



News Bulletin

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Produced by and for members of the Servas community



Servas Women





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Thank you members who shared
your stories and photos.

Your editor, Michael Johnson
newsletter@servas.org



President's Message

By Radha B. Radhakrishna

Dear members,

Here is my year-end report card for 2024. I look back at all things we have achieved and the priorities that will guide our actions till SICOGA 2025.

1. **Servas.org**. I am happy to report that there are 18,125 members on Servas.org. If I deduct those whose membership has just expired but are still on their grace period awaiting renewal, the number is 17,043. Still, that is a healthy increase from 15,389 at the end of 2023.

Getting information like this is now much easier — thanks to the new Version 2 of Servas.org released in July 2024 which has been very well received by our members. Of course, it will continue to be useful only if it is maintained and administered to ensure data integrity. Only then can members feel comfortable about using our website (and web-based app) to host, travel, and strengthen bonds.



That means that we should respond in a timely manner to any requests we receive — such as new applications, LOI requests, etc. To ensure this, we have created a cross-national “Membership Team”. This team includes a broad cross-section of people — including youth members, members of the development committee and the technology team — to ensure that all queries are promptly attended to, and all the data are up to date.

Photo: From the Servas website Version 2 new main page.



Would you like to join and support this team? We need the support of all members to achieve our goal of maintaining a high-quality database for our members' use. We hope you have been using the new website and will continue to use it for connecting with other members and building peace around the globe.



Thank you to the Membership & Technology Secretaries (**Paul and Jim**) and their team for all their hard work to achieve this.

2. Peace Schools. This year, we are very pleased to have the opportunity to promote peace schools in **Turkey, Georgia, Uganda and Argentina.**

Member support for the schools this year has been overwhelming, with so many members from different countries volunteering their time and active support. It made us think — How can we develop this concept even further? We are working on building a Core Team to develop a manual that will provide guidance to those who may wish to start a school in their own country. We are also trying to harness the energy and build a team of people who can guide new countries that are interested in exploring this concept in their own country. Servas International has also stepped up to provide financial support to the schools where needed. Thank you, **Mehmet, Nino, Prossy and Carina**, for all your wonderful work.

Photo: Georgia Peace School



Photo: Children at the Uganda Peace School

3. We had two **Youth Camps** this year — one in Germany and one in France. Servas Germany is already planning its next Youth Camp in March 2025. Hooray! We love to see more of this activity. It is a priority for Servas International to give both financial support and volunteer support through its Youth and Families Committee. Thank you, **Elena and the Youth and Families Committee, and Servas Germany.**

4. We are also supporting **two new initiatives** by forming teams on ...

(a) **Servas Women** — The UN team has been participating in the Commission on the Status of Women Conference for many years. This year they have planned to expand their activities and develop additional initiatives for Servas members for promoting the Welfare of Women. Thanks to **Paige and Kent** for shouldering the responsibility to build up this activity.

(b) **Environment** — As a result of the climate-related damage that we have witnessed this year, we

received many requests to create a new Environment Team — to work on developing ideas about the concept from Servas communities around the globe. The aim of this team will be to provide education and guidance for those who wish to foster such activities in their own country. Thanks to **Clara** for agreeing to work on building this team.

5. Peace Forums: The SI Peace Secretaries have continued offering regular Peace Forums this year. Each Peace Forum has a different topic of interest to our members, as we explore ideas for development. The next Peace Forum, the fourth this year, will be held on December 8, 2024. The topic of this meeting is to discuss the impact of regional meetings and how to organize them to promote Servas ideals and peace. Over the year, in these forums, we have discussed ideas such as: SYLE, Youth Camps, Peace Schools, Walks for Peace and many other ideas. Please participate in the next Peace Forum if possible. Thank you, **Mei** and **Francisco**, for organizing this.

6. Storytelling Competition: We had our first international story telling competition where members were invited to send their best Servas stories or send a video of their experience. Results will be announced soon. It was a wonderful effort. Thank you, **Bonnie**, for all your work in organizing the competition.

