OPEN DOORS DECEMBER:

The latest happenings with US Servas

It's a New day for Open Doors

The Open Doors newsletter publication of US Servas will now be published monthly.
Peace Secretary

Seeking a US Servas Peace and Social Justice Secretary

This volunteer position promotes understanding of the connections between peace, social justice, human rights and environmental protection (including the threat of climate change) and encourages actions that advance these causes. Read the full description to learn more. Apply by January 9th.

We are also seeking the following volunteers:

- Coordinators for Bylaws Revision
- Organizers for Peace, Social Justice & Environment
- Marketing Lead
- Social Media Coordinator
- Fundraiser

Read the full descriptions of these volunteer positions and reply to: info@usservas.org if interested

Links to Volunteer Positions: https://usservas.org/page/we-need-you
Great volunteer opportunities open now:

Shine with your expertise, learn something new, be included in a fun group: We have openings in various teams [that are part of an existing structure]. Each committee consists of 3-10 volunteers with varying backgrounds and experiences, and they meet regularly by Skype or Zoom. Servas is run mostly by volunteers but assisted by 4 part-time staff. Most of us work from a distance but the office in Arcata, CA also welcomes volunteers. If you’re interested in any of the positions below, please send a short paragraph about yourself to info@usservas.org

Coordinators for Bylaws Revision
If you like to apply your sharp, analytical mind for a good cause and enjoy language, you’ll want to be here, at the center of where all parts of an organization interact. We would love to have you on this fairly new team that is just setting up its procedures. It’s helpful but not required if you have a background in non-profit management, law or editing.

Organizers for Peace, Social Justice & Environment
Brand new initiative in response to member requests: This group will work closely with our experienced UN representatives, our Peace & Social Justice Secretary, and the Servas International Peace Secretary. We are looking for 5 more volunteers who can communicate how social justice and environmental degradation are related to peace for the purpose of building a larger, active movement among our members. The goal is for Servas to partner with other organizations and become a stronger force for peace. The initiators of this committee have already attended UN conferences and been active in various ways, and we’re excited to team up.

Marketing Lead
Are you ready to share the excitement about our cause and our growing non-profit with the world? Servas is unique but not well known, and we must change that! Be part of the Communications group, one of our most active committees, and help them strategize about best media outlets, language and timing.

Social Media Coordinator
Help volunteers in all of the committees to improve their skills using various social media. We need some tech training but also planning and coordinating of our activities so we may reach existing and potential members better without overwhelming them with repeat postings. You would be part of the Communications group and work closely with the Marketing Lead person.

Fundraising
You’ve been there, right: not enough money to implement great ideas, but you’d rather find solutions than complain? Whether you’re an old pro wishing to be involved in a good thing or you want to learn this important skill, we would like your help. We have a Strategic Plan being implemented by experienced leaders and a whole new crop of volunteers with fresh ideas. This is an exciting time to reach out to high donors and foundations, and support members in organizing events. The fundraising volunteer will work directly with the Board Chair and the Office Administrator.
Year-End

Donations

Every day, your support makes the mission of Servas possible. We're launching our 2019 Year-End Campaign. Our goal is to help an additional 1000 brand new peacebuilders join our cause and help to spread the Servas message in the upcoming year. Read more HERE
Bringing people together across borders

The Bulgarian host looked down at her cup of tea and the pistachio-bedecked pastry at its side. Then she looked up at her guests, Servas travelers from the USA, as she made her confession. “I grew up hating Turks. My parents, my teachers, my friends—everyone told me to hate them. After all, they had oppressed our country for years.” She paused to take a sip of the sweet tea and her lips puckered at the bitterness of the memory. “But I had never actually met a Turk until I joined Servas. And then I discovered something: Turks are people, just like you and me. Servas brought us together.”

Bringing people together across borders is why Servas was founded 70 years ago and why it is still going strong today. As a member, you are part of a person-to-person network in over 100 countries, promoting peace one conversation at a time.
We are asking for your support to reach our year-end goal of raising $20,000. Please help us grow our network of travelers and hosts, our activities and partnerships, and our mission of peace and justice.

