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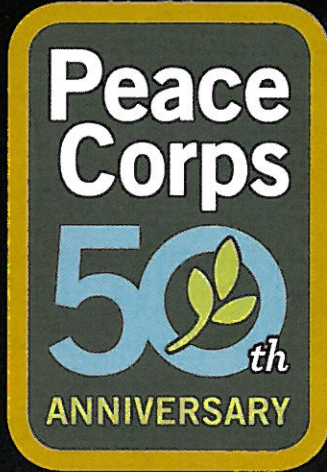
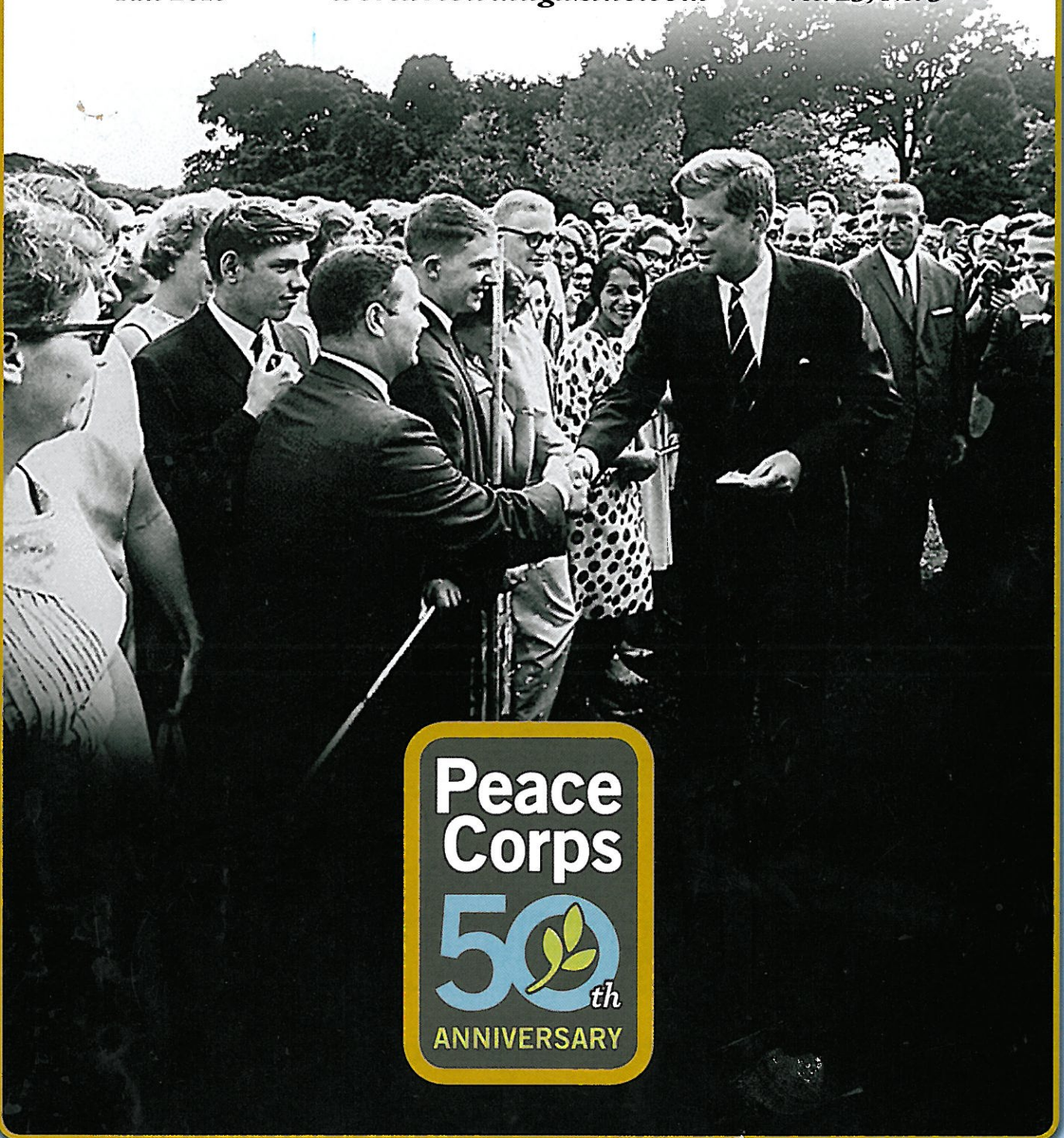
WORLDVIEW

\$6.99

Fall 2010

worldviewmagazine.com

Vol. 23, No. 3



A "REVERSE PEACE CORPS"

Atlas Service Corps finds inspiration in a 50-year-old vision

by Scott Beale

Maria anxiously awaits takeoff. Her bags are packed. Her passport and visa are in order. Her medical clearance and shots are complete. She has said her goodbyes. Maria, an MBA graduate, is leaving her hometown and an established position in a local nonprofit that empowers women through entrepreneurship to serve abroad. Friends tell her that the city can be dangerous and hostile to foreigners but her commitment is undaunted. She is ready for the challenge.