I would like to show my appreciation to **all of SI Exco** for all the work done throughout the year. Much of this labor is done behind the scenes, and not immediately visible — but is crucial for our overall success. Thanks to all the **SI teams** for helping with all of the work we have done, especially **Richard, Gulsen, Carla, Jonny and Amir**. It has been amazing to work with you.

Finally, let me invite all of you to **SICOGA 2025 to be held in Dijon, France, October 3 - 9, 2025**. Please save the date. We expect to announce more about the agenda and how to register for the event soon.

In Peace,
Radha B. Radhakrishna
President, Servas International

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Africa Regional Conference

By Philip O. and Dalton O.

The 2024 African Regional Meeting was held at Jumuia Beach Resort and Conference Center in Mombasa Kenya, from August 15 to 20. The conference was attended by 64 members from 13 different countries: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Egypt, the USA, Britain, Italy, Portugal, Mexico, Taiwan, South Korea and Croatia. This was a special meeting as it was graced by three members of EXCO, the Servas Executive Committee: the SI President **Radha Radhakrishna**, SI Vice-President **Carla Kristensen** and SI Peace Secretary **Francisco Salomón Luna**.

As the theme for the meeting was *A Peaceful World through Environmental Conservation*, most topics were centred around environment and climate change and how we can achieve peace in a hospitable planet. We dedicated a day for planting 75 trees coinciding with the 75th anniversary of Servas.

The welcoming ceremony provided guests with an engaging and immersive

experience of Swahili culture. Dancers, dressed in colorful traditional Swahili attire, offered warm welcomes and a popular Swahili refreshment of coconut water. This was followed by welcoming speeches by Servas Kenya's National Secretary





Philip O., the CEO of the Kenya Coast Tourism Association Mr. Julius, and SI President Radha.

On August 16, Francisco introduced Radha. Radha then provided an overview of Servas International and its core values of peace. He introduced members of the EXCO and took us through the leadership structure of Servas. Radha reminded the conference attendees of the Servas principles and values that is; dignity and worth for every human, equal rights for all humans and respect and care for the environment.

Philip later introduced the members of Servas Kenya with their leadership team.

A session on Servas Peace-builders was presented by Servas International Peace Secretary Francisco. He enlightened us on how to actively promote peace in the world as Servas members and to make the world a better place.

These are some of the sessions that were led by volunteers during the Conference:

- **Alternatives to violence**, by Joanne F. — an interactive session focusing on conflict resolution techniques and strategies
- **Climate Change**, by Clara P. — focusing on its complex dynamics and the urgent need for action
- **Servas Youth**, by young members from Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania
- **Development strategies for Servas Africa**, by the National Secretaries or representatives from various Servas African groups present.
- **Role of Servas in breaking down prejudices**, by Claudina M. (Portugal) — how Servas, as a group that provides a platform for hospitality and cultural exchange, can play a key role in breaking down prejudices
- **Wangari Maathai**, by Carla K. — a presentation on the renowned Kenyan environmental and political activist, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004, who fought for environmental conservation and women's rights
- **Servas.org Version 2**, by the President, Peace Secretary and Vice President of SI.
- **Servas Women and CSW/UN**, by Paige L. and Fidèle R. — on women's rights and empowerment, highlighting the importance of education, mentorship and supportive networks in fostering advancements in women's empowerment. Fidèle also did a



presentation of what he, with RWAMREC Rwanda, is doing by educating men on the need of having a peaceful coexistence with women.

- **Countries presentations**, by the different groups attending the conference, including music and dancing
- **Tree planting**, by all the attendees — this activity was held during the day-off, after a visit to Mombasa city, including an Indian Temple and Fort Jesus. The participants were invited to plant trees in Bamburi.

Closing Ceremony: The day concluded with a formal closing ceremony. The event was finalized by SI President Radha, who delivered a heartfelt speech summarizing the day's experiences and acknowledging the contributions of all participants. He also expressed appreciation of the Servas Kenya team for organizing the conference in



Kenya and to all the volunteers who participated including Sayan Roy a youth from Servas India who came up with a wonderful design to use as our conference logo and for our T-shirts.