So far this year, 1,600 United States Servas travelers and hosts have either renewed or joined for the first time, including 55 new youth members. There are now many ways to arrange lodging through the internet and mobile apps, but Servas is unique for its commitment to peace and justice through travel.

At a time when peace, justice and inclusivity around the world are under extreme stress, we are working together to make the world a better place:

• Servas encourages young people to live in a foreign country and learn the language. This year, three young adults participated in month-long overseas homestays through Servas Youth Language Experience (SYLE), aided by the Mogerman Youth Scholarship.
• Servas Experiences, a pilot program launched in California, raises both funds and fun by engaging members and non-members alike in group activities.
• Last August, over a dozen members attended the UN Civil Societies Conference in Salt Lake City, staffing a Servas information booth and attending sessions emphasizing peacebuilding, environment, climate change – and the critical connection between them.
Your support makes our programs possible. In 2020, we hope to:

Find 1,000 new peacebuilders to expand the Servas network — and have a meaningful experiences while doing it!
Put access to hosts around the world at your digital fingertips through Servas Online.
Make the US Servas website more useful and mobile-friendly (check out the recent changes).
Forge partnerships with other peace and justice organizations.
Strengthen local communities by increasing the number of Area Representatives and Interviewers, and by expanding the Servas Experiences program across the US.
Improve our marketing and develop an online store — so you can bring merchandise like this beautiful Servas-branded apron to your hosts overseas!

Your gift of $35, $50, $100, $500 or whatever you can afford will make this possible. Thank you for your continued support and friendship, and your contribution to a more peaceful world.

In peace, one conversation at a time,

Chris-Ann Lauria
US Servas Board Chair

Donate Now!
New
Office Staff & Board Members

David Simpson is the newest addition to the office, and is coming on in the role of Volunteer Coordinator and Outreach. We also have new Board Members: Raleigh, David & Yi.

Read more about the office staff and board member on our website: https://usservas.org/page/us-servas-board-directors-office-members
SYLE: Servas Youth Language Experience

Below is a report from Alex Hanyok, on her trip to France:

A Servas Experience, France 2019

Over the summer of 2019 I participated in Servas Youth Language Experience (SYLE) Program, staying with six hosts over six weeks in southern France with the goal of improving my French. I joined this program in order to have a unique and varied learning experience while traveling and meeting local people.

I arrived in France in late June at the home of Roswitha and Vincent in Thenon-les-Bains, a small lake-side town near Geneva. My hosts and their three teenage kids quickly welcomed me in as one of their own, despite a strong language divide between us. We found a common love in music and with their help I created a French music playlist that ranged from the classic ballades to modern rap so that I was fully immersing myself in the language and culture. During the week I ate plenty of smelly cheese and visited the first of many castles, two things that I can never get enough of.

My next stop was the stunning Sallanches, right in the heart of the Alps and a short train ride from Chamonix and Mont Blanc. This region is easily one of the most beautiful and stunning places I’ve ever been, as much for the snow-peaked mountains as for the mirror-like lakes. As a hiker, this was the perfect base to explore the Alps inexpensively while continuing to work on my French. My hosts were Anne, Richard, and their teenage daughter. We shared a love for food; I made southern biscuits for them and they made me some of the best ice cream I’ve ever had. We even dined one night on local delicacies at a restaurant overlooking Mont Blanc.

