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The US Servas annual member meeting is in Boulder, CO, June 12-14, 2015. Contact: John Balassa jbalassa@comcast.com
Dear Servas Friends,

The Servas Canada Board started 2014 with the inspiration of our shared vision of the future of Servas. We created our strategic plan, which included: attracting more members to Servas, increasing contact amongst our members, and trying to make Servas more accessible. Promotional materials were designed and used at appropriate youth events. Some areas had host gatherings for the first time after reading about it in the newsletter. Our Facebook page continues to attract new members and provides a forum for sharing tips and stories. With new energy and expertise in our Website Committee, the creation of an effective, easy-to-use website is our top priority for 2015.

We want to thank Chris Brennan, Sara Lippman Walsh and Liliana Szwarzberg, the departing Board members for all their hard work. We are pleased to welcome Normand Beaudet, Lorna Heaton, Kathy Lewis and Nelson McRae as new Board members. We are thankful to Michael Johnson, our Nominating Committee, for finding such well qualified candidates.

Thanks also to the dozens of volunteers who work tirelessly to make Servas run smoothly.

Happy 2015,
Julie Dotsch, National Secretary, Servas Canada
HELP WANTED

Do you remember some great experience you had as a Servas traveler or host? That was only possible through the efforts of many volunteers. Make a difference and join the team!

Volunteers Needed

Do you have a few hours a month to help Servas Canada? There are small jobs and bigger ones. There are jobs where you work mostly on your own and ones where you work with others. Here are some possibilities:
• Joining a committee, e.g. Website Committee, Outreach Committee
• providing translation, e.g. for newsletters, Facebook
• answering inquiries about Servas
• writing articles for the newsletter
• contacting travelers when they return
• helping to set up a system for sending information to members

There are already dozens of volunteers who help in different ways – join the team!

Volunteer Coordinator Needed

Do you enjoy talking with other Servas members? Do you have good persuasive people skills? We need someone to inform, recruit, orient, motivate, recognize and thank volunteers.

Translation Coordinator Needed

We have some exceptional volunteers who help translate, usually from English to French. These translators help us with the newsletter, Facebook page and when we send information to our members. We need more volunteer translators and someone to coordinate the team so no one is overburdened.

Mentorship Program

We are very fortunate to have such skilled and dedicated volunteers in the dozens of roles needed to carry out the work of Servas Canada. When someone is ready to pass the torch to a new volunteer, we often scramble to find a suitable person and try to orient them quickly. Some jobs take more time to learn. We are looking for suitable people eager to learn about a particular job with the idea that if they like it, they can eventually assume the role. Mentorship also allows those who may be interested in becoming more involved to see what the job is like.

The Servas Canada Board is committed to board and committee succession and we see the mentorship program as an excellent support.

For more information on volunteering or mentorship, contact Julie Dotsch (National Secretary) oneworld@sympatico.ca or 705-292-7769.

A Week of Peace in Italy

The international 6-day meeting “Peace in Nature” starts April 26th 2015 in San Gemini, Umbria, Italy. Hotel Duomo, Phone: [from Canada] 011 39 0744 630015. E: albergoduo mosangemini.it

Savour the beauty, join activities about peace, including: private bus, guided tours, boat.

Price for 5 days room and half board is 265 Euros basic room to 390 Euros for a suite, per person.
—Italy Servas Organizing Committee.
JUDY BARTEL, Brandon, Manitoba

I have been a Board member for two years. I am also the National Host Coordinator, Interview Coordinator, and Host List Production Coordinator. In addition, I respond to email inquiries arriving through the Servas website and refer prospective hosts and travellers to the appropriate interviewers. You can imagine how eagerly I look forward to seeing what “Servas Online” will look like, and to the revitalization of our own website! I would also gladly share some responsibilities, if anyone out there is looking for a job!

I have been a Servas member for about 30 years, although my Servas travelling and hosting experience has been quite limited. Brandon, Manitoba is not exactly a tourist hotspot! My average of one traveller a year has dwindled to the point where I can’t remember when I hosted my last Servas guest. On the other hand, I have hosted travellers through Friendship Force International, and 20 bicyclists from 5 countries just this summer through Warm Showers. It has been great to see how small the generation gap can be when people share interests and world views!

I have the good fortune to be retired, and although I limit my travelling to fairly short stints so that I can care for an aging father, wonderful travel opportunities seem to fall into my lap. In the last few years I have travelled to Costa Rica and Germany with Friendship Force, walked the Camino, bicycled in Europe and the USA, hiked the Chilcot gold rush trail, and motorcycled through Mexico and the USA. This winter I will head to Bangladesh to visit a wonderful education project in the slums of Dhaka and Khulna. Besides visiting several schools, we’ll visit a UNESCO heritage site, the Sundarban Mangrove Forest and the remote Bandarban Hill District. My goals for the next year with the Servas Board are to work towards improved access to information for travellers and hosts, and to make the process of registering quicker and easier, while ensuring that the safeguards Servas is known for, are maintained.

