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The Peace Corps turns 60

Myriad notables have volunteered around the world for the social initiative created by President Kennedy

ON MARCH 1, 1961, PRESIDENT JOHN F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps, and over the last 60 years, more than 240,000 Americans have volunteered to serve in 142 countries. Former Florida Congresswoman Donna Shalala was one of the first Peace Corps volunteers in Iran. Leslie Hawke, mother of actor Ethan Hawke, worked in Romania. In Africa, Netflix co-founder Reed Hastings taught math, and Mae Jemison, the first Black female astronaut to venture into space, was a medical officer. The Peace Corps experience often creates global citizens who go on to make a difference in the world. Here, a few examples from those who worked in the Caribbean and South America.



Maureen Orth in Colombia after graduating from UC Berkeley



Maureen Orth
Vanity Fair special correspondent

Orth joined the Peace Corps in the mid 1960s and built a school outside Medellín, Colombia. In 2005, she returned and launched the Fundación Marina Orth, which teaches English, robotics and computer skills. For her, the Peace Corps remains “one of America’s greatest achievements, appealing to our highest instincts.”



Glenn Blumhorst
President, National Peace Corps Association (NPCA)

In 1988, Blumhorst served in Guatemala, aiding small Maya farms. At the NPCA he works with 185 affiliated charitable organizations. To him, returned volunteers are a vital national resource: “They bring an understanding of global issues, and a commitment to public service, back home.”



Joseph P. Kennedy III
Former U.S. Representative, Massachusetts

After graduating from Stanford University, President John F. Kennedy’s great-nephew honored the family tradition by serving in the Dominican Republic to help improve living conditions. He notes, “There’s not a single day that I served in Congress when I did not draw on lessons learned during my time in the Peace Corps.”

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BIRDMAN FLIES AGAIN

A new exhibition showcases a rare selection of objects from an ancient Indigenous culture



From left: Erin Shaw’s *Everything Belongs*; engraved shell cup with a depiction of Birdman



Once likened to Tutankhamun’s tomb, the ancient Spiro Mounds were the cultural and religious center of the Indigenous Mississippian people, who occupied the region around the Mississippi River and its tributaries from 900 to 1650. Currently located in present-day eastern Oklahoma, the site contained a trove of significant cultural artifacts that were first uncovered in the 1930s. Now, an ambitious new exhibition—“Spiro and the Art of the Mississippian World”—at Oklahoma City’s National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, is presenting nearly 180 of these objects to the public.

Among them is a finely engraved shell

cup depicting Birdman, a deity who presides over the upperworld. Used as drinking vessels in rituals, these cups are “imbued with layered iconography,” says Eric Singleton, the museum’s curator of ethnology. Also on display is a gorget showing four mythic birds that were said to have calmed the roiling waters of the primordial sea, making them fit for habitation.

A key section of the exhibition displays contemporary work by descendants of the Spiro people, including Chase Earles and Erin Shaw. These pieces allow viewers to draw connections between the past and present, and attest to the enduring legacy of Mississippian culture. —ADE OMOTOSHO