



# GISCorps Newsletter

GIS Professionals Volunteering for a Better World

May 2009

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## URISA

## GISCorps Partner Agencies

EWB

GSDI

MMEX

UNDP

UNHCR

UNJLC

UNOSAT

iMMAP

Volunteers for Prosperity

## Relief Agency Links

### Relief Web

*global hub for time-critical humanitarian information on Complex Emergencies and Natural Disasters*

## A Message from the Core Committee

The GISCorps volunteers and Core Committee members have been very busy in the past couple of months. Three missions have been completed while six new missions were started. In this issue, you will read the accounts of the completed missions as well as those that are in progress.

We would again like to bring your attention to the new GISCorps website which was launched in September 2008. As part of this launch, we validated our volunteer database and we built some additional back-end tools to help members of the Core Committee find volunteers suitable for deployment on a mission. (If you have not yet updated your record, you can still do so by accessing your profile from [here](#). If you need assistance regarding your login information, send an email to [info@giscorps.org](mailto:info@giscorps.org).)

These two activities will prove most beneficial in the recruitment for one of our latest endeavors. We have launched a K-12/4H initiative that we hope to see many of our volunteers engaged in a mission supporting the requests of the K-12 or 4H communities. This gives our volunteers the opportunity to instill in the younger generation an appreciation for our world and how spatial technologies can contribute to making a better world for everyone. We ask all of you to assist us with this activity by spreading this information to any K-12 or 4H communities you think could use the assistance of GISCorps.

GISCorps Core Committee,

Dianne Haley, Ingrid Bruce, Mark Salling, Shoreh Elhami, Allen Ibaugh

P.S. Please email [info@giscorps.org](mailto:info@giscorps.org) if you want to be removed from this list.

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## Deployment and Partnership News

### Completed Missions:

- **Mission with Broadmoor Improvement Association (BIA) - New Orleans:** In November 2008, GISCorps received a request for a GIS instructor from [Broadmoor Improvement Association](#) (BIA). They asked that the volunteer would go on-site (in New Orleans) and train three of their employees on the use of the advanced use of ArcGIS software. Kathleen Coverick, Urban Planning Fellow at BIA, noted that though the BIA had purchased the software, the staff had only very basic knowledge of its usage and the training was intended to make GIS

## Data/Information Links

### Earthwatch Institute

*Earthwatch Institute is an international non-profit organization that brings science to life for people concerned about the Earth's future.*

### Service at Sea

*Service at Sea is a ship-based technology assistance program that will begin a circumnavigation of the earth in August, 2007, with a goal to assist conservation organizations who are using GIS technology to meet goals of their communities.*

### Society for Conservation GIS

*A non-profit organization supporting individuals using GIS and science for the conservation of natural resources and cultural heritage*

## GISCorps Core Committee

Dianne Haley, Chair  
Ingrid Bruce, Vice Chair  
Shoreh Elhami, Co-founder  
Mark Salling  
Allen Ibaugh

## Contact Us

<http://www.giscorps.org>

Email: [info@giscorps.org](mailto:info@giscorps.org)

a much more powerful tool for helping the organization meet the needs of a community hard hit by the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Read more about the project in [here](#).

- **Mission with Engineers without Borders: [NYU: Poly](#) - Dominican Republic:** In February 2009, we received a request for volunteers from Lonna Gordon, a Project Manager at Polytechnic Institute of NYU ([NYU: Poly](#)). She asked if our volunteers could teach at their upcoming workshop to cover the basics of Google Earth to 15-25 of their students. The objective was to teach them how to plot NGO water projects' locations in the Dominican Republic and then further populating them with associated information. Read more about the project in [here](#).

## Missions in Progress:

- **Mission with [HumaniNet](#) – Oregon, USA:** In March 2009, HumaniNet, a non-profit organization located in Portland, Oregon, requested the assistance of GISCorps volunteers with expertise and interest in disaster preparedness. HumaniNet was asked by the Director of Emergency Management of Multnomah County, in Portland, Oregon, to support an upcoming disaster response exercise, Cascadia Peril, with an online map-based information capability. Following recruitment, three volunteers were identified. They are: Michael Price, from Mount Vernon, WA, Mary Meade, from Milton, FL, and Paul Trudt, from Fairview Heights, IL. The HumaniNet – GISCorps team developed a new workflow and mapping process using Google Earth, building on the results of a simulation exercise in Thailand in 2008. The same team of GISCorps volunteers will also conduct a related research project under the direction of the Disaster Response Subcommittee (DRS) of GISCorps. More details and information about this project will be posted shortly.
- **Mission with [Fuquay-Varina Rotary Club](#) – Panama:** The Fuquay-Varina Rotary (FVR) club is interested in seeking GISCorps volunteers' assistance to develop an online questionnaire for the volunteers who will be conducting a survey in poor neighborhoods of Panama. The objective is to locate and collect detailed information about the staggering number of orphans in Panama City and beyond. The online questionnaire will eventually enable FVR to geo-locate those who will be surveyed. Two volunteers have been deployed to this mission. Jill Hume, a GIS Analyst for the Alberta Energy Resources Conservation Board and Steve Tsuida, a graphic designer and web developer with Kyros both in Calgary, Canada.
- **Mission with [South Luangwa Conservation Society](#) – Zambia:** In March 2009, GISCorps received a request from South Luangwa Conservation Society, a NGO in Mfuwe, Zambia for a GIS Specialist to analyze their historic data and conduct trend analysis and also assist the NGO with their GIS needs on an ongoing basis. The recruitment resulted in deploying Lisa Matthies, a GIS and Geography Instructor at Erie Community College in Williamsville, NY. She will support SLCS in both capacities; analysis of their historic data as well as providing ongoing GIS support.
- **Mission with [Ministry of Tourism](#) – Mozambique:** In March 2009, a request for a remote sensing specialist came to GISCorps. The Ministry of Tourism has several Quick Bird imageries of Chimanimani National Reserve from 2005 and 2008 and is interested in having the volunteer conduct a change detection to identify changes in land use pattern. This is expected to help the reserve management team to locate the areas

