



ONLY IN ALASKA

VISTA Newsletter Summer 2011

Message from the Editor...

As July draws to a close and we head into August—a month known as the dog days of summer for most of the lower 48—we Alaskans are already feeling a slight chill in the air, a reminder that shorter days and another long winter are just around the corner. And although I will be headed back down the Alcan come September, I envy those of you who have started their term of service in the past few months for getting the chance to bunker down, trading the frantic pace of summer for time spent by the fire, or catching up on much needed sleep. And so, with only a month left in my VISTA Leader term, Katie Abbott graciously offered me the Message from the Editor column for a quick chance at reflection, as the overlap in our terms means that I will only hold the title of Senior Most VISTA Leader of All Alaska for one short week.

It's hard to capture what this year of service gave me in a few paragraphs—and what a year it has been! When I accepted the position in Fairbanks I knew I was following a family history of aunts, uncles, and cousins who had all journeyed north to explore the last frontier. And while I had been to Alaska before (once in utero as my parents love to point out) a chance to live and work here was a prospect that was at once exciting yet daunting. Often, when I first talk to someone applying for a VISTA position in Fairbanks, the voice on the other end of the line will say, “Well what is it like there?” “Do *you* like it?” I love hearing these familiar questions because they are very same ones I asked the previous VISTA Leader. I think it's impossible to know what to expect from your experience in Alaska, and I tell our applicants as much. Speaking for Fairbanks—it gets dark. And it gets **cold**. But I can also tell you that you'll be enveloped in a community that for sheer survival purposes sticks together in a way I had never known before. I tell them gardening or floating down the Chena in full sun at midnight isn't bad either

What Alaska gave me was a chance to grow and push my boundaries in a way I had never imagined. For the same reason our VISTA newsletter is titled “Only in Alaska” there are too many moments to count where I felt I was experiencing something unique to this great state. While living in a dry cabin (more on that later) or encountering a deceptively cuddly looking black bear at a Girdwood campground are just two things on that very long list, the common theme is that Alaska showed me again and again that what makes life so wondrous and exciting is realizing that certain experiences only come along once—and so you grab life by the horns and hold on—and make the most of every minute.

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Photo by Jennifer Kehoe

MEET JULY'S NEW VISTAS!

Libby Miles, University of Alaska-Fairbanks Outreach and Retention VISTA

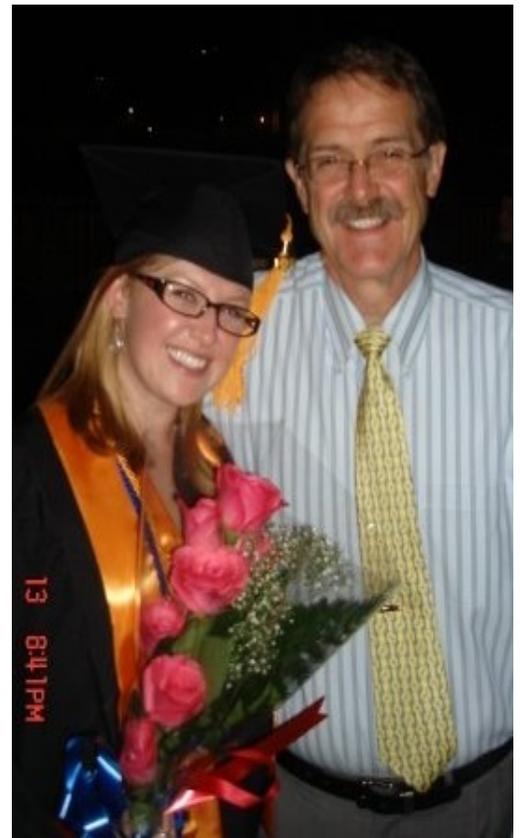
Hello everyone! I'm Libby Miles and I am thrilled to be serving in Fairbanks! I was born and raised in Washington, DC (and graduated from high school only a few miles down the road from my new VISTA Leader Mariah!). I headed north for college, captaining the sailing team and playing bassoon in the orchestra at Williams College in Massachusetts. I majored in art history and briefly entertained ideas of throwing on heels every day to work in a museum in New York or DC. However, when I discovered how few cute heels there are out there for my size ten feet, I bought rain boots instead and moved to the Pacific Northwest. I have served two schools through AmeriCorps in Tacoma, WA for the past two years. I can honestly say that I enjoy the endless cool drizzle and fog over Puget Sound. My days at school are filled with intriguing questions, corny jokes, and my Samoan and Tongan students teaching me how to play the ukulele during passing periods. AmeriCorps State/National has been an adventure, and I'm sure VISTA will be an even bigger one! I am counting down the days until I will be making the trek from Tacoma to Fairbanks, and I'm already thankful for the amazing people I know I will meet there.