You can read the full report at:

[INTERNATIONAL SERVAS AFRICA CONFERENCE REPORT \(2024\) | Servas International](#)

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Australians at Peace Camp in Georgia

By Wendy B., Servas Australia

Photo: It was impressive to see how many students and teachers attended.

In a Servas newsletter earlier this year I saw the mention of Georgia's first Peace Camp. My partner Rick and I had an independent trip to Georgia already booked. What a surprise to find that the camp was in a tiny rural village, Lamovani, about an hour's travel from Tbilisi and one day of the camp coincided with our time there.

The camp was organized by an energetic and inspiring young English teacher, Nino, in the local school. She'd been inspired to arrange the camp by Mehmet Ates from Turkey. Mehmet has been running peace camps in Turkey since 2009 and hasn't missed a year, despite Covid and a recent severe earthquake. He now has the concept of a "permanent" camp, with all infrastructure ready for whenever he has volunteers to help run it.



Mehmet and seven other volunteers came from Turkey for the week. Other volunteers included young people working and studying in Tbilisi as well as other internationals who'd flown in specially. Countries represented were Colombia, Netherlands, South Korea, India, USA, Hong Kong, Jordan and the two of us from Australia. There was also quite a collection of ex-students from the school.

Being a small school, there were more volunteers than students! Since the camp was being run in the school holidays it was impressive to see how many students and teachers were in attendance.

We were there on the opening day, helping a little, but gaining so much from the experience.

Activities included excellent interactive games, singing, dancing, health checks, ice cream-making and plenty of time to chat with the children, some parents, teachers, and other volunteers. It was truly a privilege to attend and a pity we had to leave.

This was a huge undertaking for Nino and from the reports on the WhatsApp group chat for the rest of the week, we know it was a massive success.

Some of the volunteers were planning to continue to the camp in Uganda.

Photo: Music is the universal language of peace. What a great way to get connected and share your culture.

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Help!

The recent tragedy in Spain and how you can help



We, the Servas International community, extend our heartfelt condolences to the families and communities affected by the devastating floods caused by the destructive weather system DANA (Depresión Aislada en Niveles Altos – high-altitude isolated depression) in Spain, in the regions of Valencia, Castilla-La Mancha and Andalucía. Our thoughts are with those who have lost loved ones, suffered injuries, or experienced significant damage to their homes and livelihoods. We stand in solidarity with all those impacted during this difficult time and offer our deepest sympathies.

In the face of such hardship, it is inspiring to see communities coming together to support one another. To the emergency responders and volunteers, including our brave Servas Spain members, tirelessly working to provide relief and aid, we offer our profound gratitude for your courage and dedication. We are united in our commitment to helping rebuild and restore the affected areas, supporting those in need, and standing alongside Spain in its recovery.

To donate and help with the DANA

(information from Maldita.es)

Be wary of links or messages circulating on social networks. Organizations involved in the work of caring for victims have set up ways to transfer donations and other types of help, including the Red Cross (Cruz Roja) which has activated a page to transfer monetary donations.

For information about helping and donations, click here:

<https://servas.org/news/recent-environmental-and-human-tragedy-spain-and-how-you-can-help>

[*Editor's note:* Be very cautious making any donations online.]

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A most inspiring encounter in Florence

By Suzie B., Montreal Canada

In 2014, the year I joined Servas, I was in Florence Italy to study Italian. I had won a scholarship from the Italian Cultural Institute in Montreal Canada. I was enthusiastic, but wondered how I could meet locals in a city which is overwhelmed by tourists. Servas day hosts answered generously:

- > Mauro and Betty took me on excursions in Tuscany,
- > I took walks and explored magnificent Florence with Maria Cristina and,
- > Simona invited me for meals to her house.

I practised the language with pleasure and improved quickly.

Ten years later, my husband Vikram and I returned to Florence, where we contacted day hosts, some whom I had previously met. Alessandra responded warmly and organized a supper, along with her mother, Ana Luisa, and Servas members Simona and Susanna.

