

WINTER, 2006

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 8

# RACCOON

NEWSLETTER OF RECONCILIATION AND CULTURE COOPERATIVE NETWORK



Dear Friend:

May you and all you hold dear have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, a time of joy and light, and may you be blessed and strengthened in the work you do making a better world for all

I'm delighted to present the Faces of RACCOON in this newsletter. There are so many more people who have made our existence possible. My heartfelt thanks for your passion to make RACCOON a very authentic organization with a Vision to build a network of individuals and organizations dedicated to communal healing and self-reliance among people of the Western Balkans, and to uphold RACCOON Values: tolerance; respect; desire to help others; critical thinking; and commitment to conflict transformation and reconciliation.

The main areas of our work are to provide issue-based programs focusing on such issues as domestic violence, employment, access to health care, education, and lessening the traumas of the culture of violence formed during the Balkan war. Our efforts are to be active and to engage our constituency in mental health counseling, job and medical referrals, legal aid, and various forms of cultural exchange.

Over the past six months RACCOON assisted over 250 individuals through public health outreach, and more than 300 persons attended our numerous events, workshops and cultural gatherings. We have recently expanded our program to include domestic violence prevention and awareness raising, and at the city-wide level we work with a number of other organizations by distributing informational pamphlets and brochures and by conducting an inventory of the existing providers of services for our community in this area.

As funding has dwindled, many of the programs available in the languages of our constituents (Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, Slovenian, etc.) have been cut. This year more than ever we need your support. Your money and support is making our work possible. Should you need any information please call me at 718.784.9121, and do please come to the Holiday Potluck Party on January 5th.

Gratefully yours,

Indira



**RACCOON'S  
ANNUAL RETREAT  
HELD IN  
NEW YORK,  
OCTOBER 2006**

*L-R, Back: Krista  
Minteer, Indira  
Kajosevic, Violeta  
Krasnic, Eric  
Bachman, Erik  
Tanchorov, Vlado  
Kasnar, Dance  
Calovska, Mario  
Vuksan  
Front: Armin Kadic,  
Ivo Skoric*

## IN THIS ISSUE:

- ▶ **Meet The People of Raccoon**
- ▶ **Project Nada** - Valuable information on obtaining health care coverage for all immigrants
- ▶ **Events and Activities** - Women's Gathering, Language Classes and more

# FACES OF RACCOON

## Indira Kajosevic

### Executive & founding director of RACCOON

She was born in Podgorica (Montenegro) to Muslim Slav and Albanian parents. She holds an M.A. degree in International Relations, and is a Ph.D. candidate in Human and Organizational Development. She has extensive professional and work experience with major international organizations (American Friends Service Committee, International Organization for Migration, Red Cross, Women's Commissions, United Nations). Most recently she held a position of the Coordinator of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, an international coalition of organizations serving as a resource on issues of women, Peace and Security to the UN, including Security Council briefings. Indira is a founding member of the Women in Black movement both in Belgrade and New York, Board member of the International Steering Committee and number of other women's networks and coalitions. She teaches classes in conflict resolution, political science, human rights and gender in international relations at university level. She is the mother of a three-year-old boy, and a passionate snowboarder.



In 1997, Indira and Ivo founded the Reconciliation and Culture Cooperative Network (RACCOON, Inc.). They have had an opportunity to collaborate with theater artists, trauma psychology professionals, conflict resolution specialists, and peace activists in the area, whose common ground is a fundamental belief in the power of communal creativity to heal wounds of hatred and violence. Their work was recognized by the Union Square Award for community organizing in 2004.

## Ivo Skoric

### Balkans Program & founding director of RACCOON

"I came from former YU to the US in 1990. There I was a radio journalist (Radio 101, Mladina, Polet) and an activist with the Croatian and Slovenian peace and environmental movement in the eighties. This made me 'a suspicious young adult' so they took my passport and my typewriter away." Mr. Skoric is a widely published journalist (including BBC), web-master, and media activist. In New York he has produced dozens of cable programs including Hrvatski Monitor, a 60-minute program produced in the 1990s covering the Croatian and Serbian American reactions in the Tri-State area to the war in their former Yugoslavia homeland. Ivo is the innovator of the Cyber-Yugo project



and his hope is to serve as vehicle for young Balkan exiles to set aside their grievances towards each other, begin to listen to their personal voices, and look at each other in a different light. In the Snowboard Peace Camp project he combines his love of outdoors and athletic activity with his drive for peace and reconciliation.

## Violeta Krasnic

### RACCOON Chairperson

Violeta Krasnic works as the Program Coordinator for Europe and the former Soviet Union at WITNESS, an international human rights organization based in Brooklyn, NY. Violeta is a long-term human rights advocate, trainer for NGO management, and video producer. She has worked as a domestic/sexual violence counselor in the former Yugoslavia and organized campaigns to strengthen civil initiatives against gender violence, nationalism, and war. In the U.S., she has conducted research and advocacy on the impact of the U.S. government foreign policy on women's human rights globally and worked with international NGOs to secure states' accountability for the protection and promotion of human rights. Violeta holds an MA from the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University.