NORMAND BEAUDET, Montreal, Quebec

I am a new Board member. Being involved in peace work for over 30 years, both locally and internationally I came across SERVAS travellers many times but never knew much about the organization. About ten years ago we did a home exchange through an international network on Vancouver Island, and also in Toulouse France which turned out to be our best family travel experience ever. We were able to live in “a borrowed house” for a few weeks with our three kids.

We had three wonderful host experiences

When our daughter asked to go to England for a vacation last summer, I remembered SERVAS and we applied as new travellers. We also applied to be hosts because when we get involved in a project, we also tend to join the administrative structure. Our summer stay in England was just amazing and we visited London (hard to find SERVAS hosts), Manchester, Liverpool, Bath and Portsmouth. We had three wonderful host experiences and our memories revolve as much around our host families as the great places we visited and felt really immersed fully in England’s daily life. We live in a northern Montréal suburb, and being new hosts, haven’t yet had any travelers. Maybe next year...
ALAN CASSELS, Victoria, BC

I am new to the Servas Board but have been a Servas traveller since 1990, when my wife and I packed up everything and went tramping around Asia for what was supposed to be a six-month trip. We ended that trip two years later by cycling across Canada, from Halifax to Victoria, staying with friends, family, and of course, Servas hosts across the country.

We have travelled in Asia, France, Ireland, Australia and the US, often staying with Servas hosts where we love getting wonderfully, hospitably educated about the daily lives of the people we’re visiting. The best part of staying at a host’s house is cooking and we always insist with our hosts that we cook at least one meal from our own ‘tradition.’

The funniest example of that happened with a host family in Kobe, Japan where we cooked a curry meal—and our host thought it was the most hilarious thing she’d ever seen—as if she had never seen a white guy, cooking in her own kitchen, making Indian food.

As hosts we have had many travellers, from Europe (lots of Scandinavians), the US, China, Thailand, Australia, Brazil….everywhere really. For guests who ask to stay at our house I always invite them to cook, and afterwards I take them up to “Moss Rock Peak” which is a 10 minute walk from our house. From the top of this hill overlooking the ocean I can point out the Olympic Mountains in Washington State, Seattle, Vancouver, and the lighthouse that you have to pass on your way to Japan.

I’m a writer who mostly researches and writes about the pharmaceutical industry and hence, a part of my work on the SERVAS Board is to help put together the newsletter.

JULIE DOTSCH, Ennismore, Ontario

In 1981, I was lucky enough to hear about Servas. Little did I know what delightful adventures lay in store for me. Servas has opened up my life. I never know who I will encounter when I open the door to my home or someone else’s home. Yet Servas has been much more than that for me. My many Servas volunteer jobs have let me meet and work together with amazing people. We discover the magic of Servas as we share our time and ourselves with each other. I wonder what is behind the next door?

LORNA HEATON, Montreal, Quebec

I have been a Servas traveller since 2006, when my husband, 10-year old son and I took a six month trip “around the world.” We set out to discover countries we had never visited before and we each chose a top destination: Egypt for our son, Australia for my husband and China for me. We also added a few countries along our route: South Africa, Turkey, Malaysia, Japan – and along the way stayed with Servas families. The best part was being invited into their daily lives – an unforgettable experience.

Since then, we have travelled with Servas in the United Kingdom, and have hosted many travellers, from Europe, the US, Latin America, China, Japan and other parts of Canada. We get a reasonable number of travellers, partly because we live in a trendy, central part of Montreal. My favourite thing to do with our Servas guests is to share meals and good conversation and it’s a particular treat if they offer to cook. We try to arrange to do at least one activity with them – often going to the top of Mount Royal, which is in the centre of the city. I enjoy seeing Montreal and Quebec through new eyes. I can honestly say that most of our Servas encounters have been memorable.

On the Board, I hope to continue to promote the Servas goal of achieving peace through interacting with people of different cultures, religions, backgrounds. In particular, I want to ensure that younger generations find Servas relevant for them.
KATHY LEWIS, Calgary Alberta

I am new to the Board. I first encountered Servas in a traveller magazine in 1991 just before going to Europe for a 3-month travelling sabbatical. I got in touch with Servas in Canada, and quickly signed up, got my lists, wrote a couple of letters and headed off. I mixed my travelling with some Servas people, hostels, a few small hotels, and distant relatives over the Christmas period.

Back on the road (actually, Euro-train) and in Berlin I stayed with a lovely lady – a Servas host who spoke English – a necessary criterion for me. She also happened to be a single mom to a teenager in University (mine was back at home in her first apartment). We also shared an interest in arts, crafts, travel, cards and board games, and we just hit it off. We became fast friends, have kept in touch over the years, visiting each other occasionally. Heidi is now in Austria, and I was just there this past autumn to help her celebrate her 70th birthday.

I consider myself lucky to have made new friends but I have also enjoyed meeting the great variety of hosts, learning about their lives and their interests, and seeing the differences in all our circumstances. I believe in the Servas goal of achieving peace through meeting and understanding different peoples, cultures, religions, and hope to be able to promote this goal and experience to others.

