoke about Friends of Mongolia, college life in Ulaanbaatar, and the essay contest. Approximately 60 students entered the contest. The winning students received certificates, cash prizes, and CDs. The program was funded with 100,000 tugriks from FOM Officers Brian White and Sadie Munson.

Later in the summer, in commemoration of FOM’s 10th anniversary, board member Al LaPorta and his wife Ann will organize a party at their home with Mongolian poetry readings, morin khuur performers, Mongolian opera, traditional Mongolian artwork and cultural pieces, Mongolian food, some of the founding members of FOM, and more. Information about when and where the party will take place is on page 8 of this newsletter.

FOM is volunteer run, and outreach programs are no exception. Readers who are inspired to organize events in their own hometowns should contact admin@friendsofmongolia.org for ideas about how to promote awareness of Mongolia.

Friends of Mongolia at DC area event
Peace Corps Alumnus Brian Baumann Recalls Life as an M-1

Each training group of Peace Corps volunteers in Mongolia is given a designation derived as follows: M for Mongolia and a number indicating the order of the group. Brian Baumann was an M-1 volunteer, which means he served in Mongolia during the heady yet also bleak days of Mongolia’s economic and social transition. Brian is currently in Mongolia as an American Center for Mongolian Studies Research Fellow, and FOM caught up with him to talk about what it was like to be a volunteer way back when.

Tell us about your experience as a volunteer.

Our group arrived in UB in June, 1991. We were greeted at the train station by the Peace Corps staff and treated to a welcoming party at the Children’s Palace. There was Mongolian music and dancing, the Country Director’s wife, Charlene, played very nicely John Denver’s “Leaving on a Jet Plane,” though our generation was already too young to be moved by it, and the evening closed with a mini concert by Mongolia’s first rock group, Blue Sky, with their lead singer, Sarantuya. One of our group members, John Boyd, was a rock guitarist who had played in bands in Minneapolis, and he got up and played with them. It was a memorable evening.

We did our training at the Children’s Palace. For a day or so during that time the government of Mongolia came to a standstill in the shadow of the mostly feigned attempt to take back the government in Moscow. Also during that first three months we were visited by James Baker who had come to open relations between Mongolia and the US. For the first year all of us had to work in UB. After that some of our group went to the countryside.

During our first year we saw the Soviet-era economy fall apart and the onset of serious economic hardship. Everyone was issued a ration card but there was little to buy. UB pastured lots of goats and other livestock but a shortage of gasoline made it very difficult to find meat in the stores. Rapid inflation made the salaries of Mongolians all but useless. A problem that remains in Mongolia to this day. Back then people had to rely on friends and relatives in the countryside for support or take up peddling cheap Chinese goods along the rail lines -- all the way up to Moscow in many cases.

What was your stipend as a volunteer?

For us, as we were to be paid a salary equivalent to our Mongolian counterparts, this meant that our living allowance was anything but. Though the official exchange rate quickly went from 100 to 400 tugrugs per $1, on the street the rate was 1,000 tug, per $1. Our salary of just over 2,000 tug per month gave us something just over $2.

What were prices like then?

A Snickers candy bar was 220 tugrugs. My mother was the first of our parents to figure out how to send us money -- to the Central Bank via Chase Manhattan in New York.

During my first few months I was very homesick and when I learned I could call the US from the UB Hotel I gladly paid the $10 per minute rate to talk to my family. We talked 15 minutes and I felt it was money well spent. Later I learned that I could make calls from the post offices and so I got in the habit of calling the US twice a month from the Sansar branch close to my apartment. The rate was 400 tug. per minute. The maximum call was three minutes but sometimes the operator would let me talk longer.

Calling was almost always a full day affair. You would fill out a form and then wait for hours for the operator to place the call. If the line was busy or some other problem arose you’d wait hours more before finally getting through. I always brought a book and waited patiently. My two years as a volunteer was the only period in my life when I read a lot for pleasure.

Also waiting to place calls would often be a group of Yugoslavian construction workers in UB to build the Chinggis Khan Hotel. As there was a war going on in their country in those days, tragic news from home would sometimes leave them in tears.

What are your best and worst memories of being a volunteer?

My own homesickness vanished completely the day I started working. I taught English as a Second Language at Mongolian State University as part of a nation-wide effort to retrain Russian language teachers in English. The faculty there and my boss, Sumiya, were very kind and helpful. My students were wonderful. I have lots of nice memories from my time as a volunteer. No one is best. We drank a lot. We sang a lot. Almost every weekend I’d go hiking in the mountains around UB.

What I’m most grateful for are the friends I made when I was a volunteer. Mongolia was, in those days and still is, full of humanity in all its folds, but I was lucky to meet a lot of truly selfless, kind, funny, intelligent, talented and sympathetic people, many of whom are still my friends today. Being in the Peace Corps totally changed my life. I married a girl from Inner Mongolia and took up Mongolian Studies for my education and in the process found a calling for my work. □
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    ☐ $20    ☐ $10    ☐ $20
☐ $50    ☐ $100    ☐ $50    ☐ $100
☐ $250    ☐ $________    ☐ $250    ☐ $________

Total Amount Enclosed $________

Please make checks out to Friends of Mongolia.

US Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 44132,
Washington, DC 20026

Email Contacts:
members@friendsofmongolia.org
admin@friendsofmongolia.org

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

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.

Friends of Mongolia 10th Anniversary Celebration

When: Sunday-June 28, 2009
Where: The LaPorta’s, 5333 28th St, NW, Washington DC 20001
Time: 4-7pm

Featuring: Mongolian poetry readings, morin khuur performers, Mongolian opera, traditional Mongolian artwork and cultural pieces, Mongolian food, some of the founding members of FOM and more!

Please RSVP by June 22nd to Anne Riordan: ariordan@friendsofmongolia.org

Special Thanks to Ken Heldenfels

Friends of Mongolia’s board of directors and officers would like to extend a very special thanks to Ken Heldenfels for his long service and commitment to the organization. Ken served as the president of the board of directors for two terms, playing an important part in the growth and energy of FOM over the last several years. In spite of hectic work demands that go along with running one’s own small business, Ken always found time to attend FOM’s regular conference calls offering advice and much needed guidance in operating the organization.

Ken was a executive at Pepsi Cola in Europe before quitting his job to become a Peace Corps volunteer in Hungary. After completing his service in 1997 he joined Peace Corps’ administration as an Associate Peace Corps Director in Armenia and then Country Director of the Mongolia program. He now operates his own company in his home state of Texas. Without a doubt his managerial and life experience, as well as his commitment to community work, has been instrumental in FOM’s success. Thanks for all your hard work and good luck in the future, Ken! ☺

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