



Leah Giovenno, center, a Peace Corps volunteer from Valencia, and a group of the children from Kolondieba, Mali, clown for the camera. The children refer to Giovenno as "Tubabo," or white person. One of the most difficult aspects of the African assignment for Giovenno, besides the language barrier, is trying to blend in.

CORPS BEGINS FIFTH DECADE

The Peace Corps celebrated its 40th anniversary this month. It was established in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy with three goals:

- To help people of other countries meet their need for trained men and women.
- To promote a better understanding of America among those served by the agency.
- To promote a better understanding of other people by Americans.

To become a Peace Corps member, applicants must meet certain education and work experience requirements.

Peace Corps assignments are for two years, plus three months of training in the country of service. Volunteers are placed in a location where their skills are most needed.

Peace Corps volunteers, age 18 and older, are not paid a salary, but receive a stipend to cover necessities such as food, housing expenses and local transportation.

Only United States citizens may join the Peace Corps.

PEACE CORPS FACTS:

Established: 1961
Number of volunteers and trainees: 162,000
Countries served: 134
2001 budget: \$253 million
Average volunteer age: 29
Volunteers by sector: education, 39 percent; health, 16 percent; environment, 17 percent; business, 13 percent; agriculture, 9 percent; and other, 4 percent

MISSION TO MALI



Mali, formerly the Sudanese Republic, became independent from France in June 1960. Rule by dictatorship was brought to a close in 1991 and in 1992, Mali's first democratic election was held.

Area: 1.24 million square kilometers. Landlocked. 65 percent is desert.

Border Countries: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal

Climate: subtropical to arid

Terrain: mostly flat to rolling northern plains covered by savanna in south, rugged hills in northwest

Natural resources: gold, phosphates, kaolin, salt, limestone, uranium, hydropower

Population: 10,685,948

Religions: Muslim 90 percent, indigenous beliefs 9 percent, Christian 1 percent

Languages: French (official), Bambara 80 percent, numerous African languages

Capital: Bamako

Agriculture: Products: cotton, millet, rice, corn, and peanuts

Flag description: three equal vertical bands of green, yellow, and red uses the popular pan-African colors of Ethiopia

OUT OF AFRICA

Carnegie exhibit explores diversity of Dark Continent

Hands-on activities, multimedia presentations and a collection of African artifacts allow visitors at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History to explore the Dark Continent without leaving Western Pennsylvania.

The exhibit, "Africa: One Continent, Many Worlds," showcases the diversity of the world's second-largest continent.

The exhibit, which views Africa and its people from a historical and contemporary perspective, runs through May 13.

The 8,500-square-foot exhibit has five sections: community and family life, art and society, commerce, African ecology, and Diaspora.

Dan Lagovane, the museum's assistant director of marketing and media relations, said his exhibit might be the best in content and attendance ever at the museum.

"Every seventh grader from the Pittsburgh public schools is coming to see the exhibit," he said. "We couldn't be more thrilled."

The exhibit includes a life-size robotic thimberos and a Tuareg tent made of goatskin, the mobile home of a caravaner.

Visitors are able to peer through binoculars and view videos of a mountain gorilla family at play and see a photo mural of the Royal Palace of the Bamum, which functions as the king's residence, cultural center and museum to many objects of the Bamum people.

A car rapids is a recreated interior of a

'Survivor' has nothing on Africa volunteer

Mars graduate toughs it out

By DARLENE WHITE NATALE
Eagle Focus Editor

Leah Giovenno spent the carefree Saturday mornings of her youth dribbling a soccer ball across the green fields of Butler County. She played soccer throughout high school and in college, but now the game has changed.

"I play pick-up games with the kids in town, but soccer is kinda different...no shoes, no shinguards, no grass. It's really quite amazing! But I do have fun with the kids," wrote Giovenno in a mail interview with the Butler Eagle.

The town Giovenno refers to is Kolondieba in the African country of Mali. Her route to West Africa took her from her home in Valencia through Allegheny College in northwestern Pennsylvania.

