



OPEN ▶ DOORS

Review of the 2006 Annual Meeting

by Maxine Levin

The 2006 Annual Meeting was a very pleasant gathering of about 40 people. Half of the new staff from Arcata, CA was there – Judy Sears and Daryl and Phyllis Chin – as well as the new Board of Directors for US Servas.

We also had Gary Sealey from the International Servas Executive Board. In our general session there were discussions on the budget, new operating procedures from Arcata, and general philosophical discussions from the International Servas Board. There is a big push as the USA National Office moves to Arcata and starts to put together a more electronic framework for communication, that the Servas organization also works more on outreach and partnerships to expand its influence. There was general conversation on how Servas membership is aging, particularly hosts but also travelers. Below are summaries of the three Saturday workshops.

New Technology – The staff and board are working on ideas for revamping the databases for travelers and host lists, and providing the information on-line with security controls and log-in for travelers and hosts. There will be a method for hosts to double check on travelers as to whether their certification is current, as well as ways for the hosts to control access as to what kind of information on their location and contact information is available electronically. This is all in early design stages and the board is looking for feedback from the Servas membership.

Interviewing – There are manuals being revised for Interviewers and Hosts that will soon be available to all of the Servas membership through the Web. Thorough interviewing techniques were also presented.

Regionalization – With the small staff in Arcata, CA, US Servas will be looking for ways to improve communication as well

as outreach, partnerships and recruitment. They would like to encourage gatherings throughout the United States, with a program/venue that relates at a minimum to proper conduct as hosts and travelers, expectation and complaints, but also perhaps formal presentations on travels that would be of interest to the general public as a form of recruitment and outreach. We would also like to see regional meetings start to develop which focus on regional interests and themes, possible regional projects such as conferences, group trips, presentations or partnerships with conferences. The board has tentatively developed maps of 11 regions and are looking for feedback from the Servas membership since some of the regions are very broad and have few members over long distances. We also discussed how to interest and attract a younger membership.

I had a terrific time in NJ. All conference attendees were housed with Servas hosts in the Atlantic City area. I stayed with a very nice Servas hosts in Manahawkin. The conference included terrific New Jersey style Italian meals at lunch and dinner, and a brisk but lovely sunset walk on the beach with about 10 of the group. The next USA National Servas Conference is planned for next July in San Diego, CA. Our board liaison will be Darlene McHenry.

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IN MEMORIAM

Ruth Krasner made many contributions to United States Servas over the years. The last was posthumous: a generous financial bequest.

Ruth, who died in 2006 at age 91 at home in Oxnard, California, was an adventurous traveler, a generous host, and a sympathetic but thorough Servas interviewer.

She ventured to Madagascar to hunt mushrooms with the North American
(continued on back page)



SERVAS OUTREACH

By Kristine Martin

Fifteen international students arrived in Chicago in June to become day and resident camp counselors in the Midwest. The YMCA's International Camp Counselors Program (ICCP) provides leadership opportunities to young adults while helping camps to internationalize their programs. Many of the counselors plan to travel the U.S. after completing their duties. What better way than to join Servas! Kristine Martin, Chicago Interviewer, gave an informational presentation to the counselors and Director, Ms. Rizzia Froezes. Did you know that US Servas offers a reduced rate of \$25 for counselors traveling in the U.S.? This proved to be a perfect opportunity to introduce Servas to young people who are curious about our country.

MY SERVAS EXPERIENCE

Open Doors in Scandinavia

by Christine Castanada

Finding Scandinavian Servas hosts home in summertime is rare, but one can find them at their summer houses. Problem is (for you, not for them), they really know how to vacation, which means no internet and often no TV. That means that Servas guests need to connect well enough in advance to be among those fortunate to visit homesteads often on lakes, sometimes on islands, and without plumbing. The outhouses I experienced in Sweden and Finland were stocked with old picture magazines and decorated with Impressionist reproductions or painted in bright colors and designs. As the guide books indicate, it is an honor to be invited to join in family saunas and follow the tribe into the cold lake. It took me three lakes (hence three different homes) before I could submerge except enough for a daily cat's wash. I noted their swimsuits were old, and later realized they were probably only worn because of my presence. The longer I stayed, the more of their clothes came off. I loved how primitive it all was.

However, when it came to meals, their best tablecloths were used, candles were lit, and feasts followed, almost always outside. As one Swedish host expressed, they are passionate about nature. I joined in berry-picking, garden patch weeding, storage shed cleaning, water-carrying, and fetched the paper at a distant mailbox during my morning jog. Some allowed me to wash the dishes, though most preferred to do so themselves. All of my hosts could not have been more gracious. I never stayed beyond

five days, and I was encouraged to return. Sometimes I left with useful gifts – an electric toothbrush charger a host had as an extra, winter clothing formerly worn by deceased relatives, an old sheepskin I have had dry-cleaned and NOW use as a Pilates mat in my flat in Poland, where I am now teaching English.

I became a Servas member in '93 and am still in touch with my earlier hosts. Though I am rarely home long enough to register as a host, Dutch and Australian hosts have visited me in the States. Another Aussie hostess and I have kept in touch over the years – through her divorce, through his death, through our mutual teaching assignments in China – and now we are booked to meet in London next Easter. I am also welcome back to Slovakia after a 13-year absence or to those hosts' Spanish retreat. We all welcome company if it is not a strain on our daily lives. It gives us an opportunity to use our best dinnerware, try that special recipe, and introduce to one another new ideas, books, and food. More importantly, we discuss the usually untouchable topics of politics and religion. How else could one meet someone of like mind so easily and quickly, especially as I no longer drink, or eat sugar or red meat? Servas opens doors that never shut.