NELSON MCRAE, Edmonton, Alberta

Servas has made possible many terrific experiences for me. I am pleased to commence my service as a Board member.

In 2010 while my wife and I were planning a heritage tour, a visit to the lands of our ancestors, a colleague introduced me to Servas. We said: “Why have we never heard of this?” We set ourselves up as Servas travellers and began making contacts in Norway and Scotland. Our six-week trip to Scandinavia and Britain was an amazing experience and Servas enabled us to travel the back roads, meet the local people and do so confidently and securely. We are now constant promoters of Servas and are looking forward to other European travel adventures. We have also had the pleasure of hosting Servas travellers in our home.

ALISON REID, Whitehorse, NWT

I have been the treasurer for Servas Canada since 2011, and a host here in Whitehorse, Yukon since 2005. I live in a small rural cohousing community, on 8 hectares of land. We have animals and a garden which has been very productive for us. We are fortunate to be within walking distance to the Yukon River, and are “on the marge of Lake Lebarge”. [(marge = shore) from a Robert Service poem] We have many trails accessible from our door.

On average, I have hosted one traveler/traveler group per year: from Canada, Britain, France and Germany. I would love to have more visitors because they are such a treat. I love the Yukon myself, and I enjoy seeing it freshly through new eyes.

I have stayed with Servas hosts in Montreal, New York City and Washington State. It has always been wonderful. I notice how engaged most Servas hosts are with their communities, and how easily we move into “real” conversations.
SUZANNE STIRLING, Montreal, Quebec

I have been on the Board for a few years now. I like riding my bike, exploring, travelling and languages. I speak English and Spanish and am now learning French. S’il-vous-plaît, parlez-moi en français car j’ai besoin de pratiquer!

I am looking forward to this next year with Servas, focusing my energy on moving Servas towards having a better internet presence and better communication with our hosts and travellers. I hope to meet those of you who come through Montreal and I encourage you to get involved in Servas as a volunteer!

Servas Canada Positions

YOUR BOARD

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julie Dotsch</td>
<td>National Secretary</td>
<td><a href="mailto:oneworld@sympatico.ca">oneworld@sympatico.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzanne Stirling</td>
<td>Deputy Nat. Secretary</td>
<td><a href="mailto:areid@northwestel.ca">areid@northwestel.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alison Reid</td>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td><a href="mailto:normand_beaudet@videotron.ca">normand_beaudet@videotron.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normand Beaudet</td>
<td>Peace Secretary</td>
<td><a href="mailto:judy.bartel@gmail.ca">judy.bartel@gmail.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy Bartel</td>
<td>National Host Coord.</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cassels@uvic.ca">cassels@uvic.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan Cassels</td>
<td>Newsletter Editor</td>
<td><a href="mailto:servascanadayouth@gmail.com">servascanadayouth@gmail.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lorna Heaton</td>
<td>Youth Contact</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kathy Lewis</td>
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NON-BOARD POSITIONS

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<tr>
<td>National Host List Coord. west</td>
<td>Herman Bakker</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Host List Coord. east</td>
<td>Marion Copeland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletter Designer</td>
<td>Michael Johnson</td>
<td><a href="mailto:unexpected@sympatico.ca">unexpected@sympatico.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominating Committee Chair</td>
<td>Michael Johnson</td>
<td><a href="mailto:unexpected@sympatico.ca">unexpected@sympatico.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host List Data</td>
<td>Jim Leask</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host List Production Coord.</td>
<td>Judy Bartel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interim Webmaster</td>
<td>Normand Beaudet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facebook Coord.</td>
<td>Suzanne Stirling</td>
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<tr>
<td>S. Language Experience Coord.</td>
<td>Micki Stirling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outreach Committee:</td>
<td>Suzanne Stirling, Alison Reid, Kathy Lewis, and Lorna Heaton</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Website Committee:</td>
<td>Normand Beaudet, Nelson McRae, Suzanne Stirling and Judy Bartel</td>
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Retiring Interviewers

On behalf of the Board of Servas Canada we’d like to thank these interviewers who have resigned recently. It’s hard working volunteers like these that help keep our organization strong and vibrant.
- Gijsbert and Marlene Crielaard, Winnipeg
- Kent Macauley and Thom Knutson, Saskatoon
- Frans Greebe, Calgary
- Charlotte Burgess, Ottawa, Ontario

SI IT Committee

Did you know that there are three Canadians on the Servas International Information Technology Committee? Penny Pattison, Mark Hahn, and Michael Silbert.
Servas Online

By Judy Bartel

Besides the question “How can I become a member of Servas”, the most common questions coming to the Servas Canada website are “how can I find host lists” or even “where can I find the online host list”. It is hard for new Servas members to believe that this information isn’t online somewhere.

Well, you will be pleased to learn that Servas International is currently developing "ServasOnLine." SOL will be a protected worldwide members’ database with on-line host searches and communication tools for approved travellers. The anticipated completion date is late 2015.

Closer to home, the Servas Canada Website is being revitalized. Customizable software will make it easier to create and update the site. The new site will be easier to navigate, more self-serve, and contain saveable, printable forms to download. Watch for this early in the new year.