Photo: Servas members (all from Florence area except Vikram and Suzie) at supper in Florence. From left: Vikram, Alessandra, Ana Luisa, Suzie, Susanna, and Simona.





Photos:

Ana Luisa (left) and Alessandra, her daughter, picking olives in their grove.

Suzie, at Casa della Pace or the House for Peace, about the same time Suzie became Servas Canada's Peace Secretary.



Ana Luisa, 91 years old, joined in a wheelchair and shared memorable stories, after just returning from a poetry reading during *Peace Book Week*. At 20, while studying philosophy in the USA, Ana Luisa met Servas founder Bob Luitweiler, and she has been active as a Servas member for the past seventy years. In 1962, she married Alberto, a famous sociology professor from the University of Florence. Both dedicated their lives as peace builders concerned with social justice and non-violence. They raised their four children with noble values in a home where Servas travellers have always been welcome. Now, Alessandra continues social work and participates in rural development projects in India.

Alessandra kindly invited us to their country home, a 15th century convent, which her parents purchased in 1981 and converted into the *Casa della*

Pace. Alberto realized his dream of creating a center of studies of non-violence: they named it the House for Peace. It is a magnificent estate with an olive grove and garden in San Gimignano. **[Photo below]**

For ten years, they organized summer camps, inviting educators and trainers from all over the world to study and to run workshops so that youth could become acquainted with the concept of non-violence. Participants and social activists from India, Belgium, the USA and elsewhere came to share their ideas and experience. Nowadays, Servas and Workaway volunteers are regularly hosted.

Ana Luisa impressed us with her energy. A few days later, she and Alessandra participated in the World Peace March in Florence, which started in Costa Rica on October 2.



Alessandra was also preparing and coordinating with members from Tuscany to travel to Servas Italy's annual assembly which took place in Bari on October 25, 2024. Both mother and daughter spread the message of peace, even while travelling on the train. At the same time, following this warm-hearted encounter, I agreed to serve as Servas Canada's Peace Secretary.

Photo right:

Ana Luisa and her daughter Alessandra.

Photo below: Ana Luisa on a train going to the Servas Italy conference.

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SERVAS WOMEN — Who Are We?

By Karen M.



Eleanor Roosevelt, the formidable diplomat who led the creation of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, said:

It isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it.

And more than one world leader has expressed the idea that, in order for peace to exist, justice is necessary. As a non-governmental organization with

a 75-year mission of promoting peace and, with a presence in over one hundred countries, Servas International works to promote a culture of peace and inclusion. We reject racial, gender, and religious discrimination, and xenophobia in all of their manifestations.

To further our efforts in this direction, in September 2024, Servas International officially recognized the constituency group called Servas Women.

While the primary focus of this group is coordinating our efforts at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women meeting (CSW) in New York in March, there are many ways members can be engaged in the work for equity and equality. ALL members are welcome to join in this work.

Servas Women has been instrumental in engaging our members of the Global South. Recently, there was participation of Servas Women at the Servas Africa Regional Conference in Kenya. In Africa and in South America, Servas Women are engaging in helping new mothers with supplies and supporting girls in schools. Others are working on ways to increase safety for women travelers.

This growing network is a direct reflection of the work being done by other NGOs with the United Nations around the world. Younger activists are providing their energy and technological expertise, and more experienced activists are contributing their wisdom and historical perspectives.

If you wish to know more about Servas Women and/

or our CSW work, go to: https://servas.org/gender-and-equality_. If you wish to attend CSW69 in March 2025 virtually (online), visit the online Application Form.

For further information, contact us at: Servaswomen@servas.org

We hope you will join us in our work to make the world a better place for all.

Photo: African Women gesturing the equals sign.

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Climate Justice must be at the Heart of SI Activities

By Clara P., Servas Britain and Ireland



Since 2018, our Servas community has recognized the importance of caring for the planet. The 2018 AGM adopted a motion recognizing that *“Climate change is very much a peace and social justice issue because its impacts can lead to the displacement of people, which often hurts the impoverished more than the wealthy.”*

As several of us participated at Servas events in East Africa this August, the issue of the climate crisis was very much present at the Servas Kenya Peace Conference in Mombasa and the Servas Uganda Peace School in the village of Buyoga.