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SUMMARY OF JOHN GUNTHER'S PROPOSAL HOST LISTS ONLINE

At the recent national conference in Atlantic City, NJ, Servas member John Gunther, computer expert, had some observations about the host list system and made a proposal to improve the system.

John feels that the current host list is time consuming and expensive to produce and distribute. Once produced, the accuracy of the list soon begins to deteriorate as things change for hosts. Another area of concern is security and the comfort level of hosts with having their information in printed form around forever.

Travelers, once they are approved, could be given instant access to the host list system and

search for hosts by many criteria, not just geography. Travelers do not need the entire US book and they could print out only the sections they need.

John proposes that the host list be put on line with layers of security safeguards. Hosts would be able to determine what information would be available to travelers and could edit their listing as their circumstances change. The Servas office would be relieved of considerable data entry, printing and distribution costs. Communication between members would be enhanced. Most contacts between host and traveler now are made by e-mail or phone, so physical addresses could be given out only with permission of the host.

John has more information and details about his proposal on line at servas@bucksvsbytes.com. He is available to answer any questions.

Unfinished Business: Effective Partnerships for Human Security and Sustainable Development 59th DPI/NGO CONFERENCE

The 59th Annual United Nations' Department Of Public Information/Nongovernmental Organizations' Conference was held at United Nations headquarters in New York from September 6-8, 2006 (UN/DPI/NGO). The gathering represented six hundred NGOs and included over one thousand representatives from more than ninety countries. Each Conference panel, as well as each participating NGO included one representative under the age of thirty to help ensure the widest possible exchange of views and experiences. The focus of the conference was upon the partnerships created between civil society, governments and the U.N. working to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) signed by 189 world leaders in 2000 in which they pledged, among other goals, to halve world poverty by the year 2015.

Sheikha Haya, President-Elect, sixty-first session of the General Assembly, United Nations, noted that civil society had made a significant contribution to United Nations evolution. The Organization would only achieve its goals with NGO participation and partnership. The world had witnessed civil society's efforts in time of crisis, where NGOs represented a strong voice and remained key partners in delivering humanitarian service in the most remote and difficult places.

Addressing the issue of the participation of young people, Shamina De Gonzaga, Special Advisor on NGO relations, Office of the President of the General Assembly, United Nations, said the world was witnessing a change in consciousness. It was a matter of opening the door not only to the well-informed and-endowed, but to those who might not know much about the United Nations.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan said that together, civil society and the United Nations could make even greater strides towards a more democratic and

peaceful future for all. "We must share our knowledge and reinforce our actions", he said. "I see a United Nations that celebrates the non-governmental revolution – the power of the global citizen – as the best thing that has happened to our Organization in a long time. We must work to strengthen alliances – with the United Nations, the private sector, the public sector and among yourselves – that minimizes duplication and maximizes impact". To allow the United Nations partnership with NGOs to become more effective, however, more work needed to be done in terms of implementation. Despite past efforts, we still live in a highly imbalanced world: 2.5 billion people live on under \$2/day; one billion have no access to clean water; one-third of the global population lives without electricity; 30,000 children die each day from poverty and another 30,000 from preventable diseases, or as Jeffrey Sachs states, "because they can't afford to live" – totaling 22 million needless deaths each year.

That was particularly true in terms of achieving the Millennium Development Goals. At this current time in history, with the great discontent around the world, it is important to recognize the diversity and contributions of different sectors through an open dialogue with the NGO community – www.un.org/webcast/SE2006.html.

SERVAS ALERT

Servas hosts, beware of requests from purported travelers that ask for anything other than hosting. A genuine member of Servas should address you by name and tell when they would like to visit. SPAMers have ways of sounding semi-convincing and at least two hosts have received emails that seem to come from Gambian Servas members but are not authentic SERVAS travelers.



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SPREAD THE WORD!

By Nancy Wilson, Stillwater, MN – new board member

It has been said that Servas is one of the best kept secrets around. Lets change that!

In upcoming newsletters I will give a few suggestions for outreach and publicity. If each member of Servas makes just one new contact, either personal or with the media, the word will get out.

Hometown newspapers are looking for information that is applicable locally. Go into the newspaper office in person, with written material in hand, and speak to the editor or reporter. Also, newspapers love pictures. A picture of one of your guests doing something in your community or your home would increase the chances of getting published.

The Servas website has helpful information as well as samples. On the website look under 'About Servas' for background information, under 'Outreach' for a sample full-length article, and under 'Frequently Asked Questions' for more specifics. Refer reporters to the Servas website, www.usservas.org.

Add to the general information with a personal experience as a host or traveler to give readers an idea of how Servas might work for them and to make the article more interesting. Ask the reporter what length

article he or she would like from you. In some cases a reporter may be interested enough to do his or her own lengthier article. You can give your local phone number as a contact or that of other nearby members – with their permission. Be sure to include the Servas website information and Arcata office number. Please let us know of any publicity you get for Servas and send a copy to the national office in Arcata.

Many of your neighbors are genuinely interested in working toward world peace and friendship and would welcome information on how to promote it on a one-to-one basis. This is Servas!! Let's tell everyone about it.

RUTH KRASNER (continued from p.1)

Mycological Association; to Cuba with another of her many membership groups; to Australia and New Zealand as a Servas traveler; and to many other lands. She took part in Servas gatherings in San Francisco and Vancouver, besides many in Oxnard, Santa Barbara and Los Angeles.

One Saturday afternoon she drove to Santa Monica for a party on my birthday. Before leaving early ("I don't like us 90-year-olds to be on the freeway after dark"), she repeated good-naturedly her recent advice: "I'm getting old. You'd better recruit another interviewer or two for our area."

Will do. But it's hard to find another Ruth Krasner.

Don Fawcett, Los Angeles
Southern California Area Representative