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U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants Raleigh receives 2010 North Carolina Peace Prize

North Carolina Peace Corps Association presented its 2010 NC Peace Prize to U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants Raleigh on Sunday, February 28, 2010. The prize is a hand-thrown Seagrove vase, and includes a cash award of \$1,000.

NCPCA established the NC Peace Prize to honor small NC community-based non-profit groups that demonstrate the ideals of the Peace Corps – helping people to help themselves and promoting peace and cross-cultural understanding. Sunday's event was the twelfth annual NC Peace Prize. The NC Peace Prize accomplishes the third goal of Peace Corps: Returned Peace Corps Volunteers promoting a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

USCRI Raleigh has helped more than 600 refugees from Burma, Eritrea, Somalia, Vietnam, Cuba, DRC, Iran, Iraq, Sudan and Columbia rebuild their lives in the Triangle area since its inception in 2007. Refugees arrive having fled war and persecution; many were warehoused in refugee camps for decades and must quickly adjust to a new way of life in the United States. USCRI Raleigh helps refugees through this adjustment and assists them as they become contributing members of the Triangle community, where it is possible to dream of a hopeful future for themselves and their children. USCRI Raleigh acts to meet the immediate basic needs of refugees first arriving in the Triangle area, to assist them in obtaining early employment and achieving self-sufficiency, and to nurture community integration. USCRI Raleigh works in collaboration with state and local partners to provide case management, employment assistance, family support services, cultural orientation workshops and English language training. USCRI Raleigh encourages community involvement through areas such as the *Welcome Home Project* which enables groups and individuals to set-up apartments for arriving refugees; the family mentoring program; the acculturation workshop series; and the procurement of items needed by newly arrived families, such as linens, toiletries and winter coats. USCRI Raleigh strives to engage the local community in the resettlement process to give local North Carolinians an opportunity to get to know and appreciate the

gifts of their new refugee neighbors and foster lifelong relationships within the community.

Eileen Hancox, USCRI Raleigh Job Developer, was a Peace Corp Volunteer in Morocco in 2005 where she worked with a women's cooperative that made high-end carpets and fabrics. When Hancox arrived to the village of Ain Leuh in 2005, she discovered that the women did not speak the dialect that she had been studying. They asked her, "How can you help us, you don't even speak our language?" Language barriers aside, Hancox and the women were able to work together to make valuable work/training connections, take advantage of technology and achieve success. Yet, despite this success, Hancox is quick to add that she learned a lot more from the experience than the women she was sent to assist. Hancox did not realize, at the time, how much her PCV experience would lend itself to her future work with USCRI Raleigh. After returning to the U.S., she began volunteering with USCRI Raleigh, assisting newly arrived refugees in securing employment. Hancox describes the thrill each time "they" land a job, a feeling, that as a current part-time job developer with USCRI-Raleigh, she still cherishes. Hancox reflects upon how her PCV experience still has a presence in her American life and with her work with USCRI Raleigh, "My experience as a PCV in a foreign country and culture (and how helpless I felt at times) gives me empathy for clients whose lives have been uprooted and been thrown into a totally new environment often with no job skills and limited English. I love what I do. My son says it's 'Peace Corp NC'".

About The North Carolina Peace Corps Association: NCPCA is dedicated to promoting the Third Goal of the Peace Corps, building group spirit and cooperation, promoting service, and serving as an example to others. The group of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers and friends aspires to these goals by: promoting public awareness, education, and support for the Peace Corps; supporting specific grassroots projects in developing countries; performing and supporting community service activities in North Carolina; providing social opportunities for the Peace Corps family. For more information: <http://rtpnet.org/~ncpca>.

About USCRI Raleigh: USCRI Raleigh has been helping refugees begin new lives in the Triange area since 2007. Refugees arrives having fled war and persecution, and must quickly adjust to a new way of life in the United States. We help refugees become self-sufficient, contributing members of the Triangle area community who can again dream of a hopeful future for themselves and their children. USCRI Raleigh is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. For more information: <http://uscricrefugees.org/site/PageNavigator/Raleigh/home>.

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