



2017 Peace Corps Connect
Denver, CO - Aug 5, 2017

Loret Miller Ruppe Award
First Coast Returned Peace Corps Volunteers

Rosemary Takacs accepted the award from Peace Corps' Maricarmen Smith (formerly of Jax Beach):

“Thank you Maricarmen and the National Association of Peace Corps Volunteers. We were honored by the nomination and now humbled by the award. Thank you on behalf of the First Coast Returned Peace Corps Volunteers.

Ten years ago, there wasn't a Returned Peace Corps association on the “First Coast”, that's what we call the area from Daytona to Brunswick, GA. It is where Ponce de Leon FIRST stepped foot on the mainland.

But, in the same way that atoms attract to make molecules, a couple Peace Corps volunteers bumped into each other and we became inseparable. That was in 2005, when we were only sharing beers and stories, but by April 2008, we had 501c3 status. First Coast Returned Peace Corps Volunteers was born busy.

Since then we've elected boards, approved bylaws, developed web and Facebook pages, held Annual General Meetings, collected dues and raised funds. From the beginning, we hosted an annual Partnership Dinner and gave money to PC in-country projects. Intentionally we pit RPCV's against each other, based on their country of service. You can imagine their impassioned politicking as everyone becomes an auctioneer for their host country.

By Peace Corps 50th anniversary in 2011 we had contacted over 200 volunteers living on the First Coast and 100 came to a banquet that we hosted at University of North Florida.

We have continually advocated for Peace Corps, meeting with Florida's congressional representatives, including the most conservative, to promote funding and other issues that affect volunteers.

We greet new citizens with US flags after their swearing in ceremony. We participate in Jacksonville's multicultural dinner. This year we baked and bagged 1000 chocolate chip cookies for Burmese, Haitian and Syrian refugees. Last year we hosted a screening of "Difret" a movie about Ethiopian child brides. FCRPCV's participate in fund raising and awareness events for domestic violence, homelessness, job training, refugee resettlement and indigent medical care. Coincidentally the backbone of all these outstanding Jacksonville agencies are RPCV's, including Lillian Carter and Sargent Shriver Award nominees.

We reach out to Peace Corps prospects, (those over 50 and those still on college campuses) and encourage candidates throughout the application process. Welcoming newly returned volunteers is a privilege and we do what we can to help them readjust to the US. Outreach to other volunteers has become so effective that a satellite branch is forming in St. Augustine.

Oh, and we arranged a Peace Corps/Rotary project under the new Partnering for Peace initiative for a Water Project in Guatemala. Assessment begins in October with UNF engineering students.

As we started, we are still social, so Happy Hours have only grown in popularity. This Wednesday we will be meeting at the local brewhouse to toast Loret Miller Ruppe, and share this amazing award with fellow First Coast RPCV's. Thank you ever so much."