I currently live in Montreal, and during the summer the city celebrates the warmth by hosting festival after festival. My trip to France fell exactly during this time, and I was feeling a bit homesick for the atmosphere. Luckily, when I reached out to Isabelle and Jean-Louise they recommended that I visit during the Vienne Jazz Fest. My only regret is not staying for more of the festival. Through a series of connections, we managed to watch Valérie Ékomè concert from the church yard overlooking the Roman amphitheater where she performed. I think we had the best seats in the house. This was also the week of July 14th, France’s national day, which I celebrated in Lyon by dancing outdoors with a local Swing Dance group. That night Algeria won the semi-finals against Nigeria in the Africa Cup of Nations. The streets were full of celebrations.
My next hosts lived just outside of Grenoble in a beautiful house overlooking the mountains. One of the many highlights of Celine and Oliver’s home was sitting out on the porch at night, looking at the stars with a hot cup of garden mint tea, and discussing anything and everything. Just over halfway through my time in France, I was finally feeling comfortable enough in the language to discuss heavy topics. There is no one way to speak French, and the change in environments with homestays meant that I was encountering new vocabulary and accents on a weekly basis and, through near-complete immersion, I’d successfully gotten myself from mumbling a handful of mispronounced words to holding full conversations about fairly complex topics. The home of Celine and Oliver was also where I met my toughest teachers: Émile (7), and Basil (5). Unlike adults, who are comfortable with errors so long as the point gets across, kids themselves are constantly being corrected on their grammar, and thus find no issue in correcting a foreigner’s word choice or pronunciation.

For example, Basil asked me “Why do you always say ‘ok’ instead of ‘d’accord?’” I’ve found one of the hardest things for me to pick up on is short response words to questions. In English these would be words and expressions such as yeah, sure, go for it, of course, and okay. These are the words that make communication sound natural – in English I don’t respond exclusively with yes and no to every short-response question. So, much to my relief, okay has been adopted into the French vocabulary. I immediately started using it. And, without realizing, I’d started over-using it. Adults, understanding what I was saying even if I was awkwardly over-using a single expression, let me be. However, Basil took note and wanted to know why I always said okay instead of d’accord (d’accord directly translates to ‘in agreement’ and is used in much the same way as okay). It was these small corrections to word usage and pronunciation and reading bedtime stories that dramatically improved my French throughout that one week alone.

At the end of the week, I was invited to spend a night in the Refuge de l’Etendard, an uphill hike of 5km – impressive for three kids between the ages of 3 and 7. After arriving, I continued around the two glacier lakes the refuge sits on, and up to the glaciers themselves. Then I offered to watch the two youngest so that Émile and his dad could walk around one of the lakes as well. It ended up being the perfect ending to a wonderful week.
Leaving Grenoble, I thought I was saying goodbye to the mountains, but much to my delight I’d be back a week later when my hosts in Allex invited me to a concert in St-Pierre-d’Entremont. Vincent is a musician, and his band was playing in a town nearby. After a delightful show, we spent the night in an old-fashion BnB. I also cannot forget to mention that the town of Allex is a medieval village on a hill, sitting amongst the sunflower fields and just a short bike ride away from the very artistic medieval town of Crest. Both Vincent and Judith and the other hosts I met in town rarely see any Servas travelers—I’d highly recommend reaching out to them.

My final hosts, Anne, Xavier, their three adult kids and a cousin that was visiting from out of town, lived just outside of Toulouse. All four kids were around my age, and we had a great time exploring together. They also had four dogs and a small bird – I was in heaven. They were exceptional hosts, taking me around to some amazing rural attractions—farmers markets, small medieval towns, and a giant cave. I also got to drive a tractor! Part of being a guest through Servas is finding ways to give back or something to share with your hosts. Sometimes this takes the form of a gift—sweets or cheese from another region are my go-to. I usually also like to cook something from the southern US for them as well. While in Anne and Xavier’s home I made mac-and-cheese, which they’d never had before, and had a great time teaching some basic embroidery skills, something I hope to share more of in future travels.

Traveling with Servas is a unique opportunity as a traveler to meet and connect with people from a different background than your own, to see what it’s really like to live in an area, and to share with others. Some tips for first time traveler would be to always say yes, no matter how mundane the recommendation may sound – a trip to the grocery store might turn into a spontaneous picnic in the park. Next, always bring something to share. It’s common to bring a gift upon arrival, but it’s also really nice if you can bring something immaterial to share with your hosts. For me this was my cooking and embroidery skills. Finally, when you’re choosing your hosts, look beyond the major cities. Hosts in small towns or rural areas are often overlooked but have so much to offer! Happy travels!

