

Servas Canada

Newsletter 17 - Mar 2009

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1. Servas Canada Birthday – October 10, 2009

The Board of Servas Canada have chosen October 10, 2009 as the Day for Servas. We encourage all members to make a note of the day, and ask themselves "What will you do to promote peace on Oct 10th."

2. Fancy A Cultural Exchange With A Servas Pakistan

Host?

Our email address (Canada@servas.org) has received an email from a host in Pakistan requesting correspondence with a Canadian host. With travel becoming more problematic, what with the cost, visa complications and the carbon footprint, perhaps emails could continue the cultural exchanges that Servas aims to promote. If you are interested in corresponding with this person, please send a note to Canada@servas.org.

3. Canada Has Many Time Zones

Travelers planning to come to Canada and hosts phoning across the country should bear in mind that Canada has 4.5 hours of time zone differences, so if you are calling a phone number and don't know where the area code is, find out first, or make sure to call at a time that is convenient - for the receiver!

4. Looking For Interesting Work In The Editing Field?

The term for SI News Editor Jane Giffould is ending in September 2009. The position is an elected one. Anyone who is qualified and willing to run for the office should contact Penny Pattison or the Newsletter editor, Lesley Rognier, to submit their name and C.V. Jane can provide details if needed.

5. Servas Canada Board Elections

In September, Servas Canada Hosts were sent information about new election procedures to be introduced for Board members. The two main objectives were to ensure Board renewal and to ensure a more democratic decision making procedure. The Nominations Committee accordingly sent a notice out to all current hosts asking if anyone would like to put their name forward as Board member. The Committee has found three new people willing to join the Board in January 2009 to replace the three who are stepping down, so there was no need for an election this year. The three departing Board members are Michael Johnson (Nominations Committee, past National Secretary, member of several SI committees), Sylvia Krogh (Peace Secretary) and Lesley Rognier (Newsletter Editor, Nominations Committee).

Board terms are for three years, and some members' terms come up for renewal each year. In the summer of 2009, the Nominations Committee will send out another call for candidates, and an election is planned to be held in the fall, when another three

members are expected to be retiring.

The three new Board members are Sharon Bool (interviewer in Vancouver), Michele Doctoroff (interviewer in Calgary) and Michael Silbert (interviewer and host coordinator in Niagara Peninsula). They will join current board members Penny Pattison (National Secretary, interviewer and host coordinator for Vancouver Island), Julie Dotsch (Assistant National Secretary, chair of Servas International Appeals Committee), Claude Lefrançois (interviewer in Montreal), Elizabeth Sebestyen (Treasurer), Sarena Talbot (Youth Coordinator) and Sandy Yudin (Host List Coordinator, interviewer for Huntsville/Deep River).

As the Elections Committee is already preparing for the next election in the fall of 2009, they expect to be conducting an electronic vote. For this purpose, as well as to ensure that you receive other Servas correspondence (such as this newsletter), please make a note to notify Servas Canada if your email address changes, by writing to canada@servas.org.

6. Servas Canada Hosts: Send us your E-mail Address, Please!

Most Servas hosts have given Servas Canada an email address at which they can be contacted. Not everyone wants their email address published in the host list, and we can easily ensure that an email address is only used for Servas correspondence.

We would very much appreciate it if those of you who have not given us an email address could do so, as it will save costs for the organization and make it simpler for volunteers. For example, one host is using her sister's email address.

7. Managing Expectations Regarding E-Mail Communications

The Servas Canada National Secretary, Penny Pattison, has received several complaint letters and emails on the subject of Canadian hosts not answering emails from travelers, and on the flip side, the receipt of mass or spam-like emails by Canadian hosts.

Among these letters was one from Ron Grant who wrote from Thailand in May 2008 to tell of his experience locating hosts in B.C. "As suggested in the Canada Servas book, we started this project by emailing a few hosts in the Vancouver area, including our LOI scans, as well as a description of ourselves, our trip plans, and even a photo of us

together in Thailand. What would become our main frustration soon became evident. A large number of Servas hosts we contacted declined to reply to my carefully composed email. For the first 2, I received no replies. The next three, I received only one reply, a polite refusal. I had allowed 4 days between sending out each request group, and time was running short so, finally, throwing caution to the winds, I emailed a further 5 hosts for a final chance. We struck it lucky, with 3 replies to the five letters, including one positive. While pleased to find a host, we were surprised and disappointed to get no response to 50% of our enquiries.”