Treasurer Seeks Deputy for 2016

By Alison Reid, current Servas Canada treasurer

Far from being just an isolated number-cruncher, the Servas treasurer role has evolved to have a fun communicative role as well.

When the network of Servas interviewers send me the Letters of Introduction for the travelers they have interviewed (along with the money for fees and host list deposits), I email the travelers to wish them happy Servas travels, and offer to send them the latest newsletters and to connect them with their regional coordinators. I often have friendly exchanges with members who are excited to travel with our organization, and may hear back on how their experiences were. I also have the opportunity to be in touch with the interviewers themselves, and to appreciate the work they do for Servas Canada.

For the numbers and data, I have the opportunity to use Excel spreadsheets. I like them, and I know many other interesting, non-geeky, people who do too. The bookkeeping is pretty simple, the transactions relatively few, and the service much appreciated by the rest of the Board. The data base where the information from the letters of introduction is stored, is also a simple Excel spreadsheet, with about 220 entries annually.

The work load is moderate. I usually spend about an afternoon a month with the spreadsheets and emails. The year end work of gathering and recording the outstanding letters of introduction, and sending out the new year’s traveler stamps to the interviewers is a little more.

I have held this position since 2011, and am not burned out. I think that transferring the role to someone else is good for the organization. You may come up with fresh ideas for the position and the process, and that could be all to the good.

If you are interested in finding out more, please contact me, Alison Reid at areid@northwestel.net or 867-332-5835. I’d enjoy talking with you.

Quotes with a Twist!

• Hospitality: making your guests feel like they’re at home, even if you wish they were.
• Some cause happiness wherever they go. Others whenever they go.
• I can always count on him to be there — when HE needs ME.
• War does not determine who is right — only who is left.
• Evening news starts with ‘Good evening,’ and then proceeds to tell you why it isn’t.
New Zealand Youth Opportunity

The Servas International youth fund has enough contributions to be able to offer grants for two young people to join the Servas International conference in New Zealand in October next year. We can begin to receive applications from young people with a likely closing date in March. Full details will be circulated soon about how to apply.

Eligibility:

A member of Servas, for at least a year, aged 18 to 30, recommended by your Nat Sec.

Committing to providing a written report of their Servas experiences on returning home.

Selection Criteria:

How long has the young person been in Servas and how active are they in their national group?

How enthusiastic are they about Servas and what it has to offer?

What understanding can they show of the aims of Servas and how committed are they to them.

Posted on behalf of the Servas International Youth Fund by Ann Greenhough, SI Vice President anngreenhough1@gmail.com

16-Year-Old German Seeks Long Stay in Canada

Suzanne Stirling has told us about Rena, a German Servas host who would like her daughter to get a chance to do a SYLE in Canada. (Servas Youth Language Exchange) Her daughter is planning to come to Canada in the summer of 2016 for 4 to 6 weeks. She wrote:

Hello, we are a family from North Germany who have been Servas hosts for 32 years. We have two girls, Rosalie (16) and Ricarda (12). We speak German, Danish, English, French and a little Spanish. Rosalie would like to practice her English and/or French and would love to come to Canada to do so. We are wondering if there is a Servas family in Canada who could host her for a longer stay? We’d be flexible in arranging the length of the stay. If you are interested please send an email to rena@ueth.de.

Editor’s Note: There are 3 SYLE programs for:

- 10-18 year-olds: each hosts the other to develop: language, travel, self and cultural awareness.
- 18-30 years olds: aim is language learning and cultural awareness combined with travel.
- 30-80+ year olds: 2 weeks learning culture/language, 4 weeks with hosts at a project + further travel.

Contact: Lorna Heaton: servascanadayouth@gmail.com.
I had visited several countries, mainly in Europe, often accompanied by a small group of friends. We usually travelled around, stayed at campsites, in hostels or holiday flats and stuck to ourselves. I enjoyed living in foreign countries and learning more about other cultures. I met local people, made friends with them, and they showed me around and let me know lovely places in their area.

In 2014 I signed up as a Servas traveller, took ten-weeks-leave from work and travelled to the USA and Canada – on my own for five weeks during that time. Since I didn’t want to follow a strict itinerary, other than my arrival and departure dates, I decided not to contact all my hosts prior to my departure from Germany, just the first one.

My first Servas stop was in Chicago, Illinois; the host list offered a number of interesting people and I picked a couple. Even though one of the hosts was in hospital when I arrived, I was warmly welcomed. After two stops in the State of Washington, I finally arrived in Vancouver, Canada. I could not get a host in that city. I understood it was holiday season and the persons I contacted had already been busy or on holidays themselves. They refused my enquiries but suggested whom I should contact instead. I gave up after three or four attempts.

I stayed with three hosts on Vancouver Island and had a wonderful time. In fact, all my hosts across B.C. and in Calgary were just so nice and really welcoming. They opened their homes to me, prepared meals, introduced me to friends, taught me some card games, showed me around or let me rest. Some of them invited me in with less than a five days’ notice, asking me to stay for more than two nights, or to come back another time. They helped me navigating my way, suggesting routes and encouraging me to contact other hosts on my way even if there was not much advanced notice. They arranged other Servas hosts to help me, or offered to do the laundry. They were all very trusting and I am really grateful for that.

made my stay unforgettable!

