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Florence Reed Honored by U.S. Peace Corps
Recipient of the 2012 Sargent Shriver Award for Distinguished Humanitarian Service

Every year the National Peace Corps Association presents The Sargent Shriver Award for Distinguished Humanitarian Service. The award was named to recognize the tremendous contributions of the first Peace Corps Director, Sargent Shriver, in the founding and development of the Peace Corps. The Shriver Award is given to a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer who continues to make a sustained and distinguished contribution to humanitarian causes at home or abroad or is an innovative social entrepreneur whose actions will bring about significant long-term change.

This year’s recipient is Florence Reed (International Affairs / Environmental Conservation ’90), a Peace Corps volunteer in Panama in the early 90s, for her work in Sustainable Harvest International, a non-profit she founded to help farmers in Latin America make the transition to sustainable farming practices. In her speech accepting the award, Reed reflected, “I have always felt that choosing to join the Peace corps and then serving as a volunteer is an outstanding way to separate yourself from the chaff and become the wheat that feeds the soul of this country.”

Her focus on sustainable farming began early on. At UNH as an International Affairs and Environmental Conservation student, Reed studied abroad in Australia and Guatemala and “came to love the incredible biodiversity and everything else about the world’s tropical forests.” She was devastated to learn how fast these forests were being chopped or burned down. In Panama, later as a Peace Corps volunteer agroforestry agent, she saw how slash and burn agriculture impoverishes the land and the people who work it, resulting in systemic clearing to keep up with topsoil erosion. She knew farmers were looking for alternatives to this practice, and upon leaving the Peace Corps, founded Sustainable Harvest International, to offer them a permanent solution to this dilemma, and to create a movement for change worldwide. To date, Sustainable Harvest International has helped more than 1,500 families to become self-sufficient stewards of the environment and trainers of more families. They have also planted more than three million trees and converted nearly 20,000 acres of degraded land to sustainable farms thus protecting 100,000 acres of tropical forest from slash and burn.

Reed has received many awards and accolades since her Durham undergraduate days, including the Yves Rocher Women of the
Earth Award and an honorary degree from UNH, in 2011. Recently she returned to campus to engage students on her work and passion for change. When asked what advice she had for today’s students, she offered, “…[N]ever let the fact that something seems impossible stop you from doing it. … [N]o matter how local your work and the rest of your life may be, don’t forget the impact that your actions in your own hometown can have on the rest of the world, and vice versa.”

To read more about the Shriver award, including Reed’s acceptance speech, visit http://www.peacecorpsconnect.org/2012/07/2012-shriver-award-winner-florence-reed/.