



## *The Green Exchange*

*The Newsletter of Green Across the World, November 2024*



*“We don’t usually get to go into the woods during lessons, so the lessons were very engaging. I was surprised to discover that there are huge differences between Japan and the US’s history and geography, even though we’re on the same planet! In Vermont, we learned that the way to restore nature is to leave it be with as little human intervention as possible, so I think it would be a good idea to implement this idea for Mt. Daisen as well, with as little human intervention as possible, to prevent the tree lines from getting any lower.” (October 2024).*

### Summary

2024 has been a year full of promise and regeneration for Green Across the World (GATW).

The promise comes with a remarkable effort on the part of GATW’s Board of Directors, under the guidance of Meagan Van Woert, to search for a new Executive Director. After reviewing, vetting and interviewing remarkable candidates from throughout the United States, the Board settled on Kevin Brennan who is introduced below. Kevin brings vast experience and knowledge of international exchange with a strong interest in developing GATW’s connection to African countries.

Regeneration comes in the form of dialogue with our Chinese partners about resuming exchanges during the summer of 2025.

Highly successful exchanges with Tottori Prefecture, Japan, were carried out in April (Tottori) and October (Vermont), with full and selective enrollment of 14 traveling students in each program.

On the periphery, the Vermont State Legislature passed S.30, a bill to create a Sister State Committee for the State of Vermont, Governor Scott signed it in to law in May. This created an advisory working group to establish the structure and standards for a Vermont Sister State Committee. Former Executive Director Peter Lynch serves on this advisory working group.

*The photo pages for this Newsletter offer a bit of retrospection to honor the change in leadership at GATW.*

Message from Peter Lynch, outgoing Executive Director:

Nearly three decades on, I am excited to announce a major transition at GATW with the appointment of Kevin Brennan as Executive Director on October 1<sup>st</sup> 2024. You will learn more about Kevin below.

During the summer of 1995, five high school biology students from Fair Haven Union High School (now Slate Valley Union High School) cobbled together sufficient funds to travel with me to join the field work of The Conservation Agency in Hong Kong. This began a story that brought us into exchange activities with:

- China since 1997. Exchanges began (1997) in Guangdong, China, and were first reciprocated (1998) in Vermont, USA. Our focus shifted from biology to Culture and Environment as it has remained to this day. We are looking to resume with an exchange in Vermont in 2025 following the hiatus caused by the COVID epidemic.
- Japan since 2010. Exchanges between Tottori Prefecture, Japan, and Vermont, USA, became reciprocal in 2013 with a school-based exchange program in Tottori. Our relationship with Tottori deepened over the years resulting in the establishment of a Sister State Agreement between Tottori and Vermont signed by Governors Phil Scott and Shinji Hirai.
- Senegal since 2017. After an exchange in Senegal in February 2017, reciprocity is still getting off the ground. The promise is exceptional and we are determined to realize an established reciprocal exchange program.

Virtual Exchange with Senegal and Bhutan since 2018. Board member extraordinaire, Meagan Van Woert, put a team together to build a virtual platform, Youth Green International, to support virtual youth group exchange and enhance travel exchange experiences. Schools in both Senegal and Bhutan have made fun and exciting connections with Vermont schools through this platform. We are learning how to harness the full potential of the site and look forward to expanding its use.

GATW has built many informal partnerships over the years. Our relationship with Keeping Track goes back to the first Vermont based exchange in 1998. We have connected with the Vermont Agencies of Natural Resources and Commerce & Community Development. Many legislators have guided students through the State House, the Rubenstein School of Environment & Natural Resources at the University of Vermont has hosted students in the field, on the research vessel the Marcelle Melosira, and on campus supporting student research and project presentations. GATW is associated with Tottori Prefecture, Japan, including a Sister Organization Agreement with Tottori International Exchange Foundation, with the Affiliated High School of South China Normal University, and the Ministries of Education in Senegal and Bhutan. Schools, farms, businesses and consultants too numerous to mention here have also engaged with us. I would be remiss not to include an important relatively new partnership with the Vermont Army National Guard to encourage and enhance youth exchange with Senegal where the Guard has a long-standing Sister Relationship with the Senegalese military.

On a personal note, I am incredibly grateful for and humbled by the support from volunteers, professional consultants, donors, and government officials including Governors Phil Scott, James Douglas, Howard Dean and Shinji Hirai, over the years. The New Tudor Foundation, the David Greenewalt Charitable Trust, International Paper Foundation, the Bay & Paul Foundations, the Freeman Foundation, Physician's Computer Company and Chroma Technology have all provided vital support at one time or another. It has been truly a team effort, and that we are thriving 24 years after establishment as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit business is a testament to all of you who have helped put our many exchanges together.

As I retire, GATW is in excellent hands, and the new phase in our journey will tell a story of environmental policy and action embedded in cross-cultural understanding as our students go on to effect meaningful change toward a more peaceful and reasonably prosperous future embedded in natural systems.

With utmost gratitude:



## Introducing Kevin Brennan:

I am pleased to be joining Green Across the World in the role of Executive Director. During the interview process, I was quickly impressed by the work Peter had so clearly done in establishing GATW as a strong exchange organization. I was equally impressed by the work being done by the members of the search committee - all seemed dedicated to making the right kind of choice. I am thankful to have the chance to show that the faith placed in me is deserved.

I come to GATW with experience in teaching for and managing international student mobility programs (study abroad and exchanges) throughout the world, as well as managing in the non-profit realm here in southern Vermont. I come into my new role understanding the desire to see the organization both stabilize (post-pandemic) and grow. I look forward to doing both of these, for the programs that GATW operates, as well as for the business side of GATW.

Please feel free to reach out to me (802.989.4452) if you have any questions, or if you'd like to hear more of my work history.



## Reflections from Robert Reardon, Chairperson of the Board:

The Board of Directors is greatly appreciative of Peter Lynch for all he has done since getting this organization off the ground in 1995. Peter's vision, passion, and energy resulted in GATW evolving and flourishing to become what it is today. His goal of creating impactful opportunities for students and educators to connect from different parts of the world with an environmental focus has been unwavering. Numerous students (ca. 1,700 plus hundreds not directly named in host locations) from around the globe have taken part in this impactful program.

As Peter retires, we are transitioning in our Executive Director leadership. Through a thorough hiring process, which included updating the Executive Director job description, posting the position, interviewing candidates, and engaging in strategic conversations regarding the organization and our candidates, we've selected our new Executive Director. The Board participation in the process was extensive, with many board members involved in one or more phases of the selection process. We were blessed with a wealth of very qualified applicants. We are thrilled to announce Kevin Brennan as the new Executive Director for Green Across the World.

The Board of Directors is looking forward to working with Kevin, as we look to write the next chapter in GATW's book. This is an exciting time as we embark on our long-range plan with a new, talented, experienced, Executive Director. At the same time, we congratulate Peter, with utmost admiration and respect, and wish him nothing but the best as he transitions into retirement.



*The First Five. Students from Fair Haven Union High School in Hong Kong, 1995.*



*Exchanges with China, with our first partner from 1997 to present.*



*With Japan from 2010 to present*



*Bhutan 2014*

*Senegal 2017*

*Working toward Vermont Sister States*



*It has been fun!! And so shall continue....*



*"It was an amazing trip! No complaints whatsoever. I hope you don't change anything in the future!" April 2024*