From the replies received and the welcome they were given Ron and his wife had a great stay in western Canada but reiterated his gripe. He questions why people are in the Servas host list if they do not reply to requests, especially hosts in a developed country. (Of 22 Vancouver area hosts contacted, he got only 10 replies!) Ron recommends that future travelers not limit their requests to only a few more than the number of hosts they hope to locate.

As hosts, what are YOUR feelings about how we might better manage expectations concerned with email communications, or perhaps improve email etiquette? It is obvious that many hosts are frustrated to be just one of the many contacted by a traveler wanting to arrange a visit but contacting a variable number of hosts with the same email then not informing those he/she has NOT selected that ‘Thank you very much but I have found a host.’” so that the hosts know what to expect. It can be very frustrating but, when trying to find a host ourselves, do we not do the same thing? And are WE polite enough to inform the others when we have found a willing host? After all, it takes only ONE email to do this. Servas Canada interviewers will be asked to stress this point when interviewing new travelers and the issue will be raised with Servas International at their next meeting. Another suggestion is that hosts who do not regularly check their incoming mail should not include their email address in the data printed in the host list. To conclude, Ron voices a plea that Servas Canada make a more concerted effort to ensure that the host listings they publish includes hosts that consider themselves ‘active’ (and courteous?) enough to at least reply to all genuine enquiries.

8. Homage To A Long-Time Host

A well loved Vancouver Island Servas host, Maurice Van Imschoot, died recently. Maurice and his devoted wife Nancy joined Servas in the 1980s and truly embodied the Servas ideals. His diverse interests in languages, religions and the arts made Maurice a "natural" as a Servas host. A sculptor and a musician, he and Nancy also enjoyed international folk dancing. According to his caring friend Jim Wisnia, he was a real charmer at the host gatherings that John Walker organized and loved to regale his audience with stories about visitors they had hosted. Jim will always remember him as “a positive and gentle man who faced the challenges of his condition without loss of dignity. His courage and determination was an inspiration to all who knew him.” He will

be sadly missed by all Vancouver Island hosts.

9. Upcoming Activities

9.1 Servas anniversary in 2009

The SI web site (www.servas.org) has a comprehensive calendar of all events being organized to celebrate the Servas anniversary. Keep your eyes on upcoming events planned in your area or in a country where you plan to travel.

9.2 Italy's invitation to join "Sentierinsieme/Pathway Together" -- July 10, 2009

After their successful Servas meeting in 2008 at Aussoi, "Sentierinsieme"/Pathway together will return this year for the weekend of July 10-12 in Italy in Piedmont: Ossola Valley (close to Simplon Pass, between Italy and Switzerland) and mark the occasion with a celebration of the 60 years of Servas and 25 years of Sentierinsieme. The weekend will be followed by four-five days of trekking for a limited number of people (max. 50), the Valle Antigorio, Val Formazza, Alpe Veglia, Alpe Devero, near the Swiss border. Another option is to stay in the valley visiting the different natural, historical and artistic attractions of this beautiful alpine area.

All the groups will come back together in the beautiful Val Formazza for the last "good-bye" on Wednesday and by Friday, the celebration will move to Goglio, a small locality in the little Val Devero, in an alpine hotel. This building can contain 90 people.

It's essential to book in advance. Daily cost (dinner, bed, breakfast) is 35 Euros. All details and forms of booking are available on request. Send your name, address, telephone, e-mail, and your intention (or not) to participate to the trekking, to: uslenghi@fauser.it

9.3 World March for Peace & Nonviolence – October 2, 2009

The World March will begin in New Zealand on October 2, 2009, the anniversary of Gandhi's birthday, declared the "International Day of Non-Violence" by the United Nations. It will conclude in the Andes Mountains (Punta de Vacas, Aconcagua, Argentina) on January 2, 2010. The March will last 90 days, three long months of travel. It will pass through all climates and seasons, from the hot summer of the tropics and the deserts, to the winter of Siberia. The American and Asian stages will be the longest, both almost a month. A permanent base of a hundred people of different nationalities will complete the journey.

See the following websites:

www.worldmarch.info

www.worldmarchforpeace.org
www.theworldmarch.org
www.marchamundial.org

Download the folder/brochure of the World March:

in English:

<http://www.worldmarch.info/images/docs/wmofficialbrocheng20081217.pdf>
<http://www.marchemondiale.fr/pages/Mat%E9riel/PLAKET%20MMDEC08.pdf>

9.4 Asia-Europe Inter-Continent Expedition – March 1, 2010

Servas members are invited to join a Servas Expedition from Seoul, South Korea, through Asia and Europe, to London, England. The expedition will start on March 1, 2010 to end on August 31, 2010. The team will comprise 20 Servas members (10 Koreans and 10 multinationals). The plan is to travel by four-wheel drive vehicle, 8 hours a day, with four members in each vehicle, and each person driving 2 hours a day in turns. Anyone interested in joining this expedition should contact: Mr. Jong Soo Kim, N.S. Servas Korea, at servas@korea.com.

