

## PURPOSE PRIZE WINNERS EMBODY PEACE CORPS IDEALS

*Older RPCVs continue to make extraordinary contributions to society*

by Michele Melendez

**T**hough three decades have passed since his Peace Corps service, Timothy Will has long embraced the values and skills that propelled him those many years ago in Honduras and Fiji.

In Honduras, Will taught school kids horticulture through an economic development program. In the Fijian Islands, he managed redevelopment

projects in typhoon-torn villages, helping to rebuild schools. And more recently, the 63-year-old built on that important work to bring economic development to Appalachia. This work earned him a \$100,000 Purpose Prize.

The Purpose Prize ([www.encore.org/prize](http://www.encore.org/prize)) awards people 60 and older who are making extraordinary contributions to society in their encore

careers. Now in its seventh year, the prize has recognized several Peace Corps alums and social entrepreneurs whose work depends on the generosity and drive of Peace Corps volunteers. The stories of Will and two of his fellow Prize winners who are changing lives speak volumes about the impact of the Peace Corps and the value of the years beyond 60.



**Tim Will,  
2009 Purpose  
Prize winner.**

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### TIMOTHY WILL, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Timothy Will** saw that his adopted community—which he chose for its stunning beauty—was decaying. Textile and furniture manufacturing jobs, the Appalachian county’s employment backbone, had moved elsewhere. The area lacked the technological infrastructure to support new business. Internet access was scarce.

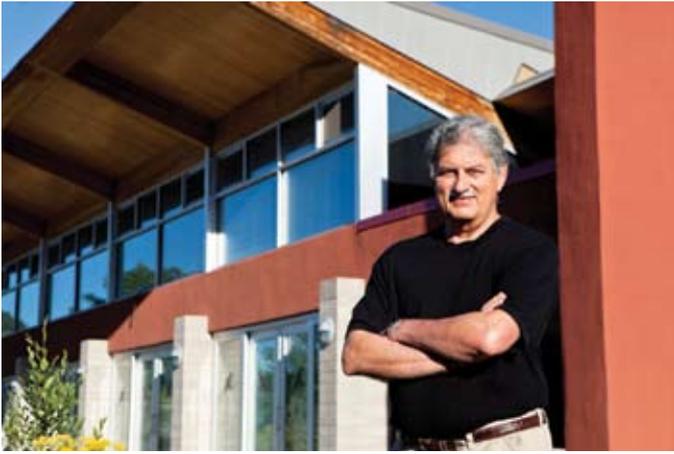
A former telecommunications systems analyst, Will had spent years introducing complex technological innovations in the Caribbean and South America. When he got to Rutherford County, N.C., in 2006, he joined Foothills Connect Business & Technology Center—an organization that promotes small enterprise—and began to connect the county’s agrarian past to a digitally supported future.

Will persuaded farmers to grow specialty crops for restaurants in Charlotte, about 90 minutes away. At the same time, he got the entire county wired with fiber-optic cable and created an online ordering system to encourage restaurant owners to order directly from local farmers.

To attract chefs, the farmers switched from traditional crops, which might have yielded a few hundred dollars per acre, to more gourmet fare, such as shiitake mushrooms and heirloom tomatoes. That produce can bring in thousands of dollars—up to \$30,000—an acre, Will estimates.

The venture has lured unemployed factory workers back to farming, and the local economy is gaining ground. Since then, Will, who taught high school in Miami before moving to Rutherford County, has returned to teaching, with a course load of advanced placement classes in government, human geography and macroeconomics at a public charter school.

Will says his time in the Peace Corps, which he served alongside his wife, taught him that there is no higher calling than to serve others. And on a deeply personal level, he says, “The Peace Corps bonded my relationship to my wife. We have been married for 37 years and service in the Peace Corps set the tone for our marriage: hard work and service to social justice.”



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Ed Mazria, 2011 Purpose Prize winner.

## EDWARD MAZRIA, ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

**Edward Mazria**, who served in the Peace Corps in Peru during the mid-1960s, thought he knew the impact of his field on the environment. An award-winning architect, he had a 40-year record of innovation and advocacy in sustainable building. So he was surprised when in 2002 his analysis of U.S. government data revealed that the building sector consumes nearly half of all energy produced in the United States, causing about half of all greenhouse gas emissions yearly.

In 2003, Mazria founded Architecture 2030 in Sante Fe, N.M., to persuade the building sector to change its ways. Three years later he issued the 2030 Challenge, a set of benchmarks for transforming the built environment (buildings, homes and other man-made structures) to “carbon neutral” by 2030. The goal: Turn the greatest contributor to climate change into the leading solution.

The American Institute of Architects, U.S. Conference of Mayors, U.S. Green Building Council and National Governors Association immediately adopted the challenge. Legislation followed, requiring all federal buildings to meet the 2030 Challenge targets starting in 2010. In addition, many states and cities have adopted the targets.

Now Mazria, 71, is developing a program (to be available free online) designed to expand proven methods of sustainable planning and building globally.

He credits the Peace Corps for helping him shape his work and outlook over the years. While designing buildings, schools and bridges, among other responsibilities during his service in Peru, Mazria saw the effects of poverty, malnutrition, disease, inadequate housing and other challenges, learning about “what is meaningful and what doesn’t make sense, culturally and economically.”

“I remember the phone company installing public telephone booths on street corners around the plaza in Arequipa,” Mazria says. “Within 24 hours all the booths were stripped bare—the metal used for construction, glass ending up as windows in homes, wiring used to install a light. In other words, to fill more pressing needs.”



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Nancy Hughes, 2011 Purpose Prize winner.

## NANCY SANFORD HUGHES, SAFE COOKSTOVES

**Nancy Sanford Hughes** felt lost after the death of her husband, a doctor, from cancer in 2001. During their 30-year marriage, she’d been mostly a stay-at-home mom. Instead of taking it easy, Hughes volunteered to cook for a 120-member medical mission in the highlands of Guatemala.

As Hughes toiled in the makeshift kitchen, thousands of people came to see the doctors each day. Most of their conditions—chronic coughs, respiratory infections and horrific burns—stemmed from open fires in unventilated homes or from carrying firewood. She thought, “We need to do something to prevent these medical problems rather than treating them.”

Hughes, 69, created StoveTeam International, which since 2008 has helped local entrepreneurs establish six factories that have manufactured and sold the affordable, fuel-efficient Ecocina stove.

Portable, smokeless, cool to the touch and needing just three or four pieces of kindling to cook a meal, the stove has replaced the open cooking fire in more than 15,000 homes across Central America, reaching more than 90,000 people.

According to the World Health Organization, smoke exposure from traditional cooking methods in developing countries causes more than 2 million premature deaths annually, mostly of women and children. So StoveTeam, based in Eugene, Ore., is expanding its focus by helping develop Ecocina factories in Mexico, Kenya, Fiji and Ghana.

The initial factory owner in Nahulingo, El Salvador, owes his continued success to Peace Corps volunteers, Hughes says. “He initially contacted a few of them and offered to demonstrate Ecocina stoves in their villages. They were so impressed with the program that they spread the word to others.”

Hughes adds: “The number of Peace Corps volunteers involved is too numerous to count.”

*Know someone worthy of The Purpose Prize? Nominate them at [www.encore.org/prize](http://www.encore.org/prize).*

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