-Alex Hanyok
Servas Experiences

Build stronger Servas communities, raise our profile, introduce non-members, have fun through shared activities, and raise funds through Servas Experience—now going national. Read more about these and how to put one on in your own community.

Read more on the website here: https://usservas.org/page/servas-experiences
Servas & the UN

HERE is an article board member and SLC resident, Barbara Pioli, wrote for Catalyst Magazine about her experience and reflections on the UN Civil Society Conference held in Salt Lake City this past August.

Salt Lake hosts U.N. Civil Society Conference
The goal: to achieve inclusiveness and sustainability at the grassroots level in our communities

BY BARBARA PIOLI
This August, as a board member-representative of U.S. Servas (pronounced Sir-vahs), I was lucky enough to participate in one of the most important international meetings in the world: the United Nations’ 68th Civil Society Conference. Traditionally held at the UN headquarters in New York City, this year’s conference was in Salt Lake City. Thousands of people from over 130 countries and almost every U.S. state gathered to address the topic of global sustainability.

On the first morning I headed to the plenary session where dignitaries—from deputy undersecretaries to directors of various UN committees—welcomed the morning crowd. There were also in attendance local and Utah officials including Mayor Jackie Biskupski, UVU President Dr. Astrid Tuminez, and Ambassador John Price (who recently served as the U.S. Ambassador to Mauritius, Seychelles and Comoros). Nearly every speaker underscored audience members’ role of listening and sharing ideas. They encouraged us to put the ideas and tools we would acquire over the next three days to use in our communities.

I was eager to find out if the UN might have ideas I might take back to the Servas board. Servas is a global network for international travelers that connects people for homestays. It prides itself on being a peace-building organization, using these cross-cultural travel experiences to build peace and social justice. Sustainability is a top concern for Servas, especially considering the effect of travel on our planet’s resources and health.

The conference schedule was packed, with up to 30 sessions each hour, offering new concepts and networking potential with people from around the world. Topics covered infrastructure and natural resource uses, climate change, emerging technologies, social impact investing, creating opportunities and economic success for youth, and recovering from conflict.

One inspirational story came from Amanda Nesheiwat of Secaucus, New Jersey. Ten years ago, as a college student majoring in environmental studies, Nesheiwat took an internship with the town of Secaucus and, while there, wrote three grants for environmental initiatives. They all received funding. No one in Secaucus’s administration better understood the intricacies of the grants than Nesheiwat so she was hired to oversee the projects. Her initiative turned the town of Secaucus into a leading environmental enterprise. With her guidance, this town of 18,000 residents, in the shadow of New York City, now self-identifies as a sustainable place to live for future generations. Their initiatives include environmental issues and education; community gardens and food waste programs; electric vehicle charging stations; and residential solar access.

Another brilliant idea came from Nabeela Omarjee with ActNow, the UN Climate Action Campaign. Using the ActNow app, Omarjee hopes to establish an online social reward system that encourages individuals to make small changes to benefit the environment. Users track their daily low-impact consumption choices and share their actions on the app.

For me, as a U.S. Servas board member, I learned that travel, peace-building and environmental stewardship do not have to be at odds with one another. As an organization, we can continue to foster peace through cultural exchange and adopt energy-saving actions to counter the environmental impact of travel.

After the conference I spoke with Vicki Bennett, director of Salt Lake City’s Office of Sustainability. Her main takeaway was to think of sustainability more broadly. “While our department does more traditional environmental programs, we need to remember the other legs of the stool that include the economic and equity components,” Bennett said. “Our department is starting a new program that will be reaching out to our less-advantaged populations to include them in our planning efforts, especially as a part of our food program.”

The city is also seeing potential population impacts from climate change. There is a very real possibility that some time in the not-too-distant future we will be taking in climate refugees. Some may come from other countries but many more will come from cities like Phoenix and Las Vegas as hotter temperatures and fewer water resources force them to seek alternative places to live. While the city is ready to welcome anyone who comes, they also want to help people stay in their homes. “It will affect us in the near future,” says Bennett, “if we don’t slow the rate of global warming immediately.”