10. A Servas Interviewer's Views On Servas

By spring 2008, Dorothy Janes had interviewed over 100 prospective travelers aged from 18 to 77 years, both first-timers and 'old hands'. Here are a few of her own comments about her role as Servas interviewer. "How much the internet and email have changed this job! Many requests for interviews still come by telephone but increasingly there are email letters from people who've read about SERVAS on the internet and wish to travel this way. Email enables me to keep accurate records of ongoing correspondence and information about repeat travelers. Over the years I've learned to be explicit in the answers I give to queries. I make it clear that because it's a volunteer organization the approval process can take time, usually 4-6 weeks, as each stage proceeds from the initial interview to the dispatch of host lists by Sandy Yudin for the destination countries. If someone is planning to travel within a week or ten days I suggest they contact Servas for their next trip.

Also, it is often necessary to gently point out to Canadian travelers that many of the hosts they wish to visit in other countries may not be able to use the internet and will have to be contacted by post or telephone. (When I traveled in India in 1982 often the best I could do was send a telegraph ahead of time and give an estimate of when I'd be in a particular town/city so the host would have an idea of when to expect me.)

Sandy (Yudin, host list coordinator) and I work together to encourage travelers to be realistic in the number of hosts they think they can visit and how it is the quality of an

individual stay that is important not the quantity of places to stay. Servas travel definitely is not “If it’s Wednesday it must be Gabarone!”

I have also learned through some iffy experiences that it must be “cash on the barrel”, i.e. no membership fee, no stamped and signed Letter of Introduction.

Just going through the process of finding Servas and getting in touch with me to arrange an interview time eliminates quite a few who had thought Servas was a cheap travel agent company.”

11. Remembering The Life Of Servas Founder, Bob Luitweiler

Servas Canada National Secretary, Penny Pattison, and her husband attended a celebration of the life of Bob Luitweiler, who passed away in summer 2008. Held in Bellingham, Washington in September, this turned out to be a joyous occasion, filled with laughter as well as serious discussion. About 40 people attended, including his daughters Sonja and Anita, their mother, his grandchildren and old friends. Servas was represented by several members from Victoria and Vancouver; and Jay and Seichiro Tomioka from Tokyo (Jay is making a documentary about the founding of Servas and was handing out DVD samples) in addition to local members.

”We formed a circle and talked together about Bob, Servas and life,” said Penny. “We felt that this is what he would have wanted! I loved hearing of childhood experiences from his daughters, recent interactions with his friends, his multitude of projects and also direct quotes of his initial vision of Servas. It was a real privilege to have had that chance to say goodbye to him, along with some wonderful folks who share our admiration of him.

12. Opportunities For Canadian Youth To Join Syle

Servas has created a unique opportunity for younger travelers to experience another culture and learn a new language through the Servas Youth Languages Experience (SYLE) program. This program is open to youth and young adults between the ages of 18-30 who would like to experience another culture, while at the same time begin to learn (or improve) a new language (such as Spanish, French, English, Portuguese). The program is now going into its sixth year and the results have already been incredible with SYLE programs taking place in many countries around the world.

If you are interested, please check out SYLE at <http://servasyouth.org/> or contact the Servas International Youth Coordinator Pablo Chufeni in Argentin

13. International Servas Youth Conference 2009

The youth contact for Servas Australia, Ailish Battersby, is sorry to inform people of the cancellation of the International Servas Youth Conference in Australia that was scheduled to take place this January. Unfortunately there was not enough interest in the event for it to take place.

14. Viaje Precioso Servas In Chile

Laura, a Servas host in Newfoundland, wrote to say how she has struck it rich with lovely Servas people in Valparaiso, a World Heritage Site and port half-way up Chile. Her first hosts were a couple who warned her that they are both very active and busy but invited me to stay with the proviso that they wouldn't be able to spend much time with her. "True," she wrote "but what we've managed has been Quality Time." Her host was an Austrian-born architect and his wife a heritage-preservation activist; they have three growing children. Michi even offered to meet me at the bus station, and drove me to their huge and distinctive 8-storey home built onto the side of Cerro (hill) San Juan de Dios. For the first three nights Laura was a guest, but after that she rented their unique little basement room, sleeping in a bed about 10 feet off the floor!!