where more attention is required to control illegal activities currently occurring in the Reserve (e.g. gold panning). Stephanie Lassieur, a remote sensing specialist with the NATO Command Control Consulting Agency in the Hague (Netherlands) has been recruited for this mission.

- **A new K-12 Project in Chattanooga, TN:** In February 2009, the UT-TSU Extension office in Chattanooga, TN requested a GISCorps volunteer to help them install the ArcView software onto their new computers and facilitate group sessions on registering waypoints, downloading it into the computers, and creating printable maps for display. Andrew Carroll, the GIS Manager at ARCS, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, was selected for this project.
- **Global Spatial Data Infrastructure (GSDI) Small Grants Program's 2008-2009 Projects:** GISCorps first participated in the review of 2005/2006 Small Grants projects in 2005 and most recently has participated in the 2008/2009 projects. The team has reviewed 31 applications – 19 from Africa and six each from Asia and the Americas. The announcement of awards is expected soon and we are investigating the potential role of GISCorps volunteers for a dozen of those proposals. The 2008/2009 efforts are currently spearheaded by Mark Salling, a GISCorps Core Committee member. Read about the 2005/2006 projects [here](#).

Read more about completed projects [here](#).

Read more about projects in progress in [here](#).

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## URISA Announcements

### Upcoming Conferences

- **URISA's GIS in Public Health Conference**  
June 5-8, 2009 - Providence - Early registration discounts!
- **URISA/NENA Addressing Conference**  
August 4-6, 2009 - Providence
- **47th Annual URISA Conference**  
September 29-October 2, 2009 - Anaheim, California
- **GIS in Transit Conference - New Dates**  
November 16-18, 2009 - St Petersburg, FL
- **14th Annual GIS/CAMA Technologies Conference**  
2010 Details Coming Soon!

### What's New

- [2009 URISA Annual Conference Program Details Now Available](#)
- [GIS in Public Health Conference offers Important Topics](#)
- [2009 Exemplary Systems in Government Awards Process Opens](#)
- [2009 URISA Student Paper Competition Opens](#)
- [Nominations Sought for URISA's GIS Hall of Fame](#)
- [Check out the Latest Job Listings](#)

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## Shop for GISCorps Stuff!!

Do you find yourself in need of a new T-shirt, coffee mug, ball cap or tote bag? Do you want to advertise GISCorps and your association with the organization? Well, you are in luck! You can now find various GISCorps items at our online shop at: <http://www.cafepress.com/giscorps>

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## ESRI's 29<sup>th</sup> User Conference, San Diego, July 13-17, 2009

### ESRI 29<sup>th</sup> User Conference, San Diego, CA, July 13-17, 2009

As in the past several years, GISCorps will be present at ESRI's 29<sup>th</sup> User Conference (San Diego, July 13-17, 2009) and involved in a number of activities there.

- This year GISCorps' booth will be located in the Ballroom (next to the Map Gallery). Please come and join us on Monday July 13<sup>th</sup> during Map Gallery hours from 4:30 to 8:30 pm to meet GISCorps volunteers and the Core committee members.
- Our annual meeting will be held on Wednesday July 15<sup>th</sup> from 5:30 to 7:00 pm in room 28-D
- The Core Committee members will give a presentation on 2008/2009 activities on Wednesday July 15<sup>th</sup> from 10:15 to 11:30 am in room 30-C.
- On Wednesday following the presentation, there will be a no-host gathering at:  
Rama A Thai Restaurant  
327 4th Ave  
San Diego, CA 92101  
(619) 501-8424  
[ramarestaurant.com](http://ramarestaurant.com)  
Join us (anytime after 7:30 pm) and meet the other GISCorps volunteers and Core Committee members.

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## 47<sup>th</sup> URISA International Conference

### 47<sup>th</sup> URISA Conference, Anaheim, CA, September 28-October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009

Since 2003, GISCorps has been holding several events at the URISA International Conference. We hope that you can join us in Anaheim, CA (from September 28 to October 2<sup>nd</sup>). This year's events are:

- Wednesday September 30, 4 to 5 PM – Joe Forrest, a GISCorps volunteer who recently traveled to Thailand, will give a presentation. GISCorps Core Committee members will also give an overview on 2007-2008 projects and activities.

