



Friends of Korea

Dedicated to fostering cultural awareness and
friendship between Americans and Koreans

Annual Report – 2016

Celebrating the 50th Anniversary

Fifty years ago – September 16, 1966 to be exact – the first Peace Corps volunteers landed at Kimpo Airport. Fifty years later, of course, Korea has been transformed from one of the poorest countries in the world to a donor nation sharing its resources with other countries seeking to emulate its success.

“Seoul in September”

Many members of Friends of Korea expressed a desire to celebrate this special occasion. Under the guidance of David Lassiter, one of those young, eager volunteers who landed that day in 1966, a group of 60 RPCVs, their spouses, families, friends and former Peace Corps staff attended “Seoul in September” – a week of events and activities celebrating the anniversary.

Thanks to the support of the Korea Foundation, there were a series of educational presentations on contemporary education, Korea culture, and the perennial favorite topic, relations between North and South Korea. Participants also had the opportunity to visit the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) headquarters where they were treated to a delightful luncheon, as well as an opportunity to learn more about the programs and activities of KOICA.

“Beautiful Journey, Endless Friendship”

A highlight of this week was the opening of the special exhibit on Peace Corps Korea at the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History. Titled “Beautiful Journey, Endless Friendship,” this exhibit, over 2 years in the planning, was the culmination of countless hours of collecting, cataloging, and organizing more than 1,200 artifacts donated by returned volunteers. These artifacts ranged from books and journals to homemade Korean language study guides, photos and letters, clothing, items of daily living such as bank books, Peace Corps-issued photos IDs, certificates and awards, and much more.

The museum staff sorted through these donations and created a wonderful narrative highlighting the daily lives and work of the volunteers as well as the lasting impact and

influence of the Peace Corps and RPCVs on Korean Studies programs in the US, US-Korea diplomacy and the establishment of KOICA/World Friends Korea.

The Museum published a catalogue of the exhibit and copies can be obtained from Friends of Korea.

Annual Meeting 2016

Immediately after these events in Seoul, Friends of Korea held its 2016 Annual Meeting in Washington DC on Saturday, September 24th. More than 70 people attended the meeting which was generously hosted by the Embassy of the Republic of Korea. Topics covered at the membership meeting included a report on the results of the recent board election, a financial update and a summary of recent activities.

Once the business meeting was over, there was a panel session focused on changing perceptions of Korea moderated by Thomas Byrne, President of the Korea Society. Panelists included:

- **Jimmy Rhee**, Special Secretary of Maryland Governor Larry Hogan's Office of Minority Affairs
- **Max Han**, Manager with Accenture as well as a blogger at New York Seoul (
- **Hannah Kim**, Chief of Staff and Communications Director for NY Congressman Charles Rangel and Founder of "Remember727" (organization honoring Korean War Veterans and facilitating peace on the Korean Peninsula.)
- **Dr. Young-Key Kim-Renaud**, Professor Emeritus of Korean Language and Culture and International Affairs at GW University and Founder of GW's Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium in Korean Humanities.

The day ended with a lovely dinner at the residence of Ambassador and Mrs. Ahn with over 100 people in attendance. There were several presentations, followed by a fabulous meal, and, of course, the obligatory singing!

Kevin O'Donnell Distinguished Friend of Korea Award

One of the highlights of the evening was the presentation of the first Kevin O'Donnell Distinguished Friend of Korea Award to Kathleen Stephens. Maura O'Donnell, daughter of Kevin O'Donnell presented the award on behalf of Friends of Korea. Kathleen Stephens served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Korea in the 1970's and continued to work in the country throughout the rest of her career. She served as a U.S. Foreign Service Officer for over thirty years, during which time her postings in Korea included chief of the internal political unit in Seoul, principal officer of the U.S. Consulate in Busan, Korea, and U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Korea (2008-2011). In 2010, she published a book, "Reflections of an American Ambassador to Korea," based on her Korean-language blog. Some of Stephens's many accolades include the Korean government's Sejong Cultural Prize and the Korea-America Friendship Association Prize.

The Kevin O'Donnell Distinguished Friend of Korea Award recognizes individuals and their accomplishments that further cultural awareness and friendship between Americans and Koreans. This award is a tribute to the groundbreaking contributions made by Kevin O'Donnell, U.S. Peace Corps' first country director in Korea and the fourth director of the Peace Corps. O'Donnell accepted the post in 1966, served for four years, and is remembered for his extraordinary leadership that created the foundation for Peace Corps' successful 15-year commitment.

Giving Back Initiative

Begun in 2014 at its annual meeting in Los Angeles, FOK's giving back initiative recognizes organizations that deliver social services to the Korean American community. Friends of Korea presented a gift to the Virginia Korean American Disabled People's Association (버지니아 한미장애인협회) in support of their work with disabled people and their families by providing financial, educational, referral, interpretation, recreational, and advocacy support services.

50 for 50

As part of the celebration of 50th anniversary of the arrival of Peace Corps in Korea, the Friends of Korea Board launched the 50 for 50 Campaign in October. As Peace Corps volunteers, Fulbrighters, and those interested in advancing better understanding between the U.S. and Korea, we often hear how much we have gained. This Initiative represents FOK's commitment to giving back. All funds raised will support the FOK "Giving Back Initiative." The Giving Back Initiative was created by the FOK Board of Directors in 2014 as a way of continuing our support and fostering the friendship between Americans and Koreans.

Governance

Four new members joined the Friends of Korea board at the fall annual meeting. They are Jenna Gibson, Bruce Kim, Joy Kim, and David Roden. For a full list of the board and their bios, please click [here](#).

In 2015, the board approved the creation of an honorary membership to recognize and thank those individuals who have supported the mission and activities of FOK over the years. The first three such memberships were presented in 2016. Recipients included: Joonhee Lee, Sunny Kim, and Garry Stanberry.

Joonhee, the son of Pak Shin Hae, a Peace Corps staff member, has been a staunch friend of RPCVs and FOK over the years. Perhaps best known for his moving video, *Memories of Peace Corps Korea Volunteers*, which he created in 2013, Joonhee has been instrumental in linking returned volunteers with long-lost friends and coworkers.

Sunny Kim, was the organizer behind the highly successful “Seoul in September” trip. She worked closely with David Lassiter to develop a meaningful series of activities and events for returning volunteers and their family members.

Garry Stanberry, while on staff at the Peace Corps headquarters in 2014, spearheaded the drive to have the Friends of Korea photo exhibit installed as a permanent exhibit on the 8th floor of the Peace Corps building. The exhibit, which features photos of US Peace Corps volunteers in Korea and KOICA/World Friends volunteers around the world, was officially installed in December of 2014.