Meagan Scheer, Love INC VISTA

My name is Meagan Blair Scheer and I am originally from Juneau, Alaska. Because of my father's career with the United States Coast Guard, I spent the first fourteen years of my life moving from state to state (about every two years or so) and then settling in Chesapeake, Virginia the summer before my eighth grade year. While in high school, I participated with the YMCA, Crew Club, and played volleyball for both the school and city. In 2003, I graduated from Great Bridge High School in Chesapeake and began college at the University of Mary Washington. After completing 4 semesters, I decided to take some time off to travel. After my break, I enrolled at Tidewater Community College, and on May 13, 2011, I graduated with my Associates degree in social sciences.

During those fourteen years of moving, as well as during my personal travel time, I had the wonderful opportunity to experience many different communities and meet some of the most amazing individuals. I have a wonderful, supportive family who gave me the strength and courage to explore, pursue, and succeed at each endeavor and they are and always will be my biggest role models. As far as interests and hobbies go, I LOVE music. Although my own musical talent goes no further than singing in the shower, I do appreciate the musical talent of others and I love to read about my favorite bands. I also love outdoor activities such as hiking, camping, and running. I have a passion for people and society, as well as constantly furthering my knowledge for both. I plan on continuing my education and eventually working as a career counselor at a university or community college. I am very excited and look forward to spending the next year in Fairbanks, Alaska working as an AmeriCorps VISTA for LOVE, INC!!



Letter from the Editor continued:

I'd like to extend a warm welcome to all of our new VISTAs this month. If you're serving as a VISTA it likely means you're already used to pushing whatever boundaries you may have and discovering all you can accomplish and I'm looking forward to reading of those ventures in the many newsletter editions to come. I was lucky enough to get to know some amazing VISTAs this year, as well as have the pleasure of working with 3 ladies in developing new ways to connect all of our members spread across the state and I'd like to say a big THANK YOU to all of those I came across in service. Keep up the good work! Please enjoy our Summer Issue of *Only in Alaska!* —*Mariah Terhaar*



Photo by Katie Abbott

The Mountain View Street Fair

Kirk Rose, ACLT

VISTA Testimonial

Mountain View is Anchorage's most ethnically diverse and lowest-income neighborhood. Mountain View probably has all the same elements as 'the bad parts of town' all across the United States – vacant, run-down buildings, broken glass, things that seem just out of place, pollution, people who look different or scary, a reputation for crime and a stigma making people think and often say 'oh, you don't want to go there'.

My name is Kirk and I'm a VISTA volunteer in Mountain View for the Anchorage Community Land Trust, the only non-profit advocating specifically for the neighborhood and the people who live there.

For years and years public officials, business owners and the residents themselves have been asking how to put Mountain View in motion – on track for changes that will make Mountain View a community of choice and not a last resort. The Anchorage Community Land Trust (ACLT) is responding to that call. ACLT is a hybrid organization coupling strategic properties in Mountain View with community-devised strategic uses. For example, ACLT bought an old gas station on Mountain View Drive, the main thoroughfare in Mountain View, and partnered with Credit Union 1 to bring the first financial institution to Mountain View in twenty years. The newly constructed building is a landmark of hope for the community and business is thriving. The Credit Union gives people of the community an opportunity to put their money in savings and debit accounts instead of cashing checks at pawn shops and getting pay-day advances.