Barbara Pioli is a board member of the peace-building non-governmental organization US Servas and a founding member of the Wasatch Food Cooperative. She works as a consultant to nonprofits.
Volunteering for Servas

At the 6th Annual Women’s Travel Fest – March 9-10, 2019

Servas had a table at the 6th Annual Women’s Travel Fest – March 9-10, 2019 held at the Angel Orensanz Center for the Arts in the East Village, Manhattan, New York. Servas members Carole Silverman, Jessica Malavez and Karen Oughtred volunteered to share many benefits of this interesting peace organization. The attendees seemed intrigued that Servas has been around for 70 years and is still going strong. With safety an issue in this economy, they seemed pleased that prospective members were interviewed as hosts and travelers. They felt traveling with Servas would expand their horizons, open their eyes to new ideas, new cultures and hopefully create more peace in the world. We also handed out colorful pamphlets and brochures about Servas. The festival offered exciting speakers about women traveling, great vendors, networking opportunities, refreshments and goodie bags. A wonderful time was had by all!

Servas will always be remembered as an alternate way of traveling for everyone!

Submitted by Carole Silverman, Volunteer
New Stories

We'd love you to share your stories and images with us, just as Ksenija did, after this trip to Japan. Send them to: Volunteer@USServas.org

Read other testimonials HERE and also on our Blog. We're also happy to share your Blog links!

Testimonials:  https://usservas.org/page/testimonials

Blog:  https://usservas.wixsite.com/blog
Mourning Helen Shimbo

We are so sad to report that DC member and interviewer, Helen Shimbo, passed away September 16th.

Hayden Wexel (DC member and interviewer) tells us: I am very saddened to learn that our very faithful member Helen Shimbo has died. Helen joyfully hosted many, many travelers, always attended our events, and was perhaps the most supportive member we had, regularly calling or writing me to say how much she got from her Servas experience. I certainly will miss Helen and guess many of you will too. See the obituary here:

https://www.gatheringus.com/memorial/helen-shimbo/1535
Servas Kids

Servas Russia proposes to launch a project on postal correspondence between Servas children aged 6 to 15. **Our basic goals are:**

- to involve our children in international communication;
- to ensure the continuity of generations;
- to promote tolerance;
- to develop interest and acceptance for the culture, religion and traditions of other countries.

**Read the full announcement**

Contact [Ju16@yandex.ru](mailto:Ju16@yandex.ru) (Lilliia Mezenina, the national secretary of Servas Russia and coordinator of this project)

PS: the first letters have already been sent to Italy, Turkey, Burundi, France and Poland (as in the photos)
NEW SERVAS PROJECT for KIDS ages 6-15

In the Servas organization of any country there are families with children. Servas works with young people to attract them to the organization. Can we raise new Servas members from these children whose parents are Servas members now?

Young children in Servas do not often meet Servas people of the same age.

This is why Servas Russia proposes to launch a project on postal correspondence between Servas children aged 6 to 15. **Our basic goals are:**

• to involve our children in international communication;
• to ensure the continuity of generations;
• to promote tolerance;
• to develop interest and acceptance for the culture, religion and traditions of other countries.

**How do we plan to implement our project?**

With the help of other Servas members, especially National Secretaries, Servas Russia plans to establish a database of children who wish to exchange letters and postcards by snail mail. The database would include the name of the child, their interests, their language capabilities, and their postal address. It should be distributed to the National Secretaries and then to the rank-and-file members.

**Vehicle of communication:** letters or postcards, bought or self-made.

**Language of communication:** English, Spanish, others if there are young people ready to communicate in them.

JOIN US write now!!!! And please share this information with your members who have children or grandchildren who and ready to join us

Contact: [Jul6@yandex.ru](mailto:Jul6@yandex.ru) (Iuliia Mezenina, the national secretary of Servas Russia and coordinator of this project)

PS: the first letters have already been sent to Italy, Turkey, Burundi, France and Poland (as in the photos)
WANT TO CONTRIBUTE?

For newsletter deadlines, get us info by the last Friday of each month!
Send contributions to info@USservas.org with "for the newsletter" in the subject