Like thousands of Peace Corps volunteers before her, Maria eagerly awaits her overseas volunteer adventure. However Maria is not your typical Peace Corps volunteer. Maria Duenas is from Bogota, Colombia, and her service will be in the United States. She will travel to Washington, D.C., and serve as an Atlas Corps Fellow at TechnoServe. Maria is ready to bring her knowledge, gained as

a nonprofit professional in Colombia, to the U.S. while furthering her professional

skills. She joins the 50 current and past leaders from 17 different countries who

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Atlas Service Corps

Atlas Service Corps member Maria Duenas of Colombia.



Atlas Service Corps members from 17 different countries.

are Atlas Corps—the organization that some people describe as “a reverse Peace Corps” because the vast majority of the participants are nonprofit professionals from the developing world who volunteer in the United States.

In 2010, Atlas Corps welcomes our fifth class of Fellows, skilled nonprofit professionals from around the world who volunteer overseas for 12-18 months. Atlas Corps addresses critical social issues by developing leaders, strengthening organizations, and building international networks of nonprofit professionals. Our vision is to create a world where everyone can serve and the developing world is seen as a partner in development as opposed to a recipient of aid. Our host organizations include Ashoka, the Grameen Foundation, Oxfam, the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, Population Action International, and World Resources Institute. This year, even the U.S. Peace Corps will receive Atlas

Corps Fellows from Mexico and Uganda. Host organizations pay a cost share that covers about two-thirds of program expenses (still far below the average expense for such high caliber candidates) and Atlas Corps maintains a sustainable operational model.

While many components of the Atlas Corps model are new (a two-way flow of skilled nonprofit professionals), our inspiration finds its roots in the origins of the Peace Corps. During the first years of the Peace Corps, volunteers from Africa, South Asia, and Latin America also volunteered in the U.S. until Congress cut funding for the program. Sargent Shriver and Harris Wofford advocated for a two-way Peace Corps and thought that volunteers coming to the U.S. could also advance the three goals of the Peace Corps through their presence on home soil.

However, since the 1960s, there are few examples of a two-way or reverse

Peace Corps approach. Enter Atlas Corps in 2006. Our first Fellows arrived in Washington, D.C., in 2007. The typical Atlas Corps Fellow possesses 3-10 years of nonprofit experience, a college degree, and is fluent in English. It is a competitive fellowship with about 100 applications for every one position. They volunteer full time at U.S. organizations and participate in monthly management development trainings. After 12 months, some Fellows extend for an additional six months, though all Fellows return to their countries after 18 months. In four years, the program boasts 50 participants from 17 different countries (Armenia, Belgium, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Tanzania, Turkey, Uganda, the United States, and Zimbabwe). In 2009, the Brookings Institution called Atlas Corps a “best practice” in international exchange.

The concept of Atlas Corps really comes as no surprise to the Peace Corps community. Returned Peace Corps Volunteers realize that the international pool of talented people is large and that service should not be a one-way flow of ideas, people, and resources. Rather, it should be a two-way partnership where we all learn from and support each other.

The best results can be found in the stories of our Fellows. Take for example Masoora Ali, a 28-year-old, nonprofit leader from Pakistan. In Islamabad, she worked with VSO on empowerment of women. As an Atlas Corps Fellow, she served at Asian American LEAD and helped launch a girls leadership program. Her dedication, commitment, and quality of work resulted in a six-month contract extension, as requested by her host organization.

And what about Maria Duenas? After her term of service, TechnoServe invited her to remain in Washington, although personal commitments and the structure of the fellowship did not facilitate such an opportunity. Instead, TechnoServe asked her to help establish a new TechnoServe office in Bogota. Before, Maria helped hundreds of Colombian women through entrepreneurship. Now, she reaches thousands of individuals through TechnoServe and her Atlas Corps experience.

Currently, Atlas Corps is preparing for our 50 in the 50th campaign—50 Atlas Corps Fellows from around the world volunteering in the U.S. in the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps. It is a small, yet significant step, in promoting international service and positioning the developing world as a partner in development as opposed to a recipient of aid. To learn more about this campaign and general Atlas Corps activities, please visit www.atlascorps.org.

Scott Beale is the Founder and CEO of Atlas Corps. Prior to Atlas Corps, he served with the U.S. Department of State in New Delhi helping coordinate the U.S. Government's efforts to fight human trafficking in India. He also worked at Ashoka's Youth Venture, in the White House, and with OSCE organizing elections in Bosnia.

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