I firmly believe Mountain View is a community worth celebrating. The history and evolution of the neighborhood is fascinating. The people who reside here now are warm, hard-working, and they believe in their neighborhood. There are so many people just 'around' in Mountain View... people do not sit in their houses watching TV at night. Every time I am out in the community or at one of our buildings people are so curious, "What are your plans for this building", and I respond back, "Well tell me what you imagine? What would you like to see?" I've met Buddhist monks, rappers, artists, museum curators, Baptist preachers, drug dealers, people who are

chronically homeless, people who have been here since "they put the first gravel road in" and most often, people who are dedicated to the future of the neighborhood. The Mountain View Street Fair is a celebration for the community and was part of my VISTA year. It's meant to be free and fun. For that to happen, we had to utilize all our community partners and we had to raise a lot of money from bigger sponsors. That's all the planning and hard-work. Let's instead focus on some of the results:



All told we drew 4,500 people, mostly from the neighborhood, but also from the rest of Anchorage – exposing folks to the revitalization taking place. The food was available for a ‘nominal’ fee of \$.50. Entertainment was provided by the Air Force Band of the Pacific, Team Legit, a Mt. View rap group, and a Mountain View Island Reggae Band. There was access to services like vision, dental and HIV/STD testing, and tons of kid friendly activities – from rock walls to bouncy castles to face painting and wacky hair.

In addition to all the activity at Clark Middle School, the Alaska Museum of Natural History provided a free day which 500 people utilized, the Mountain View Branch Library offered information about their summer reading program and a special performance by the Tomodachi Daiko Drummers, which drew another 500 individuals to the library and hundreds came to the Credit Union 1 Mountain View Branch for a special Kid’s Day event.

At the end of the day I was exhausted and I spent the entire weekend in bed. At one point, I remember saying, “why would it go right, if it could go wrong”. One of my favorite memories is running around the Fair trying to find duct tape for a giant hole in the 80 ft. long inflatable obstacle course. Truth be told, the day was a blur. And I relied on everyone else to tell me that it did, indeed, go great.

We believe the Street Fair is here to stay and that it enhances the healthy growth of the Mountain View community – come see us!

—Kirk

VISTA Kirk Rose with Senator Mark Begich



[A Community Testimonial](#)
[From the Museum’s perspective:](#)

Agreed, everything went very well. We had about 500 folks into the Museum and everyone said they had been having a very good time. We spoke at length with people who were raving about the festival and, Mountain View! Several people from south Anchorage expressed their surprise at “the changes in Mountain View” and one stated that the “Old” Mountain View is gone. Since this was the point of the event I would say that the festival is the vehicle we needed. Kudos to everyone for pulling this off.

—Museum staff, Katch

Adventures at Science Camp in Sitka, Alaska

Asia Beder, Alaska Marine
Advisory Program



In the beginning of June I was invited to help out as a counselor at a science camp in Sitka. Jumping at the chance to get out of the office, travel, and see a place I had never been before-- I quickly agreed and soon found myself walking off a plane in the Sitka airport. The director of the Sitka Sound Science Center was there to welcome me and to give me a brief tour of the town. She then took me to the center so I could jump right into the camp festivities. There were fourteen kids attended the camp. It was filled with a variety of activities that ranged from looking through microscopes to combing beaches for critters to bring back to the science center. We had the kids for 11 days. Although I joined a few days into the camp, the kids were kept busy the entire time they were with us each day. The last three days of the camp were the most exciting for me. The campers were lucky enough to help clean the bones of a juvenile male killer whale that washed up on a nearby beach in the spring. The kids, along with the counselors and three High School AmeriCorps members, worked on getting the ribs, skull, and vertebrae cleaned. Working together, we all successfully dealt with the unpleasant smell and safely cleaned the bones. Work on the skeleton will continue during the next few months and once completed, the rearticulated skeleton will be on exhibit at the Sitka Sound Science Center. The trip was an overall success. It was lots of fun and I enjoyed working with some new AmeriCorps members.



