

Albanian Alps Institute
1620 NW 23rd Street
Corvallis, OR 97330

Phone: 541-753-3066
Email: albanianalpsinst@gmail.com
Website: www.albanianalps.org

President: Steve Cook

Secretary: Terri Cook

Board of Directors:
Karen Berg
Sharon Carlson
Rod Gwinn
Lloyd Meskimen

Albania Manager:
Marash Rakaj

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

2008-09 Scholarship Program Expanded



AAI began providing scholarships to students attending high school away from their home village three years ago. We now have one fourth-year student attending high school in the US, and seven third-year and two second-year students in Shkoder and Koplik High schools. In addition, we are helping with bus fares for nine other students to attend the new high school in Dedaj, and one scholarship student attending the University of Shkoder.

Rounding out our current projects, we have established a small monthly line of credit at a bookstore in Shkoder for eleven girls in elementary school. This "Early Intervention" program is intended to encourage village girls (and their parents) to view themselves as potential high school and university students and professionals. In another year or two we will be able to evaluate the success of this program. The feedback we have received from the participating students and their parents this summer was very encouraging.

Every AAI scholarship student writes a monthly letter that is forwarded to their sponsor. We are already receiving applications from hopeful students for the academic year 2009-10 and are looking for donors. You can sponsor a village student to attend high school away from home in either Shkoder or Koplik for \$500/year. A donation of \$250 can help defray bus fare expenses for a student commuting to the Dedaj High School and \$200 will buy books/school supplies for an Early Intervention girl for one year.



Dafina Rakaj

AAI Celebration for Scholars



In June, Terri Cook accompanied Steve on his annual trip to Albania. Before going, she designed and printed certificates to present to AAI scholarship students. Steve and Terri also hosted parties in Dedaj and Boga for lower and upper valley students and their parents. Almost all scholarship students attended with at least one parent. They enjoyed sub sandwiches, cake and ice cream. The ice cream was a challenge, as the villages are located some distance from the ice cream source. Since there were no picnic coolers to be had, Steve improvised by creating a "cooler" using a banana box and some Styrofoam insulation, which kept the treats cold for everyone to enjoy.

Following the introductions, certificates were presented by Steve and Marash. Then the students played a rousing game of "Pin the Tail on the Donkey", which was a new experience for everyone. All enjoyed the game tremendously - even the School Directors and parents.

Meet Dr. Marash Rakaj AAI Manager in Albania

Dr. Marash Rakaj manages the day-to-day operations of AAI in Albania. In 1992, Marash invited Steve and his son Erik to his family's home in Boga. They had a wonderful time visiting and getting to know the entire Rakaj family. Throughout the 1990s, Marash selflessly contributed his valuable time and knowledge in facilitating Steve's efforts to help Albanian students.

When Steve arrived in 2002 with the vague idea of the Albanian Alps Institute in mind, Marash helped him flesh it out into a viable organization. He recommended the first English teacher and helped facilitate Steve's efforts to work with villagers in the district of Shkrel. From its inception, Marash has been the Albanian Alps Institute Albania Manager, taking care of everything in the eleven months when Steve isn't there. AAI would not exist without Marash Rakaj.

In addition to his work with AAI, Marash is a biology professor at the University of Shkoder and lives in Shkoder with his wife Marjeta and son Gabriel.



Dr. Marash Rakaj

Eyeglasses for Students in Shkrel

Just as this newsletter was being written, we received notice of approval from the Dutch Embassy in Albania for AAI's \$19,000 grant proposal to conduct eye exams and provide eye glasses to the neediest students in the Shkrel School District. There is a cultural stigma attached to eyeglasses in Albania, and when combined with the poverty of village parents, not a single student in Shkrel wears eye glasses. We hope to change that during Steve's annual visit in June 2009, when the exams and vouchers for glasses will be completed.

Albanian Students in Corvallis



Alfonc Rakaj

Alfonc Rakaj, from Boga, attended Santiam Christian High School under scholarship last year. Alfonc is currently studying at Oregon State University, having received a full scholarship from the International Studies Program. Alfonc is living with AAI Board Member Karen Berg and her family in Corvallis.

AAI extends its heartiest congratulations to Alfonc, and sincere thanks to the Berg family for continuing to provide him with a welcoming home.

Kristina Milaj, AAI's original scholarship recipient, is spending this school year in Corvallis at Santiam Christian High School under an AAI scholarship.

Steve and Terri Cook enjoy having Kristina in their home this school year.



Kristina Milaj

Annual Yard Sale – May 2009

AAI will have its third annual yard sale in May 2009. Our first two sales were very successful, earning about \$4500 total. We welcome donations of books, clothing, and household items.

Please let us know in early May if you have items you wish to donate.

Visit our website to learn more about AAI at www.albanianalps.org