Of course, all the people were different and so were their homes. All of my hosts provided a guest room, often with a private bathroom, and I even spent a couple of nights in an RV that was parked in front of the house.

I really enjoyed the company on day trips, and especially in the evening. It was always interesting to meet new people and to see who is “hiding” behind the address in the host list. I usually phoned hosts five to seven days in advance after noticing that e-mails took too long to get answered. Through calling I received an answer immediately if people were available, or I learned that people had moved. Just one of my hosts cancelled our meeting after we agreed on a date because family was coming to see her and she needed the room.

All in all it was an amazing experience for me and I am really glad that I did this journey. My Canadian Servas experience only involved hosts in British Columbia and Calgary. When I was touring across Ontario afterwards with my not-yet-Servas-member friend, I was really missing something. Thank you very much, Nancy, Sherri, Gillian & Richard, Phyllis & Fred, Beth & Bob, Wendy and Kathy! You all made my stay unforgettable!
Peter and his wife Marlies came from Germany to visit their son who was studying at the University of Toronto. One weekend they came north to Algonquin Park and then on to Sturgeon Falls to enjoy a Servas visit with us.

They had advised us that they were vegetarians and Marlon, their son, had other dietary restrictions. We prepared as best we could, finding a number of interesting recipes. At the time I really didn’t understand why some people were so obsessed with what they ate. Just follow Canada’s food guide and all should be good. What’s the big deal? They even brought a box of groceries with them!

At one point during dinner I was talking about my debilitating shoulder pain and how I’d been to see a specialist, had had cortisone treatments, tried physiotherapy, and been on a two-month holiday to obtain absolute rest (since we are farmers that might have been the cause of my shoulder problems). Yet after all those attempts, my shoulder was no better.

Then Peter made that shocking statement “I had that and look what I can do now!” How had he solved his problem? He went on a special diet that was developed in Germany. The researchers had analyzed a number of blood components and correlated them to illness or symptoms. They developed recommended foods that assist in mitigating the identified conditions and those which aggravate a condition. Of course, that’s why the Nuske family had their special diets. It was by adjusting his diet, not prescription drugs and intervention, that Peter had solved his problem. It was really simple.

I had tried everything but with no success. At 63, life was looking pretty grim. Why not try a special diet? It’s just food, nothing earth-shattering. I contacted Peter again, then hit the internet looking for the metabolic diet developed in Germany. In Canada it’s called the ‘Healthy and Active’ metabolic program, available only through naturopathic doctors. So I made an appointment.

food choices causing the problem

Today, I can lift that jug with no problem. My health has changed so dramatically that we are expanding our farming business, not downsizing. My entire family and friends have embraced healthier eating, although I must admit that my constant pestering has prompted a lot of that change. My sister suffered from vertigo for 10 years before she discovered, on her own, that it was her food choices that were ultimately causing the problem. My son, who has primary progressive MS has reduced his symptoms and stabilized to a great extent using diet along with prescription drugs and the CCSVI treatment. My husband controls his cholesterol with diet, not drugs. The examples go on and on.

So why don’t doctors immediately analyze your diet when you come to their office with a problem? Dr. André Behamdouni, chief of staff at the local hospital, says “People don’t want to change. All they want is a quick fix.” Personally, I don’t think people realize how critical their food choices are to their health. I certainly didn’t. I knew nothing about nightshade vegetables and inflammation. My sister knew even less about goitrogenic vegetables.

It is hard work changing your entire approach to eating. Along with my new diet program, a book that really helped me was “The World’s Healthiest Foods.” As a hospital board member I’m pushing for more emphasis on diet. As a start, I want the dietician to see every patient before they leave the hospital.

It took a Servas visitor from Germany to give me back my life. I tell this story every chance I get. Not only is a healthy diet so incredibly important, but so too are the benefits. Without that visit, where would I be today? A new friend from Germany has given me back my life.
Calgary Potluck

By Local Host Coordinator, Kathy Lewis

Servas hosts had an afternoon barbecue. About a dozen people attended, ranging in age from 6 up to those in their 70s. As the host, Kathy Lewis, arranged to rent a space in her condominium apartment complex with an outdoor gas grill, tables and chairs, and kitchen with all the necessities.

The group shared their host experiences over the last year — regrettably many didn’t see any visitors — and so we also talked about our own travel experiences and past host opportunities. We are all hopeful that more attention can be garnered for the Servas organization and what a wonderful opportunity this can be for young and old to build understanding and peace in the world; and then, of course, we’ll all have more visitors, which is always exciting.

Ontario Potluck

By Local Host Coordinators, Art & Danette Webster, Cambridge, Ontario

A big thanks to Louise & David for hosting the fall Servas Potluck. The weather cooperated and David led a hike with some of the group while others stayed back and played a rousing game of Scrabble.