## Erik Tanchorov

### Board Member

Erik Tanchorov comes from Macedonia, where he worked with Bosnian, Albanian, Serbian and Roma refugees for a period of eleven years. He has been involved with RACCOON for the past six years as a consultant, program coordinator, and most recently as a board member for RACCOON's Balkan programs. Also, currently he is pursuing his master's degree in conflict transformation at the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont.



## Barbara Syrrakos

### Consultant

Barb Syrrakos is from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and is a consultant at RACCOON, where she edits the newsletter and assists in other assorted projects. She has worked as a journalist and lecturer in history and political science in New York and now resides with her family in Brussels where, as a Fulbright Fellow, she is conducting doctoral research on European governance.



## Krista Minter

### Development

Krista Minter has been involved with RACCOON in various capacities since 2004. As a student intern she assisted with fundraising and special events. Last autumn she was hired as a program consultant to work on issues of domestic violence. She currently continues to develop the domestic violence program and has taken on the additional role of development coordinator. She recently received her master's degree in International Affairs from New School University where most of her research centered on the former Yugoslavia.



## Eric Bachman

### Financial Administrator

Eric Bachman is a transnational peace activist, a nonviolence trainer and consultant on information technology for NGO's and NPO's. He has lived 36 years in Germany before returning to the US in 2005. He has worked with peace, anti-war, human rights and environmental groups in many European countries and in Africa and has experience working in crisis situations and in nonviolent action. He worked with the Anti Ratna Kampanja in Croatia, the Centar za antiratnu akciju (CAA) in Beograd, Centar za mir nenasilje i ljudska prava Osijek, Pokret za mir Pancevo and many other peace, human rights and women's groups in the region. He was one of the founders and the coordinator of the ZaMir Transnational Net, an electronic communication network that was set up during the wars in the former Yugoslavia to enable communication among NGO's on every side of the new and old borders and with the rest of the world. He is affiliated with the War Resisters International, the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the Nonviolent Peaceforce. He has worked with the Balkan Peace Team-International and the German Federation for Social Defense.



## Mario Vuksan

### Board Secretary

Mario Vuksan comes from Zagreb, Croatia. He has studied at U.S., Germany and Israel. He is currently a Program Manager at Cambridge, MA based high tech startup Bit9, Inc.



## Bojana Zezelj

### Consultant

Bojana Zezelj graduated from the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University and is now in the process of earning her second masters from the Hunter College School of Social Work at CUNY. She earned her professional chops at the Open Society Institute New York, and Child Protection section at UNICEF. Her teaching credits, in addition to working as a Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian tutor at Raccoon, include teaching a course in children's rights at the undergraduate program in Social Sciences at the New School, and working as a writing tutor at Hunter. While at Columbia, Bojana wrote and produced two short documentaries, one of which, about the Bosnian immigrant community in New York, has been screened at a number of festivals. Bojana also has a background in acting, and extensive experience in translation and interpreting. She is currently involved in a theater production about the effects of the recent Yugoslav war on a mixed marriage family in Mostar.



## Marko C. Maglich

### Board Member

Marko C. Maglich has been a member of Raccoon's board since 1997. He was a member of the Balkan Dialogue Group at the American Friends Service Committee, and worked on various cultural and services projects with the Group. He is an attorney, and directs the immigration law practice at White & Case LLP, a global law firm based in New York.



## Ivana Begic

### Health Advocate

Born in Bosnia, she moved to Connecticut in 1996 where she finished her BS degree in Communication with a minor in German. She moved to NYC in 2003 and has been with Raccoon since early 2005 working as a health advocate. As a health advocate Ivana tries to help uninsured, underpaid constituents get affordable health care.



## Nida Bikmen

### Consultant

Nida Bikmen is finishing her Ph.D. in Social/Personality Psychology at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She is a native of Turkey and has been living in New York since 1999. Nida has done research with various immigrant groups in New York focusing on identity negotiation, experiences of discrimination, and collective action. She has recently completed her dissertation on collective memory and intergroup relations among refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina. At Raccoon, she is working as a consultant for the Cyber Yugo project.

## Armin Kadic

### Board Treasurer

Armin, a citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina was born in Tuzla, Yugoslav's biggest industrial capital. Before moving to New York, Armin worked with several international institutions such as NATO and United Nations on peacekeeping process and restructuring of local governments in Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia. Currently, he works in the office of Special Events at the United Nations Headquarters. Armin has a degree in Computer Information Systems and studies Psychology in Computer Design.



## Don Larrabure

### Consultant

Don Larrabure studied graphic design and is a Production Manager for Herman Associates, an advertising agency in mid-town. He became acquainted with RACCOON through the highly acclaimed and controversial Serbo-Croatian language class. He had to "marry into" the Bosnian community but is glad he did otherwise he never would have known the beauty of the Croatian coast, the joy of mama Krizanic's homemade sarma (Balkan's chicken soup) or ever known what cevapi was. Don designs the newsletter. His dream is to import sand to the Croatian coast to make the beaches more comfortable for Westerners to enjoy.



