

**John Epler (a.k.a. Juan)** Vice President/Interim President      Board member 2004-present

**Hooked on the DR** - I am hooked on the DR. My Peace Corps Volunteer experience in rural DR (town of Moncion) has immeasurably affected my life. Was it the mix of fellow Volunteers, or the challenging period time at which we arrived in the DR (just 5 weeks after the '65 Civil War started), or maybe the Dominican people themselves? Whatever it was left me with an incredible legacy: 1) Met the girl I later married while in the U. of New Mexico Grad School Latin American Studies program - a program/school I would not have attended but for my 2 years in the DR; 2) Several fellow DR-13 Volunteers are among my closest life-long friends; 3) It gave me a 2nd "home" and an adopted culture – Jean & I travel to the DR annually to spend time with two Dominican families-friends I developed while a Volunteer; and 4) It influenced my career- when I finished school I looked for a job involving poverty programs, ending up running low-income housing development programs for the U.S. Dept of HUD.

**Post-Peace Corps** – After PC-DR, I worked in 3 cycles of Volunteer training programs. After the Masters Program at the U. of New Mexico, I took a HUD job in San Francisco where I became head of the office responsible for public housing management in California. I moved to Seattle in 1980 with my wife and two girls where I ended up as the Director of Community Development programs until I left HUD in 1995 to set up a consulting firm. I still consult fulltime, running around the country helping cities, counties and states improve their ability to end homelessness (facilitating lots of group planning processes).

**What keeps me ticking** - Along the way, we've done some interesting things: for 8 years was on the Board of the Seattle-Tashkent Sister City. During that time, our family hosted maybe 30 people from 12 different countries who stayed anywhere from 2 days to 18 months; was appointed to the State Governor's Advisory Council on the Homeless for 10 years; and for 4 years was the President of Ploughshares, a peace organization that built a Peace Park in the Soviet Union in the 80s (my wife, daughter and I spent 5 weeks working alongside Soviet volunteers) and developed the first joint US-Soviet Union Peace Corps that built community projects in Ethiopia and Armenia.

**Fulfilling!** I have long dreamed of trying to do something to have an impact on the lives of Dominicans. I finally figured it out during my 2 stints as a DR Crisis Corps Volunteer and in 2004, Jean & I founded the Community Challenge Fund. We borrowed money to set up a matching fund (and talked my Dad-Joe-into joining) so we could raise funds for some great little projects meeting the basic needs of Dominican families. We have been overwhelmed by the success of the program and the results of the 33 projects undertaken in the first 5 years. It has proven to me we can all do something to impact poverty in the world.

*Juan & the Club Juvenil- 1966*



*Moncion, DR*

*Joe, Jean & John, Amigos Eduardo & Augustine - 2005*