Giovenno, 23, had a history of service in student government and received a 1996 PaWest referee award for her work at youth soccer matches.

However, her mother, Jenny Giovenno, said that the "real" sense of volunteerism was instilled in her daughter at Allegheny College in Meadville.

At Allegheny, about half of the student population participates in community service projects each year.

There Leah Giovenno joined AmeriCorps, where she logged more than 1,200 hours as a volunteer at a Meadville women's and children's domestic violence shelter. She also went to New York City on spring break twice and served meals to AIDS patients. The college sponsored these service projects.

After working with AmeriCorps for two years, she wanted a greater challenge.

So the young woman from Valencia enrolled in the Peace Corps and accepted a post in Africa.

"I guess I figured if I can live in Africa for two years, anything after this will be a piece of cake!" Giovenno said.

She ended up in Mali because of her choice



Leah Giovenno, of Valencia, enjoys the view of the West African country of Mali, where she is serving as a Peace Corps volunteer.



Two boys from the village of Kolondieba peak through Leah Giovenno's door in Mali.



Leah Giovenno, right, and her host stand outside of the typical Malian mud house that Giovenno lives in while training for Peace Corps service in Bamako.

■ See Volunteer on Page C2

Pair adopt nomadic lifestyle

Missionary work takes couple to West Africa



Missionaries Jack and Sally Kennedy in the living room of their Muddy Creek Township home. The couple is displaying artifacts collected on their missions to Mali, Africa.

By CONNIE PISTON SHOEMAKER
Eagle Correspondent

When John "Jack" Kennedy of Muddy Creek Township was seeking a ministry in French-speaking West Africa, he discovered Mali.

Kennedy was looking for an "unreached" people where he could plant the gospel.

"God led us to the nomadic Tuareg of Timbuctu," said Kennedy.

Kennedy first visited Mali in January of 1986 as part of a Christian Missionary Alliance work team with some members from Evans City.

After that, Kennedy and his wife Sarah "Sally" made their first visit in October 1986 and stayed for five months.

The Kennedys are ministering in the Niger River bend and living in the town of Gossi. They go from there to the various

nomad camps.

"By American standards, these people who live in goatskin tents in the rainy season from June-October and in cloth or straw mat tents from mid-October until May would be considered very poor. While our families may seem to be poor, they are very rich in their family relationships," said Kennedy.

Finding a place to live was the first order of business for the Kennedys. They live with a "noble" Tuareg family, a wealthy family in good standing in the community.

"This gives us a natural relation with others and a place in the social structure. Our people are herdsmen raising sheep, goats, donkeys, cows and camels."

■ See Couple on Page C2

Volunteer

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Working in the health sector and the fact that she wanted to start in the summer 2000.

Giovenno will be in Mali through the summer of 2002. She is a health education volunteer working with the Children's School Health Program.

This sector has many activities, including training and educating nurses, doctors and teachers on how to provide health education in the schools, distribution of vitamin supplements and medicines to rural village schools, as well as other programs.

"I work with a well-educated and capable Malian staff and am able to bring fresh ideas and new perspectives to otherwise traditional ways of doing things," Giovenno said.

"There are approximately 160 PCVs (Peace Corps volunteers) in Mali. But in the town of Kolondieba, where I live and work, there is one other PCV. The next closest American is about 40 (kilometers) away," Giovenno said.

Her mother has daily concerns about the risk of malaria, and especially the way they travel.

"They ride on wooden benches in the back of vans and travel on very poor roads," Leah's mother said. "Jenny said cooking is primitive and lone outdoors on a furnace, a charcoal-fueled metal stove."

Mrs. Giovenno said the family misses Leah most during the holiday seasons.

She admits she wrote to her daughter after the training period and implored her to come home. Mrs. Giovenno told her daughter she had already proven she could survive. Leah declined because she wanted to serve and experience the Malian culture.

Mrs. Giovenno said Leah is stationed in a tiny village, but that the capital Bamako is a large city with rime. Still, the city has much less violence than in the United States. She expressed confidence that the Peace Corps would evacuate the volunteers in case of political danger.