## Nada Khodlova

### Consultant

In September of 2004 Nada began working with RACCOON as a consultant providing weekly women's dance movement therapy groups. In September of 2005 she began to organize the monthly women's groups covering topics such as traditional dance, arts in healing, and belly dance. She also assists in organizing various RACCOON events...usually, by adding song and dance in some fashion. Nada received her masters of arts in Dance/Movement therapy in 1993 and her creative arts therapy license in 2006. She has worked in a variety of mental health/human services settings over the years and presently works as a Supervisor of Creative art therapy in a SE Bronx women's homeless shelter serving women with severe mental illness/chemical addictions and are survivors of trauma. Her passion is to weave social justice/healing/arts/community/nature in all facets of her life. Working with RACCOON has enriched her by being an active part in assisting reconciliation for others.



## Elma Prapaniku

### Intern

Elma Prapaniku is an Albanian-American. Currently a junior at Hunter College in Manhattan, she is majoring in English-Language Arts. Her internship at RACCOON began this summer. She has great interest in peace education, conflict resolution and youth development.



### RACCOON House Party

House Party at Zana and Leon Gross held on November 21st, 2006

## SUPPORT RACCOON! SUPPORT RACCOON! SUPPORT RACCOON!

- ☐ Add me to your mailing list or listserv  
☐ Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution to support RACCOON, Inc.

Please, send this form with your check to:

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43-32 22nd Street #301  
Long Island City, NY 11101

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## REGULARLY SCHEDULED RACCOON EVENTS

*Get involved!*

### The Cyber-Yugo

This is a dialogue project via the World Wide Web. Stay tuned and log on to <http://cyberyugo.com>

### Language Class, level II

**Time:** Monday from 7:00pm-9:00pm

Small class language tutoring in Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian for intermediate level students.

**Price:** \$35 per month (\$100 per semester)

### Women's Gathering with Nada Khodlova

Our regular gatherings are a place to learn, support, share, and have fun in the great land of womanhood. Come and join us in a variety of topics for exploration, such as traditional dance, celebrating women's history month, the arts, women and children, women's crafts, body image, and more! Guest presenters and video presentation will be included. **Contact:** [mokosh@nyc.rr.com](mailto:mokosh@nyc.rr.com)

## RACCOON

**43-32 22nd Street #301  
Long Island City, NY 11101  
718-784-9121** Fax: 718-784-1858

*In the heart of Long Island City, one subway stop away from Manhattan!!*

Take E, V to 23rd Street, Ely Ave. or 7, G to Court Square. Call for detailed directions!

## FORUM ON COMMUNAL HEALING

**Time:** December 8th, 6-8pm **Place:** St. Marks Insitute for Mental Health **Host:** Lilly Pavlinovic

The recent terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center generated a need to educate both the mental health community and the general public about the psychological impact of exposure to traumatic events, and to develop effective strategies for trauma related interventions. Community trauma is defined in terms of circumstances that "threaten the community existence and purpose" and, in this case involves the death of community members. An essential response to trauma involves overwhelming stress associated with unpredictability and uncontrollability of traumatic events. However, response and understanding of trauma may vary, and are dependent on a particular worldview of the community that includes past exposure, cultural and spiritual factors, immigration status, available support systems, etc.

## BALKAN WORK

RACCOON is a registered NGO in Croatia. Our Balkan programs aim to help organizations dedicated to reconciliation and to work with youth. The last two winters, we held snowboard camps in Sarajevo and Zagreb for children who were affected by the war, in collaboration with Wings of Hope, Snowboard Club Jeti, and acclaimed professional snowboarders like Tina and Mike Basic. **Contact:** [ivo@balkansnet.org](mailto:ivo@balkansnet.org)

## NADA PROJECT

We provided mental health counseling, job referrals, and legal help, and held open houses, forums, and 9/11 related workshops in our community space in Long Island City and a number of nearby community centers. We also produced and regularly updated the Resource Guide, which focused on access to the government services as part of our public education campaign.

**The Health Care Access and Advocacy Collaborative with the New York Immigration Coalition:** Educates and enables people to have greater access to health care. Ivana, a member of our staff, holds **child health clinics every Tuesday** and is available for consultations and information on how to obtain health insurance as part of this program.

**Domestic Violence Project:** Involves a forum, regular workshops and cultural activities. Staff member Krista, who has attended various trainings on domestic violence outreach and awareness, is available for consultations regarding sources and services for victims.

**RACCOON SPACE** Facilitates support groups and provides a safe space for community meetings, joint cultural activities and projects since it was established in December 2000. We aim to empower Balkan expatriate communities throughout the tri-state area and enable them to overcome intimidation, feelings of powerlessness, and polarization. Our Education Outreach Program involves working with local schools to introduce after-school programs for youth.