Just before the conference started, we heard the sad news that a massive landslide in a Kampala rubbish dump had

killed many, buried homes and caused devastation. This was caused by torrential rains and poor management of the site. Talking to many Ugandan and Tanzanian people during our trips, it was clear that extreme weather events were becoming more frequent and that the usual patterns of rainy and dry seasons was blurring.

The Mombasa Peace Conference included sessions related to environmental issues:

- Carla K, SI Vice President, introduced the formidable Kenyan female activist and Nobel Prize winner Wangari Maathai who inspired millions with her tree planting activities and brave campaigns to defend political prisoners and forests. The film *Taking Root: the Vision of Wangari Maathai* can be watched online, if you click [here](#).
- Clara P, from Servas Britain and Ireland, held a session on the issue of climate justice for East Africa. She highlighted the terrifying impact of climate change on the region and gave an insight about the infamous East Africa Crude Oil Pipeline, a “carbon bomb” that has already displaced 100,000 people in the region and threatens Lake Victoria and many National Parks. You can check the presentation [here](#).

At the Servas Uganda Peace School, many activities were related to environmental issues. There were art workshops using natural dye, organic gardening activities and workshops about

the natural environment and potential threats to it. The last day saw a mini-march by children demanding a green future.

At both events, Servas members planted trees. In Mombasa, we went to the Bamburi forest, where a former limestone quarry had destroyed existing trees and polluted the area. The Bamburi Cement company was forced to decontaminate the site and replant trees for rehabilitation and is now charging tourists to plant trees and participate in regreening efforts.

In Buyoga village, the tree-planting scheme appeared more genuine and sustainable as it is led by the Bukomansimbi Organic Tree Farmers Association. They have developed a system of permaculture that allows multi-crops plantations to thrive, providing a mix of crops. Some of us were able to visit the farm and witness how Mutuba trees, Matoke trees and jackfruit trees grow alongside cassava, yams, passion fruit, sugar cane, and many other crops. Servas members were then able to sponsor a visit to the farm for four East African Servas members to learn about sustainable agriculture projects.

Servas International is committed to expand its activities around environmental issues.

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Peace Thinkers

Members Meet at Thinkers Lodge National Historic Site

By Teresa K., Nova Scotia Member Administrator, Canada

On July 20 2024, several Servas members in Nova Scotia met at Thinkers Lodge, Pugwash. **(photo)** Thinkers Lodge, a site famous for peace, was a think-tank created by native son, Cyrus Eaton in 1955. He invited scholars, writers, scientists and academics to summer retreats where they discussed ideas on how to improve the world.

The most famous Thinkers conference was held in 1957. **(photo)**





During the height of the Cold War, scientists from both sides of the Iron Curtain came to discuss the dangers of radiation from atomic bombs. Scientists from communist China and Soviet Union joined scientists from Canada, UK, Japan, Australia, United States and other European countries. Some stayed at Thinkers Lodge, many were billeted in the village. The conference was successful. The group created an

international movement that exists today: **Pugwash Conference for Science and World Affairs.**

If you have watched the Oppenheimer movie, this 1957 conference was the next chapter in the development of atomic weapons and the push by scientists to stop them being used in war. Joseph Rotblat, a physicist from Poland, had worked on the Manhattan Project to develop the first atomic bomb.

He left the American research site before the bomb was created, but he always felt guilty about his participation. In 1957, Joseph Rotblat attended the Pugwash conference, and he dedicated his life to promoting peace and the Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs.

In 1995, Joseph Rotblat (**photo**) and the Pugwash movement won the Nobel Peace prize, and it is now on display at Thinkers Lodge national historic site. For more information about this amazing history, you can go online to the National Film Board of Canada and watch the documentary 'The Strangest Dream' for free.

https://www.nfb.ca/film/strangest_dream/

Thinkers Lodge remains a site for inspiration and peace. It was the perfect backdrop for a meeting of Servas members who shared their stories and experiences of traveling for peace. If you would like to learn more about Thinkers Lodge, watch for an invite to Servas members to attend an online presentation in January.