Mrs. Giovenno said she feels the Peace Corps experience will be a defining event in her daughter's life.

"Naturally, every aspect of Leah's self being comes to mind when I think of her so far away and without adult family for support, homesickness, adequate food and fresh water, the severe heat."

"But I remind myself that this was Leah's big dream — she and her roommate Nicky Mason were recruited their senior year, they anticipated the adventure," Mrs. Giovenno said.

Mason is stationed in Guinea, West Africa, and visited Leah at



Leah Giovenno, a former Mars High School soccer standout, plays soccer with other residents of the village of Kolondieba, where she serves in the Peace Corps. Giovenno said soccer is very different there for the natives: no grass, no shinguards and no shoes.

'Any Survivor producer that picked a PCV from Mali to do the show wouldn't have much of a contest. Also, I don't see the point in living for 40 days, in conditions that some people must endure for a lifetime, and then making a million dollars from it.'

LEAH GIOVENNO
Peace Corps volunteer in Africa

Christmas.

"They got to spend a week together — that made me feel good that they had a friend at least to be with for the holiday," Mrs. Giovenno said.

"Today's youth crave an experience that is real and meaningful. It seems a natural progression in her volunteerism as well," said Mrs. Giovenno.

With Leah more than 4,000 miles away from Butler, the Eagle contacted her via mail and e-mail and asked her to discuss her experience in Africa. Here are her responses to questions posed by the Eagle.

QUESTION: Describe your home and materials used in construction.

LEAH: Although I lived for three months in a stereotypical "mud hut" during training, I now live in a cement house with a tin roof. Walls and floors are cement. I have four rooms: living room, bedroom, kitchen (very rudimentary) and a room that I haven't given a function to yet ... junk room. The latrine/shower is outside (hole in ground).

QUESTION: Do you have any utilities? Running water, electric?

LEAH: Nope. No water. I use a well. I have to pull all water I use from it. No electricity. I use candles, kerosene lanterns and flashlights.

Some Mali volunteers do have both, most don't though.

Here's another fun fact I heard through the grapevine: in 2000 only 15 percent of Peace Corps volunteers do not have electricity. Guess here in Mali, I am lucky. Before my arrival I thought that getting used to no electricity or running water would be one of the biggest challenges. These things have actually been one of the easiest to adapt to.

QUESTION: Do you think this experience will help you get on "Survivor"?

LEAH: Nope, any Survivor producer that picked a PCV from Mali to do the show wouldn't have much of a contest. Also, I don't see the point in living for 40 days, in conditions that some people must endure for a lifetime, and then making a million dollars from it. Half the world lives in conditions comparable to Survivor and doesn't make a cent!

QUESTION: Is language a daily hassle or a major barrier?

LEAH: For me both. Here in Mali people speak French and Bambara, so I'm learning two languages at once. During my three months of training, I studied French only. I'm quite functional in French.

Bambara on the other hand is much more difficult. I can speak it a little but I usually only understand 10 percent of what is being said.

Most people here speak little

LEAH GIOVENNO

Age: 23
Education: Mars High School, 1992-1996; Allegheny College, bachelor's degree in psychology, 1996-2000
Experience: AmeriCorps, working in a women's shelter, 1998-2000
Family: father, Dale; mother, Jennifer; sister, Susie, 19, freshman at Indiana (Pa.) University; and brother, Ben, 17, senior at Mars High School

French and mostly Bambara ... it's coming along. It will take some time so I'm told! Luckily, at my job, everyone speaks French and most people speak English as well, so I'm never misunderstood completely.

QUESTION: Tell us some routine (USA) things that are impossible there.

LEAH: Talking to anyone by telephone or e-mail
Keeping leftovers
Getting mail everyday
Making a "quick trip" to the store
Buying already-made clothes that fit

Taking a shower (unless I'm at a PC hostel)
Traveling easily (public transportation and roads are bad!)
Blending in or not being the center of attention
Ice in drinks

QUESTION: What thing is much more difficult than you anticipated?

