

## LETTER FROM PRESIDENT, STEVE COOK

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The highlight of my trip to Albania this year was an “English Language” competition that I organized with the help of Aleks Vulaj, our Vrithi English teacher. About 40 people met in the big meeting room in Dedaj. There were five student teams from each of our six schools in Shkrel—Boga, Xhaj, Vrithi, Dedaj, Recj, and Zagora. Also in attendance were five English teachers, four School Directors, and some parents and friends of the participants. One of these friends took my camera and got some excellent photos.



Group competition included writing a short story, making words from the letters in a long word—like Constantinople, and orally relating a story from notes. Then we held two rounds of individual activities, adding up the cumulative scores of the group members. Finally, each team (or team member) sang a song or two in English, or recited some poetry. Some were very, very good.

English teachers were keeping score, but disagreements ensued, and I declared that we had no winners and passed out the prizes rather randomly. My concluding remark was: “Some English teachers and School Directors have found fault with the way I did things today, but one thing that I think we can all agree that I did right. I brought cake and ice cream for everyone!” (Cheers all around). I think the event was a huge success and the students all had a good time.



*Our Mission:  
Supporting improved quality of  
educational opportunities for  
the children and youth of the  
isolated Malesia e Madhe  
region of Northern Albania.*

Other than the competition, Marash and I had a pizza dinner with our five college students, Toneta Durgaj, Dafina Rakaj, Aurel Lekaj, Brusilda Hoxhaj, and Rregjina Rakaj. They are all doing well. More recently Toneta and Angjelin Olaj, whom we supported through high school and a Master of English degree, announced their engagement. Toneta intends to get a Master of Teaching degree and teach math.



I also had dinner with the new Ministry of Education Malesia e Madhe Director Vlash Linadi, who seems to have the best interest of our students uppermost. I taught some English classes in the rebuilt school in Vrithi as well as in Boga. I met with Kindergarten teachers in Reci, Zagora, Xhaj, Dedaj, and Vrithi. We hope to use crowdsourcing to raise funds for needed equipment for these kindergartens. In the same vein, Ndue Durgaj, Xhaj School Director gave me information for a crowd sourcing project for toilets in Xhaj, where they have neither indoor nor outdoor facilities. We have raised \$455 of our \$770 goal. Donations can be made at the Fundly website:

<https://fundly.com/xhaj-school-restroom-phase-i>

On the home front, Alfonc Rakaj, Oregon State University Political Science graduate has an exciting internship with the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tirana, and Kristina Milaj continues her education at Oregon State University working towards a dual Master of Civil Engineering and Wood Science.



As the Albanian Alps Institute moves into its eleventh year working in Shkrel, we continue to focus our efforts on five areas 1) high school and university scholarships; 2) library book donations; 3) English teacher; 4) kindergartens; 5) school supplies and repairs. And as you move into the new year, we wish you all the best.

Steve Cook