Group of vertebrae before



Group of vertebrae after



Preserving Food & Culture in Rural Alaska

Candace Andrew,
RurAL CAP VEP,
Koliganek, AK



Candace Andrew received a RurAL CAP Foundation Grant for the amount of \$1,875. She used the funding to plan a Summer Fish Camp in her home village. As Koliganek, Alaska is located off the road system, hundreds of miles away from Anchorage and only accessible by bush plane, energy efficiency is incredibly important. The cost of shipping in food products and using modern appliances can be a huge burden on the monthly bill for community members. Rural Alaskan subsistence practices help to reduce these costs. If people are able to provide for themselves off of the land, using traditional preparation methods, a more sustainable and therefore less energy-dependent lifestyle can be lived.

Candace's Summer Fish Camp brought together young adults and children and gave them the opportunity to learn from the Elders of the community. In Alaska Native culture Elders are highly respected and carry a wealth of knowledge. Lessons on how to catch, fillet, salt, hang, smoke and store salmon were provided to the younger generation, closing the gap between the ages and fostering respect between all parties. In addition to preserving local food to save energy, Candace's VISTA efforts also supported a preservation of unique culture.

Candace is now working on a culmination project to document her work so that the Summer Fish Camp may live on into the future.



Farming in Alaska

Jessica Farmer, Calypso Farm and Ecology Center

“You’re farming in Alaska?! What can you possibly grow there?” This was a common response when I told people I was moving to Alaska to be an AmeriCorps VISTA at Calypso Farm and Ecology Center in Ester, Alaska. To be honest, I myself wasn’t quite sure what to expect. When I arrived in April, the ground was still covered in ice, the fields covered in snow.

Three months later, I’ve discovered the shocking truth. In Alaska, a food revolution is brewing, and it’s led by 12 year olds.

Calypso Farm and Ecology Center (Calypso), founded in 2000, is a successful educational, working farm located near Fairbanks, Alaska. Calypso’s mission is to promote local agriculture and environmental awareness through hands-on education in natural and farming ecosystems. Calypso provides educational programs for children and adults, reaching thousands of individuals annually. Programs include: farm field trips, farm and garden workshops, Community Shared Agriculture (CSA), farm apprenticeships and an extensive school garden network – the Schoolyard Garden Initiative (SGI). Through all of its programming, Calypso works to provide food and education access for low-income members of the community.

The SGI is an innovative community food program which creates organic school gardens that function as youth-operated food gardens during the summer months and experiential learning environments during the school year. This program responds to the need for locally grown food for the community; a gardening, nutrition and employment connection for youth and hands-on educational opportunities in the schools.

There are currently 6 schools in the program. These Student Gardeners (aged 12-18) plant, maintain, harvest and sell vegetables throughout the summer. They will also assist in teaching home gardening workshops to aspiring gardeners in the community and garden lessons to younger children in the fall. In exchange for their work, each Student Gardener takes home a weekly supply of vegetables and receives a monetary stipend at the end of the season. For most, this is their first job experience.

School Garden produce is available to the public through CSA’s and at weekly Farm Stands. Each garden offers a small number of CSA shares and operates a weekly Farm Stand on site. All produce is available for purchase with Food Stamps, WIC and Senior Coupons. Five of the six schools are within walking distance of low-income housing and two of the schools are federally recognized as Title I Schools (serving low-income students).

The Student Gardeners aren’t just farmers in training. They are agents of positive change, cultivating a new food culture. With pitchforks in hand, they shout “I love kohlrabi!” from the rooftops. They prefer vermiculture to video games. They don’t just finish their vegetables, they grow them.

This is farming in Alaska.



Meet our new State Program Specialist: Chad Davis

Where are you from? I am from all over but I claim San Diego, CA as my hometown as it is where I "grew up." I spent the last seven years on the east in Maryland, Florida, and DC.