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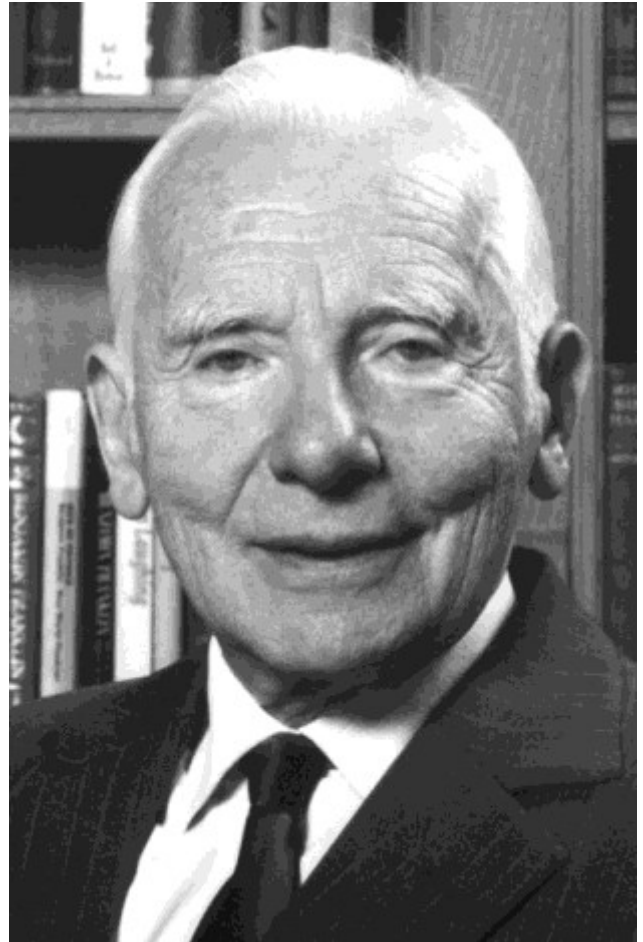




Photo: Servas members around the Ginkgo tree. From left: Amanda Stark, Claudia S., Jon N., Jane H., Ian B. in front of a flowering cherry tree.

Seeds of Hope

By Amanda Stark of Hobart, Tasmania, Australia

When the suggestion came from Servas International that there could be a worldwide theme of planting trees to celebrate our 75th anniversary as well as the UN International Day of Peace, we combined our plans with a special event held by the Hobart City Council. The Council is an established member of the international network called Mayors for Peace. (<https://www.mayorsforpeace.org/en/members/list-members/>)

Servas members were involved in the tree-planting and we were able to display our wonderful banner. The Lord Mayor, Anna Reynolds, also gave me the opportunity to speak to the gathering, as a representative of Servas Tasmania.

Photo, right: Servas banner with Jonathan and Amanda (right)



The HCC's Facebook page begins:
Today we planted a very special little tree...

To read more of the planting go to:
<https://ourcitycanopy.com.au/hiroshima/>

Thanks to HCC photographer, John Sampson for these photos and permission to publish them.

Photo, below:

City of Hobart staff Travis [left] with Amanda Stark, ready to plant.

Photo, top right:

Planting the ginkgo tree at Hobart's Peace Park.

Photo, bottom right:

An origami peace crane.

Mayors for Peace were nominated for the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize. This is one of many peace organisations that gain by collaborating.

To learn more, go to: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayors_for_Peace .



My SYLE in Brittany

By Pauline

I am currently 16 years old. Last year I decided that I wanted to do a Servas exchange in an English-speaking country to improve my English but I couldn't find suitable hosts or schools. After a while my family and I started asking French Servas families. Soon there were three French families interested in hosting me.

We connected with a family in Rennes in Brittany and from May to June 2024, where I spent six weeks. The family had two girls with whom I connected really well, and they were all very active and sweet.

