

News from the High Atlas Foundation

By Jason Ben-Meir, President, High Atlas Foundation



It has been a VERY eventful year at the High Atlas Foundation (HAF). Morocco's Ambassador to the United States, Mr. Aziz Mekouar, has accepted our invitation to be a guest of honor at a

gala dinner fundraiser to be held in Washington, DC, in October 2005. Funds raised will be used to help establish development projects that local communities design, such as in potable water, irrigation, women's coops and tree planting. More on this exciting event later!

HAF and our Moroccan government and non-government partners completed our "Vision for the Rural Community Development of Morocco" book, which is available on our website (www.hightatlasfoundation.org). It describes many viable project proposals and a comprehensive rural development strategy. Please share this vision book with people who you feel can help advance the community development of Morocco.

U.S. Ambassador to Morocco, Mr. Thomas Riley, visited our 2003 tree planting and irrigation project in Tafraoute this past August. We expect him to agree to greatly expand this project for the 2005 planting season. HAF has also launched an outreach campaign, headed by RPCV and HAF Treasurer David Keiser, so that the many groups that care about Morocco can join our cause.

HAF would like to welcome the following people to our Advisory Board: Kamar Bencrimo, Office of the Ministry of Social Development, Morocco; Amina Fahim, Education Program of Peace Corps, Morocco; Hassan Kourdass, Department of International Cooperation at the Ministry of Agriculture, Morocco; and Ahmed Ouhammou, Professor of Biology, Faculty of Science, Marrakech.

Friend, we need you to renew your membership and give your continued support. A contribution of \$20 makes you a member for a full year. Simply visit our website at www.hightatlasfoundation.org. As you know, the development potential of Morocco's communities is enormous. With your support we can realize the development goals of the Moroccan people.

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Arabic could not be counted on for conversation. Aziz is also a patient and friendly fellow, but in this he is certainly not unique among Moroccans. I guess inside of each person there's a blend of culture and individual experience, sometimes favoring the one and sometimes favoring the other. In some ways, it's similar to the psychologists' debate over the influence of heredity versus that of environment. Besides Aziz, I have made some other friends in town, but I still have a lot to learn about Moroccan culture. This is not to say that I never arrive at a point of mutual understanding with people in Morocco; it just means that we're coming from two totally different places.

In-Service Training is coming up in a few weeks, and this will bring me back together with all of the other youth development volunteers with whom I did training. Some of them, like Timothy "The Prince of Denmark" Shriver, I have had regular contact with during these five months; some I have seen a time or two, enough to catch up and share stories; and some I haven't seen at all, nor heard from or talked to. It will be interesting to be reunited with all of these folks for a week, and I think it will be a good opportunity to see how the time alone in my site has affected me. Have I become a raving lunatic and just don't know it yet? I hope not, but it's difficult to monitor the ups and downs of daily life when you've been removed from the context of your former existence, an existence that you understood well enough to use as a scale to

measure yourself, your beliefs and values, and your actions and interactions. Looking into the faces of the people with whom I did training will be like looking into a mirror for the first time in six months, not at my face, but at my heart and mind. These people knew me before, and they'll know me again. Perhaps, looking into their eyes, I will be reminded of reasons I came to Morocco in the first place, reasons that have been buried with the business of making a home here. Perhaps there is some inspiration, some broad enthusiasm, that I misplaced a time ago and have forgotten that I ever had. No matter what it may hold, I can't help but look forward to being reacquainted with old friends and the inevitable joy that this brings.

Jack Sundell is a Peace Corps volunteer currently serving in Azilal. Jack writes periodically about his life in Morocco as a PCV.