LEAH: The daily stress of just being here. Trying to speak and understand another language and culture really wears me out. By the end of the day I am dead tired and I feel like I haven't really done too much. Also, I thought after four months kids would stop calling me "Tubabo" (white person). From what I hear, the name-calling continues for two years!

QUESTION: Would you describe your daily schedule and/or rituals?

LEAH: My schedule is actually quite structured compared to other PCVs not affiliated with an NGO (Non Governmental Organization).

Wake between 6 and 6:30 to run, eat, get to work between 8 and 8:30 a.m.

Home for lunch around 12:30 for "sista," afternoons vary. Sometimes I must go back to work, others I stay at home and read, write letters, do chores, visit with friends.

Seven-ish feet and head hits the pillow usually before 10 p.m.

QUESTION: What are the things you miss the most?

LEAH: Family and friends are certainly No. 1, but American food is distant second. The seasons, especially fall and winter and wearing sweaters.

QUESTION: What creeps you out the most? Bugs? Snakes?

LEAH: Snakes definitely, bugs less and less each day ... dogs, a ton. They're different here. Wild and meaner. Then again, I wasn't exactly an animal lover in the States! (The following was added in a different ink) I just found out ... mice creep me out the most!

QUESTION: Describe your method of communication with the outside world.

LEAH: Snail mail every week (letters take between two weeks and three months!). Email and phone in the regional capitals — once every month or two.

QUESTION: Tell us a little about Mali society and culture.

LEAH: Malian culture is rich and deep-rooted. Mali lies in the heart of Western Africa and welcomes you with some of the most gentle and kind people on the continent.

One of the first aspects a visitor will learn about is the Malian greeting. It is a necessary part of any interaction and those who forget are considered rude! The greeting begins, usually, with a handshake and a "good morning" (in Bambara, of course) and continues by asking about health, families, children, hometowns, etc. This can continue for sometimes five minutes! Luckily (or maybe not) my Bambara skills limit me to one to two minutes!

Mali is primarily Muslim and therefore dress quite modest. Men wear long pants all year round, while women wear full-length skirts and dresses. Even when the temperature rises to above 100 degrees Fahrenheit, which it will be doing very soon! (Most of the Northern Mali is the Sahara desert but I am in the Savannah region).

Malian women are absolutely amazing. All and all, Malian culture and society has proven to be friendly and welcoming to me, an obvious foreigner.

Leah Giovenno has agreed to update Butler Eagle readers on her experiences and the culture of Mali as her schedule and the mail service permits.

Carnegie

From Page C1

small bus and visitors take a video tour from downtown Dakar to a home in a neighboring suburb.

A slave ship illuminates the silhouettes of four enslaved Africans as they tell their story.

The museum also offers additional educational sessions.

A lecture called, "Temujin — The Story Teller" will begin at 3 p.m. April 29 as Temujin, a scholar, shares African and African-American folklore by means of audience participatory programs.

"Koi and the Kola Nuts" is a show featuring an African story

IF YOU'RE GOING

WHAT: "Africa: One Continent, Many Worlds"

WHERE: Carnegie Museum of Natural History, 4400 Forbes Ave., Oakland

WHEN: Now through May 13.

HOURS: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays and 1 to 5 p.m. Sundays

ADMISSION: \$6 for adults, \$4.50 for senior citizens, \$3 for children 3-18. Exhibits are free with museum admission. Some special events are \$8 for members and \$12 for non-members.

GOSPEL FELLOWSHIP PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

about a boy on his quest to find respect in African villages.

The show runs at 3 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays, at noon and 3 p.m. Saturdays, and 3 p.m. Sundays.

Admission is \$2 for the show featuring the voice of Whoopi Goldberg and music by Herbie Hancock.

"Archaeology, Slavery, and Freedom" is a session led by Dr. Kofi Agorsah from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. April 26. Agorsah will share his research on the archaeological evidence of the formation of the Maroon cultures and enslaved Africans.

The exhibit is on permanent display at the Field Museum in Chicago.