

Peace Corps of the United States: 55 Years of Friendship for Development

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Thai people may not be familiar with "Peace Corps of the United States", however, this US government agency, founded in 1961 by the President John F. Kennedy, has sent Volunteers around the world to help develop community in various regions in various dimensions. The Peace Corps Mission is to promote world peace and friendship.

No matter what the political conditions, international relations are like. "Peace Corps" continues its mission of continuous development. There have been 5,500 American volunteers working in Thailand since 22 January, 1962.

Peace Corps Thailand cooperated with the Royal Thai Government agencies which are Thai International Cooperation Agency (TICA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of Local Administration (DLA), Ministry of Interior and Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC), Ministry of Education and Friends of Thailand to host celebrations to commemorate the 55th anniversary of Peace Corps in Thailand.



Participants help plant mangrove seedlings

In this spirit, celebrations included a service project of planting 550 mangrove seedlings on August 1, 2017 at the Khlong Khon Mangrove Conservation Center with more than 60 participants from Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, Royal Thai Government representatives, US Embassy, and students from the Thammaprasit School, Samut Songkhram Province.



Students from Thammaprasit School participated in Mangrove reforestation event

Participants traveled to Klong Khon District in the morning, before proceeding with a long tail boat to the mangrove area.

In the same evening Peace Corps and Friends of Thailand hosted a dinner reception with attendees including Ambassador Glyn T. Davies, current and former Peace Corps staff, current and former Volunteers, Thai ministry officials, and Embassy representatives.

C. Howard Williams, Country Director, Peace Corps Thailand, who was a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Philippines, indicated that currently Peace Corps Thailand's program is focused on two projects: Teacher Collaboration and Community Service Project and Youth in Development Project. There are criteria and process to match the

community and school where Peace Corps will send Volunteers to the area for a maximum efficiency that meets the needs of the community.

He stated "Peace Corps is a US government agency specifically established to give Americans opportunities to work at a community level in other countries for two years. In Thailand, the opportunities are working with Thai English teachers to develop English language courses and teaching English in the elementary schools, and also working with local government agencies in the Youth in Development Project. The project is not only develops English ability but it also includes sports, leadership skills, speaking, and so on, so young people can become important community asset to help support other youths”.



C. Howard Williams (left) Country Director, Peace Corps Thailand and Marvin Pannell (right) Director of Management and Operations

Williams also stated “There are currently serving 112 volunteers in Thailand, the first group of Volunteers arrived in Thailand in 1962, and Volunteers came every year. They stay for 2 years at working site. They stay with Thai host families. This is a chance for Americans to help as well as to learn from the community and they return to the United States as an ambassador from Thailand”.

Marvin Pannell, Director of Management and Operations, Peace Corps Thailand, who was a Volunteer in Thailand, said in clearly fluent Thai that 20 years ago, he was a Volunteer in Surin Province for two years before moving on to his life and having the opportunity to return to work with Peace Corps Thailand in 2015.

Pannell stated "In the past, there were 6 projects in total, for example, forestry, public health, nutrition, land development, etc. Today, although there are only 2 projects, they aligned with Thailand’s national priorities”

“For the 55th anniversary celebrations of Peace Corps Thailand, I aimed to organize two activities; the first activity is for community service: Mangrove Reforestation event. It is a simple project and it is an outdoor activity that everyone can join and work with the school children. And the second activity in the evening is a reception to thank the Royal Thai Government Agencies ; TICA, DLA and OBEC, while Friends of Thailand will raise funds for the CCF Foundation for Children and Youth under the patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn”.

Williams said about the future of Peace Corps Thailand "We will retain the existing projects that are currently in line with Thailand s priorities which we have close collaboration with DLA and OBEC. We are going to discuss a plan over the next five years, which will continue to focus on teaching English and working with youth because youth is an important asset of the society in the future. However, we open up to the new idea, innovation and opportunity. Williams emphasized that Peace

Corps are here to support Thai youth and people. If there is anything we can enhance our impact in Thailand, we are ready to adjust and do it at our best.