As can be expected, the potluck meal was well worth the trip.

Edmonton Meeting

Courtesy of Nelson McRae

Edmonton area Servas members attending a barbecue at the home of Grant Davies and Nhung Tran-Davies in August 2014.
Are You Updated?

By Judy Bartel, National Host Coordinator

Thanks to the hard work of a “host” of host coordinators around the country, the Servas Canada Host list is once more being updated. We hope to get the 2015 list out to you before the end of March.

If you have somehow been missed, or have had changes since you were contacted, you have a very brief window to get the information to me (judy.bartel@gmail.com). Changes received after the end of January will have to wait for the 2016 list.

When you get your list, don’t forget to save it on your computer (and remember where you put it!). The list is not yet available online, so if you lose the list, you will need to contact canada@servas.org to get another copy. However, Servas International is in the process of obtaining host lists around the country, so we hope that the process of obtaining host lists will soon become easier!

I wish to once again extend my thanks to all the host coordinators across the country who faithfully contact hosts every year and enter changes in the database.

DID YOU KNOW?

By Julie Dotsch

Servas hosts can travel within Canada for FREE? You don’t need to contact an interviewer, get references, or purchase a stamp—but I would encourage you to complete the LOI and use it to introduce yourself to prospective hosts. You will need to provide evidence that you are a Servas host.

Servas hosts may travel outside Canada for half price. That’s right, for only $35.00 per adult, you can see the world the Servas way. Contact an interviewer in your region to become a current traveler and request host lists.

You can easily find specific hosts in particular towns or look up a specific host. Anywhere in the pdf, right click with your mouse. In the drop down box, click “find”. Type the town or surname into the box. This will take you to the first listing of this name. Click “next” to move to the next appearance of this name.

Servas is more than just a hosting organization—it is a network of people internationally and at home who share many interests and philosophies from promoting peace in the world to exchanging cultural knowledge and world views. Gatherings of local hosts and travelers provide another forum to meet people you would like to know! If your region hasn’t had a gathering recently, why not contact the host coordinator in your region and offer to coordinate one?

Spreading the Word about Servas

By Alison Reid

Word-of-mouth is a good way to promote Servas. As Servas members, we have had some great experiences to travel and host. We tell our friends and relations, and often encourage them to give it a try.

In January, I will be promoting Servas in a less informal way. The local Yukon College, here in Whitehorse, Yukon, is hosting a Community Services Fair, and Servas Canada will have a table there.

We now have the materials that make it easy to do. Last year, a Board member produced attractive poster and flyer designs. There is now a handout on the Servas Youth Language Exchange Programmes (there are 3, for ages 14 to 80+), and I plan to have copies of the letter of introduction, reference forms the list of countries where we have hosts, so that I can explain the process to those who are interested. “TRAVEL WITH SERVAS” will be prominently displayed, and there will be cookies and fruit as an added incentive for hungry students to come by and chat.

I have also been in touch with the Social Justice Clubs that our Whitehorse high schools have, and have made arrangements to make presentations there. If that goes well, I hope to present to various language classes in the schools.

Last year, Servas Canada instituted an affordable $20 annual fee for people 25 years old or younger, or students. This will be helpful in gaining more young members.

If you are interested in doing such promotion in your communities, for people of all ages, please get in touch with us. We can send you electronic versions of the informational material, and we can cover reasonable costs (cookies and fruit are reasonable). We’d love it if you would let us know how it went, and post pictures to the Servas Canada Facebook page.
Big SI Meeting in 2015 in “Hobbiton” NZ

This item was taken from the latest Servas International Newsletter:

Aotearoa New Zealand is hosting the next Servas International General Assembly in October, 2015. The conference location is a 2-hour drive south of Auckland a few kilometres from the country town of Matamata. It is near the hot pools at Totara Springs http://www.totarasprings.org.nz/ and the town gained some fame for being the home of Hobbiton—the little village made for the Lord of the Rings film trilogy. Registrations will be available in early 2015. Questions regarding the GA 2015 please contact:

SIGA2015info@servas.org

New Zealand: Tale of Two Islands

by Michael Johnson, Cambridge, Ontario

This is a condensed version of my travel post. For the full article contact me at: unexpected@sympatico.ca.

Will you attend the Oct. 2015 GA and travel while you are in the country? Some of the most welcoming hosts in the world are in New Zealand, AND you have amazing scenery and uncrowded roads. If you are on a limited budget, the price guides here will help you plan a longer trip so you can visit more wonderful hosts. Bon voyage.

“It’s more beautiful in South Island.” I heard from travellers. But is it?

This article should give you a better idea. I've also added tips to save you time and money.

Kiwis, as New Zealanders call themselves, include folks originating from Europe and other continents, and the Maori [pronounced “Mary” by some Kiwis]. The Maori came from Pacific islands about 700 years ago, not to be confused with “Islanders” – people who have arrived recently from places like Samoa and Cook Islands. When you visit a Maori village, several of which are set up for paid visits, you will get more smiles by greeting them with “Kia ora” (hello) roughly pronounced “key-oar-ah”. Over 20% of Kiwis speak Maori. Some folks call fair-skinned people (mostly of European origin) Pakeha (pack-key-ha) a Maori word.

