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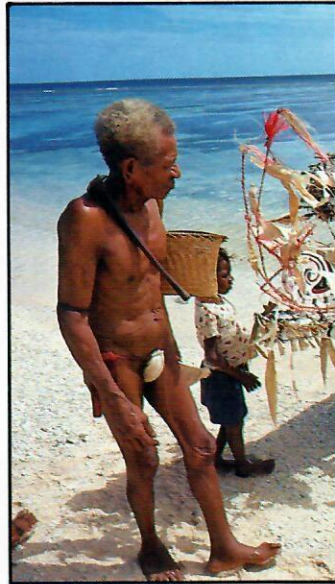
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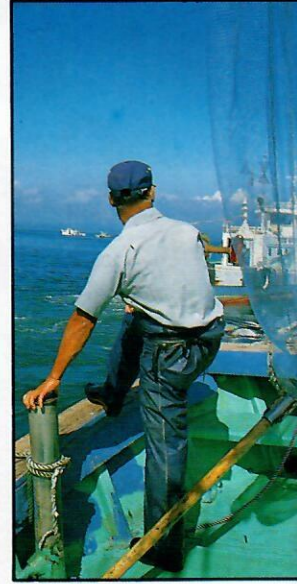
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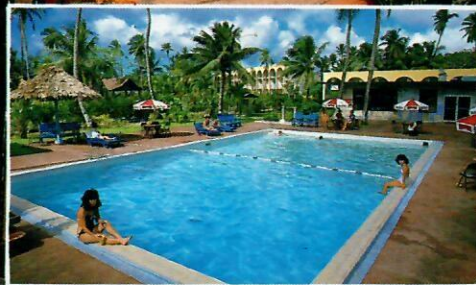


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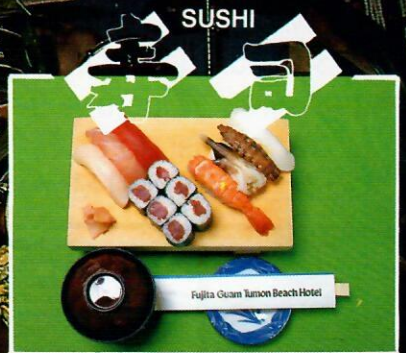
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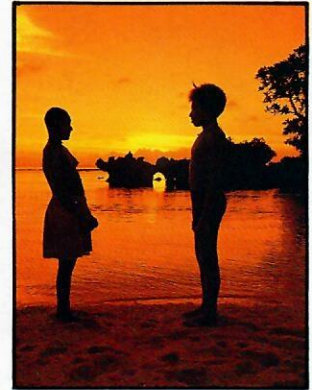
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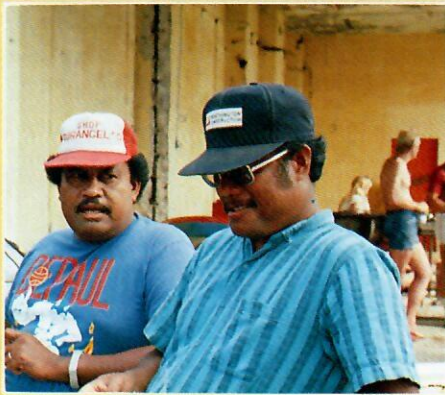




(Left) Peace Corps regional director Robert Clarke with Peace Corps volunteers.

# THE PEACE CORPS AT AGE 20 IN PALAU

Story and photos by Dirk Anthony Ballendorf



Joe Ysoal, the Peace Corps director for Palau, and the Reverend Billy Kuareti.

The Peace Corps celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary this year, with activities being held throughout various host countries including the United States. It is a time for reflection, and for planning for the next twenty-five years. The agency has proven to be one of the most worthwhile ever devised for extending assistance to those in need.

In Palau and elsewhere in Micronesia, the Peace Corps is celebrating its twentieth birthday. In Koror, there was a small gathering at the Mariculture Center where volunteers, Palauans, and Peace Corps staff members discussed programs while enjoying some local foods and each other's company.

Peace Corps regional director Robert Clarke and his wife, Elizabeth, were in Koror for a few days and joined in the discussions and fun. "The Peace Corps is adapting to the changing political situation here in Micronesia," said Clarke, who was a volunteer in Fiji. A lawyer with many years of practice in the United States, Clarke and his wife spent two years living and working as community developers on a Fijian outlying island.

A significant change being made is the breaking up of the Peace Corps administration in Micronesia into units corresponding to the emergent national entities. There is now one Peace Corps director for

the Federated States of Micronesia who serves the people of Pohnpei, Kosrae, Yap and Truk. There is another director for the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and yet another for Palau.

Joe Ysoal, the Palau director, has served the longest—nine years in his present position. "Over the years we have had many problems and difficulties," Ysoal said, "but we have always managed to work these out to the best advantage. The Palauan people and the volunteers work very well together and are committed to the development goals of the Peace Corps."

A perennial concern has been over assignments made in rural areas or urban centers. Traditionally, the Peace Corps has focused on development in rural areas, and this remains the current emphasis. "Volunteers almost always have a better experience in the outer islands," Clarke said, "but sometimes their assignments in the urban centers become of special importance to the government because there is a lot of activity going on and they are often needed there."

Some volunteers believe the Peace Corps should function only in rural areas. Others have mixed feelings. "I worked for quite some time in the outer areas," said one volunteer, "but then I came into Koror; I feel

that, in many ways, I have made a more lasting contribution here."

"I wouldn't trade my outer-islands experience for anything," said another. "It's where the Peace



Robert and Elizabeth Clarke with Joe Ysoal and Billy Kuareti.

Corps is at!" Clearly, the volunteers who live and work in outlying areas learn the local languages more proficiently. "Learning the language is essential," one volunteer said. "It helps you to understand Palau better."

In Palau, the Peace Corps seems well organized and works well with the government. Dr. Swei, the current minister of social services in Palau and the government's coordinator with the Peace Corps, maintains frequent contact with the Peace Corps director, Joe Ysoal. Palau President Lazarus Salii is a longtime supporter of the Peace Corps, and has even had volunteers living with him and his family. "We are very glad they are here," he said, "and we appreciate their efforts and help to us."

Over the years, the Peace Corps bureaucracy has changed, but one thing that remains the same is the motivation of the volunteers. They are young, idealistic people for the most part, and they join the Peace Corps out of a sense of adventure and to provide help to others.

After twenty years, the Peace Corps is alive, well, and healthy in Palau. It is coming to maturity.



Peace Corps volunteers swapping stories about their experiences.