What is your most memorable service experience? I have so many memorable service experiences both inside and outside of National Service programs. However, the one that still sticks in my mind is when I served in AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) and was sent on disaster relief work in Florida in 2004. A record-breaking four hurricanes had hit the state and many communities were devastated. I was part of a NCCC team of over 100 corps members that were sent immediately into the state to work under the direction of FEMA and the Christian Contractors Association to "dry-in" damaged roofs for the elderly, disabled and low-income communities. Sometimes this work is called "Project Blue-Tarp" because to dry-in a roof you essentially cover the roof in blue tarp. I was moved by the ability of my peers and me to have immediate impact on individuals and families that were recovering from close to total loss in their homes. As anyone who knows central and southern Florida, it rains nearly every day so an elderly person that has a huge hole in their roof that is waiting for the overwhelmed insurance companies to process his/her claim can end up experiencing even more loss to their possessions each day the roof is not covered. I always say that the five weeks I spent in Florida doing this work was the hardest I've ever worked physically and the most rewarding also.

What impact do you think Alaska will have on you? I am so excited to work with Alaska. As for the impact Alaska will have on me only time will tell but I think it will continue a long held commitment I have held with myself to continuously expand my horizons and perspectives. I am obsessed with learning new communities and understanding the unique perspective we each bring to our communities.

And/or what impact do you hope to have as State Program Specialist? I hope to have a twofold impact as State Program Specialist. The first is to provide outstanding and exceptional support to our partners in Alaska - both the VISTAs, the Supervisors and the Sponsors. Second, I would like to provide the guidance and direction to continue to move our programs into high-impact VISTA projects that demonstrate the impact and outcomes of our programs to our various stakeholders.

What do you see as the future of VISTA in Alaska? I see the future of VISTA in Alaska as strong and continuously improving. I see our VISTA projects demonstrating impact on the priority areas established in the five year strategic plan approved by the board of directors of CNCS. I see strong, diverse, and capable VISTA candidates being selected to serve. And finally I see well trained, equipped and supported supervisors and sponsors supporting the outcomes of the VISTA projects.

What thought or message would you put into a fortune cookie? Let go of your filters and experience the moment.

What was the first concert you ever went to? I hate to admit this in a public format but my first concert was Boys II Men in 1994 at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas. I was in 7th grade. Please don't judge me. :)

Name your favorite hobby. I have a lot of hobbies but I would say I take pride in my increasing interest and daily practice of Yoga.

Biggest assumption about Alaska? I really do try my best to quiet the assumptions in my head...it is the only way we can truly experience a place honestly. But if I were to say one (which is perfect timing as I am headed to my first trip this Sunday) I would say that I assume that Alaska is very rural and is faced with the challenges of a lack of infrastructure outside of Anchorage, Juneau and Fairbanks.

I'm most looking forward to _____ (blank) in Alaska. The Travel!

Is there anything else we should know about you? I am extremely passionate about our work and look forward to working with everyone in Alaska.



Alaskans Dipnetting in the Kenai River



VISTA Leader Katie Abbott



VISTA Leader Mariah Terhaar



Land of the Midnight Sun



Charging the "solar garden" at Summer Festival in Port Protection



VISTA Leader Jennifer Kehoe

An Essay on Dry Cabin Living

By Novice Mariah Terhaar

When the last VISTA Leader told me she lived in a “dry cabin”, what immediately came to mind was that it might not be possible to enjoy a glass of wine in one of these cabins. My knowledge of Alaska had never included anything about the surprisingly high percentage of people who choose to live (happily) without running water, particularly in Fairbanks, where the cost of living rises dramatically when wells must be driven deep into thick permafrost to produce water. Thinking that life without water wasn't for me I elected to move into a place with a shower, close to the center of town, and never expected to so quickly start longing to move into a dry cabin on my own. A proud dry cabin resident since April, I can now say I'm a part of the Fairbanks Dry Cabin Club, whose official motto is “No water, No toilet, No problem.” Here are a few of my observations on living the dry life.