Traveling in New Zealand:

Hotels/Hostels:

The basic hotel/motel rooms and Bed & Breakfast start about NZ$100/night/room. A backpacker dorm room bunk bed might be $20-35 a night. Breakfast is not normally included in motels. In popular area like Queenstown, book rooms well in advance. Everything reasonably priced may be sold out. Shop around, book early, and ask about discounts even if they say there are none.

Hotel vacancies do not mean there are affordable rooms. For example, accommodation at a lodge in Lake Taupo was $2,000 a night.
Wi-Fi:

Unlike North America, finding free Wi-Fi to check your email is rare. Tourist info areas and your hotel may give you 30 minutes free. Restaurants often charge a few dollars for an hour. Ask your Servas host before using theirs.

Coffee:

You’ll learn a “long black” is a large black coffee, and a short white is what you’d expect, a small coffee with milk. All coffee is made fresh and is good quality, which may explain why it’s around $4 everywhere.

Drinks:

At a grocery store I couldn’t find a bottle of water under $2. Bottled drinks are $3 and up.

Restaurants:

The most important thing to remember, especially outside large cities, is that some restaurants are open for lunch – period. Most are open for lunch and supper, but close from 2:30 to 5:30. We usually ate lunch out and dined with our Servas hosts in the evening. However when not being hosted we found filling evening meals (called “mains”) from $20 to $30. As in France and Quebec, an entrée means an “appetizer” or starting plate. These can easily be up to $20 in an average establishment, but a “main” will fill you. Lunches often cost from $17 to $19. This very limited range was normal country-wide, whether you ordered ham and eggs or a chicken dinner.

Thai restaurants served consistently good, if not award-winning, lunches for under $15. Great for vegetarians or those needing gluten-free. In Queenstown we had dinner (Pad Thai: $17) one evening at the restaurant @ Thai, a popular spot.

A melt-in-your-mouth NZ specialty “white bait” (tiny fish the width of a shoe lace) was $30. In NZ if the menu says $19.50 most locals put down a $20 note and walk out. Tipping is not expected.

Early Closing:

In the town of Te Kuiti a loud siren sounded at 5 pm. I first looked up to see if any missiles were heading my way. Then watched as the stores closed – and I mean ALL the stores. Even grocery stores in small towns can close at 5 pm, some closed at 1 pm on Saturday. Few stores open on Sunday. The touristy Arrowtown near Queenstown closes up tight at 4 pm, except one art shop, run by a lovely German lady, open until 5. In Queenstown and Auckland we found shops open longer. Tourism in Queenstown – which is called iSite everywhere – closed at 7 pm. This is a great place to get maps, plan your travel, hotels, book trips and attractions.

AA, a partner of AAA & CAA

AA (auto services) often has free maps even if you’re not a member. They can help CAA or AAA members book hotels.

Taxis/Shuttles/Buses:

At the Christchurch Airport, officials suggested that we wait 20 minutes for the shuttle bus [cheaper than a taxi]. These shuttles take you to any address in the city for $14.50/person. When I went to pay [$29 for two persons], the driver handed me a $1 coin before he took my $30 in notes.

If taking a taxi, ask about traffic delays, which can easily double the “normal” taxi fare, as we found weeks earlier in Sydney, Australia.

Cars:

Regular octane gasoline, called petrol here, is “91.” It was about $2.20 throughout NZ.

GPS:

If you don’t have a GPS, you may not need one. Outside of Auckland most routes are fairly simple. You could buy one online as many people are selling GPSs and their cars/campers when they leave. I found a GPS comforting; no need to consult maps while getting used to driving on the left side of the road. Because instruments are reversed you’ll see drivers (including me) turning on their windshield (windscreen in NZ) wipers to signal a turn. For a long trip a GPS is useful, not just for reaching destinations but to find fuel or restaurants. Buy a basic one and leave it with your last Servas host.
BUY or RENT:
If you are staying months instead of weeks, consider buying a car, a common practice here. Often people convert a hatchback car to a camper, adding a bed at the back on a raised board.

Rental Cars:
We booked with A2B rental. A 2014 Toyota Corolla hatchback was $35/day because we rented for over 19 days. [My credit card covered insurance extras.] You can find lower rates, even with this company, but your car may be 10 years old – i.e. no USB plug to play your favourite tunes, no cruise control, poorer fuel economy and it leaves one wondering if it may break down.

CAMPERVAN or CAR?:
1. Camper rental prices are ~$100/day compared to ~$40 or less for a car.
2. Driving on the left side of the road is tensing (at least for a while) with a SMALL car. Imagine driving on very narrow, very winding roads with a wide, long campervan. (Note: JUCY Rental has some very compact campervans for two persons that drive much like a normal car.)
3. Don’t forget to add the cost of extra fuel, camp sites, parking problems, longer driving time with a slower vehicle that can’t overtake slow trucks easily.