I went to school there with one of the sisters and we often spent the weekends by the sea. It was a great experience with a lot of adventure, new food and culture, nice people and a wonderful time. I would love to do something like that again and I am looking forward to again meeting this French family. Maybe next year they will visit me.

Photo: Bretagne, from left: Charlotte, Gwenaëlle, Jeanne, Pauline, Jérôme.

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Active Germans

By Manuela K., Deputy National Secretary, Servas Germany



In September, Servas Germany's annual meeting took place in Mannheim. Almost ninety members, including ten young adults, came together in a wonderful youth hostel with a great view of the Rhine. A varied program included speed dating, excursions, bike tours, city and castle tours, as well as an introduction to Mannheim street art.





In a very relaxed atmosphere, people exchanged ideas in a variety of workshops about important Servas topics, such as working with Servas online version 2.0, interviewing, organizing new events, favorite travel books, city and country exchanges, long-distance and long-term trips and Servas by bike.

There was also lively discussion about the Youth Camp Germany in Nuremberg and a German radio report on the

75th anniversary of Servas international.

The official members' meeting concluded the weekend, during which many new contacts were made.

A big thank you to the many helpers, from registration to grill master and protocol, to room allocation and others in front of and behind the scenes, without whom this harmonious meeting would not have been possible.

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Closer than You Think

By Michael Johnson, SINB editor

This summer, I stayed with an Exco member, Jim, who lives west of Ottawa, Canada—about a six-hour drive from us.

We were also generously hosted by another Servas couple, Joe and Nora, in central Ottawa. One day they invited yet another Servas member, Lisa, to join us for dinner and a walk.

Three weeks later, back home, we hosted the former Servas National Secretary of China, Changxian, who lives now in Ottawa with his wife Xiaoyan, an excellent chef. She cooked for us for two days during their stay. On the same weekend, long-time Servas friends David and Louise stayed with us.

You don't have to circle the globe to visit Servas members – some may be closer than you think.

Photos, from top, L-R:

Michael, Dafi, Andrea, Jim, at hosts' house, west of Ottawa, Sept. 2024

Lisa, Nora, Dafi, Michael, Ottawa park.

Louise, David, Changxian, Dafi, Xiaoyan, Michael, our home, Oct. 2024.

Xiaoyan cooking wonders in our kitchen.

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SERVAS INTERNATIONAL NEWS BULLETIN

The SINB is a newsletter produced by and for the Servas community.

Editor and Graphic Designer: Michael Johnson

Proofreader: Picot Cassidy

Translators: Isabelle Girard & her team, plus Cynthia Granados Posada

Please send your news for the SI News Bulletin to: newsletter@servas.org
We encourage Servas key people around the world to forward this bulletin to all members. Feel free to quote us but please mention the source.

SI EXCO 2022 — 2025

President: Radha Radhakrishna president@servas.org

Vice-President: Carla Kristensen vicepresident@servas.org

Treasurer: Richard Cabassut treasurer@servas.org

General Secretary: Jonny Sågänger generalsecretary@servas.org

Membership & Technology Secretary: Paul Nielsen mts@servas.org

Membership & Technology Co-Secretary: Jim Leask mts@servas.org

Peace Secretary: Francisco Salomón Luna Aburto peacesecretary@servas.org

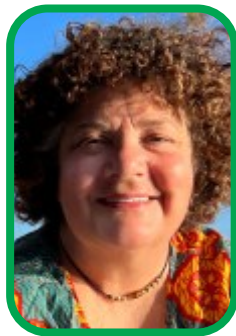
Co-Peace Secretary, Mei Wang peacesecretary@servas.org

Servas International is an international, non-profit, non-governmental federation of national Servas groups, supporting an international network of hosts and travellers. Our network aims to help build world peace, goodwill and understanding by offering opportunities for personal contacts between people of different cultures, backgrounds and nationalities.

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Radha Radhakrishna



Carla Kristensen



Jonny Sågänger



Richard Cabassut



Francisco Salomón Luna



Mei Wang



Paul Nielsen



Jim Leask