1. You will spend a significant amount of your time doing dishes. Although the view is beautiful, and deep down you know that doing dishes can be meditative and relaxing, you also quickly realize that every dish you use to make, bake, or stir something together you will also have to wash and dry.

2. You will bump into your dry cabin neighbors at the laundry mat, the “Water Wagon”, and the local transfer site.

You nod in recognition over having to run out at 11 p.m. to fill up your 5 gallon blue water jug, lament over the cost of a wash cycle, and congratulate each other on a particularly good find at the dump. After all, this is dry cabin living, and resourcefulness is key.

3. You will be in the best shape of your life. Because now that you don't have running water there is no excuse for skipping the gym—and the shower—when you're too tired after a long day of work.

4. You will get used to reassuring your friends and family that you're doing just “fine” and if they are really that worried then they should just come out and visit.

5. You have extra storage space in your cabin; in fact there's a whole extra room approximately the size of a bathroom being used for nothing except tents, sleeping bags, rafts and assorted outdoor goods you've accumulated since becoming “an Alaskan.”

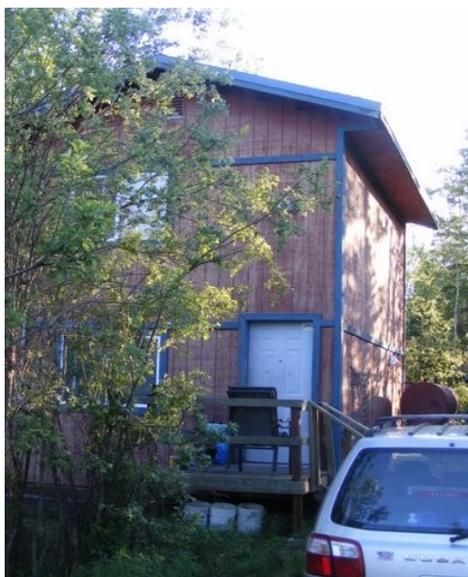
6. You can get internet in a dry cabin. You can also get TV channels and you definitely have modern amenities such as electricity to power your red Kitchen Aid mixer. Using it, however, creates a lot of dirty dishes.

7. You will have the best view in town (since you are slightly outside of it) of the Northern Lights. Your friends will even drive out unannounced for aurora viewing parties.

8. Running to the outhouse during an Alaskan winter (or for that matter spring and late August) is never appealing. But that's what blue foam and an installed heat lamp are for.

9. A coffeepot can be used for so much more than just coffee. Without it, you'd be lost when heating up water for doing dishes.

10. Nothing beats the feeling that you've successfully made it through another day without water. Not only will you never leave the tap running again but you've also made up for all of your 24 years of taking long hot showers!



FROM THE DESK OF YOUR VISTA LEADERS:

Want to connect with other VISTAs around Alaska??

Make sure to join in on our new monthly
VISTA TELECONFERENCES!

Our first teleconference on Sustainable Food in Alaska was a success and we would like to thank Ben Zimmerman, Jessica Farmer and Terri Metcalf for presenting on the great work they are doing at their sites! Also, Jodie Anderson for being a great guest speaker!

Our next teleconference will be on Poverty in Alaska and Economic Development projects.

Make sure to join our Facebook group:

Alaska AmeriCorps VISTAs

We would love for it to evolve into a place for VISTAs to discuss their projects, questions about VISTA and especially Alaska in general. (No one knows better than us what to do in Alaska on a budget!)



Happy cows at Jodie Andersons Palmer facilities

We would like to thank all of our contributors this month:

Jessica Farmer
Asia Beder
Libby Miles
Meagan Scheer
Kirk Rose
Candace Andrew
Chad Davis

The newsletter depends on stories from
YOU!

Please submit stories, pictures, updates
on your project to
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We accept submissions at anytime...So
put your creative minds to work and send
in some fun stories for the next
newsletter!