Rental cars, continued:
Especially if you are planning to rent a campervan, consider starting as far south as you plan to be and head north. Almost every tourist lands in Auckland and drives their campervan south and flies back to Auckland, so rental companies often give BIG discounts to drive the campervans back north. This can work to a lesser extent for rental cars also.

Go online, do a Google search. I found one site offering 3 days free rental of a campervan WITH a free full tank of gasoline (petrol) from Queenstown to Christchurch and another rental from Christchurch to Auckland with the same conditions including the cost of the expensive ferry fees from South to North Island. That gave someone 6 free days of travel with free built-in accommodation. That pace is way too fast for site-seeing, but one could rent a normal car to drive south, then exchange it and drive north with a campervan. Expect a drop-off fee for leaving the car.

Drive in circles:
Another efficient way to see New Zealand is driving in circles – let me explain. We picked up our car in Auckland, circled around from Coromandel to Rotorua, Lake Taupo and the Waitomo Caves and back to the Auckland airport with one rental car (called “hire car” there). We then flew to Christchurch and drove south to Dunedin and Queenstown, coming back to Christchurch via roads near the mountains, passing beautiful lakes with a view of the Southern Alps.

Bus/Train:
In 1995 I toured NZ for a month, often using buses and trains, but didn’t this trip. Backpacker buses are popular and some train routes are reasonable, depending on your travel preferences.

Must-see sites:
If you’re from Canada, standing on a piece of dirty ice is NOT exciting, so I would pass on the Fox Glacier.

Coromandel Peninsula:
The quiet towns here are a pleasure to tour – you’ll think you’re back in the 1950s, especially due to the friendly manner, so typical throughout the country.

The “Hot Sand Beach” is famous, with hundreds of people looking for just the right spot – digging madly with shovels to find the place that was not too hot and not too cold. The “just the right place” was a VERY narrow strip down to the sea and only a few found it. Because of the crowds it was not so magical to me. If you go, don’t miss the intricate lines in the stone hills by the beach.
Queenstown: The energy of adventurous young people is enough reason to go. Here you can do almost any bungee jumping, jet boating and death-defying activity. We chose the calmer gondola ride.

Arrowtown nearby is touristy, but quaint. There are many trips in the area that I’m sure you’ll love.

Otago Peninsula: is an hour’s drive east of Dunedin—extremely beautiful, but keep your eyes on the twisting narrow road if you get away from the coast where the road is just winding. You’ll be rewarded at the end with a visit to see yellow-eyed penguins—and a few blue penguins perhaps—in their natural setting from sheltered “blinds”.

Christchurch: This city is a monument to the power of nature and the resiliency and determination of people to overcome disaster [earthquakes].

Punting: In American football, punting is what you do to the ball. On the Avon River in Christchurch, punting is

The Glow Worm Caves

in Waitomo ... are a magical, unique, serene experience, definitely worth the price of admission. You are led down stairs and paths through a stalactite- and stalagmite-filled cave. Your guide points out interesting formations with a flashlight in the somewhat dimly lit cavern. This is to prepare your eyes for the climax. You are boarded on a simple metal boat, holding about 20. The guide asks for silence and pulls on an overhead rope as you glide silently into the dark. One can barely see anything until you enter the glow worm section. Suddenly hundreds of blue-white radiant creatures appear on the cave ceiling resembling a brilliant starry sky. The experience is so satisfying, inspiring and relaxing, making me wonder how anyone can ever be bored when there is nature. Afterward, you can walk by yourself to nearby shallow caves and beautiful waterways and falls. Don’t miss it.

South Island, from south to north:

Milford Sound and Doubtful Sound: ... are wonderful experiences, loved by devoted hikers.

Rotorua area:

Geyser and bubbling mud. The Maori village nearby showed everyday life – if throwing a chunk of raw meat on a rope into 130 C hot springs can be considered normal. The coloured ponds and lakes, many steaming all day, were attractive.

Picturesque Lake Taupo:

This lake looks like a perfect postcard scene. You can just stare at the blue or go for adventure. (Write the author for details on superb sailing and jetboat trips there.)

Rotorua

Waitomo

The Glow Worm Caves

“Barbary”
how gondolas are propelled. I contacted the punting company and explained I was doing a story on New Zealand highlights. A very friendly employee, Alistair, offered to take us punting the next day for free. Alistair explained highlights of the Avon River. After a half an hour of silently gliding along the water listening to the high-pitched cicadas and slipping under low-hung branches, I told our pole-pushing guide I didn’t want to keep him from his paying customers. He assured me he had all day, because this was his day off! He said, “I can’t believe they pay me to do something I enjoy so much.” We learned more of this generous chap, Alistair, when we took him out to lunch. This kind of uncommon hospitality is quite common in New Zealand.

unforgettable smiling faces

From hosts who picked us up at the airport, to one who gave us an antique pharmacy bottle, the generosity and camaraderie never stopped. Many of our hosts in their 60s and 70s were quite fit, hiking and biking more than younger Canadians I know.

Come for the amazing places, stay for the unforgettable smiling faces.

Mr. Carson, help — these people all want flesh-coloured Band-Aids.