One evening she took a colectivo (looks like a taxi but it jams people into it and charges less than a dollar for anywhere along a set route) to visit the Servas National Secretary, a delightful man named Gaston Lux, who lives on Cerro Esperanza. (Everyone in Valpo lives on a hill.) We sat in front of his computer all evening, as he gave me a digital tour of Chile with his slides and Google Earth screens! He writes guide books, among other things, for a living. "Also, you should see the size of one of the cacti in his yard -- very impressive!"

15. So What Makes Servas Different From Couchsurfers? Read On...

Paul and Sandi Caplan own and operate a fascinating store, 'Novacks', in London, Ont, selling outdoor, outfitter and travel-related merchandise. Although not (yet) members of Servas, Paul has submitted an article to the Free Press summarizing the differences between Servas and CouchSurfers, a distinction many 'outsiders' fail to make. We reproduce most of it here for the reader's interest and information.

"This article deals with a response to a previous article about "free" accommodation. The local coordinators for Servas were concerned with my statement that the CouchSurfing project was similar to Servas. While there are similarities, both having as their mandate the promotion of tolerance and cultural understanding, it is the differences that distinguish the two.

Servas was founded in 1949 by Bob Luitweiler as a peace movement. It is the desire and intention of Servas to promote peace and understanding between people by providing opportunities for a deeper more personal contact between different cultures. Servas is primarily concerned with the promotion of peace among nations and to this extent Servas International has consultative status as a non-governmental organization with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, with representation at many of the UN's hubs of activity. The opportunity to host and be hosted is the vehicle used to further the original goal of Servas as a peace movement. (...)

On the other hand CouchSurfing was founded "when Casey Fenton got a cheap ticket to Iceland for a long weekend. With his ticket in hand, there was one problem: he had no place to stay and no desire to book into a hotel for the weekend. So, he came up with the 'brilliant' idea of spamming over 1500 Icelandic students in Reykjavik and asking them if he could crash on one of their couches. After exchanging emails with many of the students, he had several groups of friends offer to show him 'their' Reykjavik. From that point onward, it was all about crashing on exotic couches and cultural exchange. And, thus, the CouchSurfing Project was born." Initially founded in 2003 to provide "free" accommodation, Couchsurfing has evolved. Its mission statement reads as follows: "CouchSurfing seeks to internationally network people and places, create educational exchanges, raise collective consciousness, spread tolerance, and facilitate cultural understanding." The CouchSurfing website, however, is merely a venue for users to learn about one another and, if they wish, arrange stays with one another. There is no actual membership approved by CouchSurfing. It is a network rather than an organization and as such is not involved in the actual contact between users and therefore, has no control over the conduct of the users.

(To summarize,) the initial intent of Servas and CouchSurfing differs. Servas was founded as a peace movement and that still remains central to the organization. CouchSurfing began when someone wanted an alternative to a hotel and grew to recognize the benefits of cultural openness. Servas, as an organization, takes responsibility for their members by thoroughly interviewing and approving membership. CouchSurfing, as stated, is only a venue for those searching for a "couch" and takes no responsibility for their users.

As the oldest hospitality exchange organization, Servas stands on its reputation while the reputation of CouchSurfing is evolving."

16. Servas Artists Group On Facebook

Gizella Borcsok (Servas Hungary) and Jean-Luc Turlure (Servas France) decided together in Budapest in August 2007 to create a group of Servas Artists.

Servas-Artists will be multi-cultural, gathering all kinds of artists: authors; visual artists, painters, sculptors, photographers, film makers, video-makers...

- interpreters of music,songs,geste,dances...

- journalists, historians of culture, art critics, curaters, art galleries, music-lovers
collecters art teachers etc.

The objective of Servas artists is to bring into contact members of Servas to work together in cultural exchange and communications for the purposes of helping world peace. Each country will have its representatives linked for the moment by Gizella Borcsok and Jean-Luc Turlure

17. Pictures



Two key members of Servas Canada: Jim Leask and Penny Pattison. This picture was taken in the summer of 2008 when Jim visited Penny.

18. Credits

This edition of the Servas Canada newsletter was compiled and edited by Lesley Rognier. Articles were submitted by Lesley, Penny Pattison and Michael Johnson.

Translation from English to French was provided by Jean-Guy Charland, Lesley Rognier and Danielle Monfette. Translation from French English was provided by Lesley.

Host list addresses were provided by Jim Leask. Robert Dar-Woon took care of e-mail distribution. Gerry Staring handled the mailed copies. Alvaro Barba posted the newsletter to the Servas Canada web site.

If you have ideas or contributions for the next Servas Canada newsletter, please forward them to canada@servas.org.