- Thursday October 1<sup>st</sup>, 8:30 to 10 AM – GISCorps volunteers are recognized for their service at URISA's Annual Breakfast Award Ceremony.

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## Featured Project

### Teaching GIS to Humanitarian Aid Workers in Thailand

*By Joe Forrest, Geological Consultant, Resource GeoServices LLC, Austin, TX*

This mission was in partnership with Partners Relief Development ([PRAD](#)) and Free Burma Rangers ([FBR](#)). The request was for one GIS instructor to teach an introductory ArcGIS course and also assist PRAD/FBR with database design and application development for two weeks. Joe Forrest, a Geological Consultant with Resource GeoServices LLC in Austin, TX, was selected for this project and spent two weeks in Mae Sot, Thailand. He wrote a wonderful article upon his return, and we encourage you all to read it; the full text of the article can be found [here](#). The following is an edited version of Joe's article.

#### Introduction

My recent GISCorps assignment was to Thailand, where I was involved in training a group of twelve NGO relief workers in the use of ArcGIS 9.3. Goal of the training was to introduce the workers to ArcGIS for use in their efforts to (1) document human rights abuses in Burma, (2) document movements of Internally Displaced Peoples (IDP's) in the country, (3) assist NGO's in establishing logistical and communications networks for providing aid to IDP's, and (4) analyze and assess the effectiveness of relief efforts over time. The training took place in the town of Mae Sot, which is 400 km northwest of Bangkok on the western border of Thailand directly across the Moei River from Burma.

#### City of Mae Sot

Mae Sot is an amalgamation of Thai, Burman, Karen, Chinese and smaller ethnic groups, with a population of around 110,000 people. Being directly on the border, it is a major gateway to Burma via the Moei River Friendship Bridge. The city looks and feels like a frontier boom-town, bustling with people, pickup trucks, motorcycles, scooters and tuk-tuks that speed along dusty, crowded streets. The city also has a gentler side. Many humanitarian aid organizations are headquartered there with their accompanying expatriot and local staffs, and, though remote and wild, there is something almost cosmopolitan about the community. The people are friendly and hospitable and accustomed to foreigners.

#### Travel to Country

After my selection for this assignment I was put in touch with the head of the sponsoring organization and the convener of the workshop. Together we picked mutually acceptable dates for the training, which turned out to be February 2 – February 14, 2009. Various airlines and routes were suggested to me for travel to Thailand, but I was allowed to make a final decision and my own arrangements. Since I live on the east coast of the US, I decided to travel the Atlantic-Europe route rather than Pacific-Asia, as it involved fewer layovers and airline changes. I departed Raleigh-Durham, NC on January 27

and flew directly to London. I departed London on January 28 and flew directly to Bangkok, arriving there on the afternoon of January 29. I spent the night in Bangkok and departed there on the morning of January 30 (Friday), arriving in Mae Sot in the afternoon after a bus ride of about 8 hours. I was able to rest and adjust to jet-lag the next two days (Saturday and Sunday). We began the training on Monday, February 2.



### **Accommodations in Country**

Accommodations in Mae Sot had been made by the sponsoring organization in the Poon Na Gunn Hotel, a 10-minute walk from the training venue. The hotel is new and very comfortable, and I felt very much at home there. The reception area and restaurant are located in a beautiful open-air pavilion at the front of the hotel. The restaurant served an excellent breakfast buffet with both Asian and Western dishes. In addition it was possible to order meals at other times. Each room was equipped with a small refrigerator and bottled drinking water was provided each day. I would rank the hotel accommodations as excellent.

### **Trainee Group**

There were 12 trainees, all male. Some of the trainees were essentially beginners in GIS, while others had been using ArcView 3.3 for several years (The convener of the workshop was quite experienced in ArcView 3.3 and had good knowledge of ArcGIS 9.3). All of the participants had some previous elementary training in ArcGIS 9.3 but limited practical application of the software. Eleven of the trainees were non-native English speakers, while one was an American who spoke typical American English. The convener of the workshop spoke excellent English and served as interpreter; he provided native language interpretation when required, usually when a more complicated concept or function was explained. For most of the workshop extensive interpretation was unnecessary, as the trainees all had some knowledge of English.

### **Training Plan**

Prior to traveling to Thailand I reviewed numerous training texts to use in the workshop. I found none of them particularly good for the group I was to train. Though most of the existing training manuals are quite good for Western GIS users, they are not particularly applicable to the culture and

background of the group I was to train in Thailand. I did finally recommend two texts for my workshop, but simply because they explain much of the basic functionality of ArcGIS, not because the examples and datasets are relevant to Asian users. For example, concepts of geocoding, marketing, selecting a location for a new pizza parlor based on demographics and population, and calculating the quickest route from a fire station to a hospital are not particularly useful for groups that are working in remote jungle locations in which there is no electricity and roads. I therefore tried to devise datasets and exercises that were more applicable to the group's culture, background and applications. **To read the detailed accounts of 12 days of training click [here](#).**



### **Conclusions**

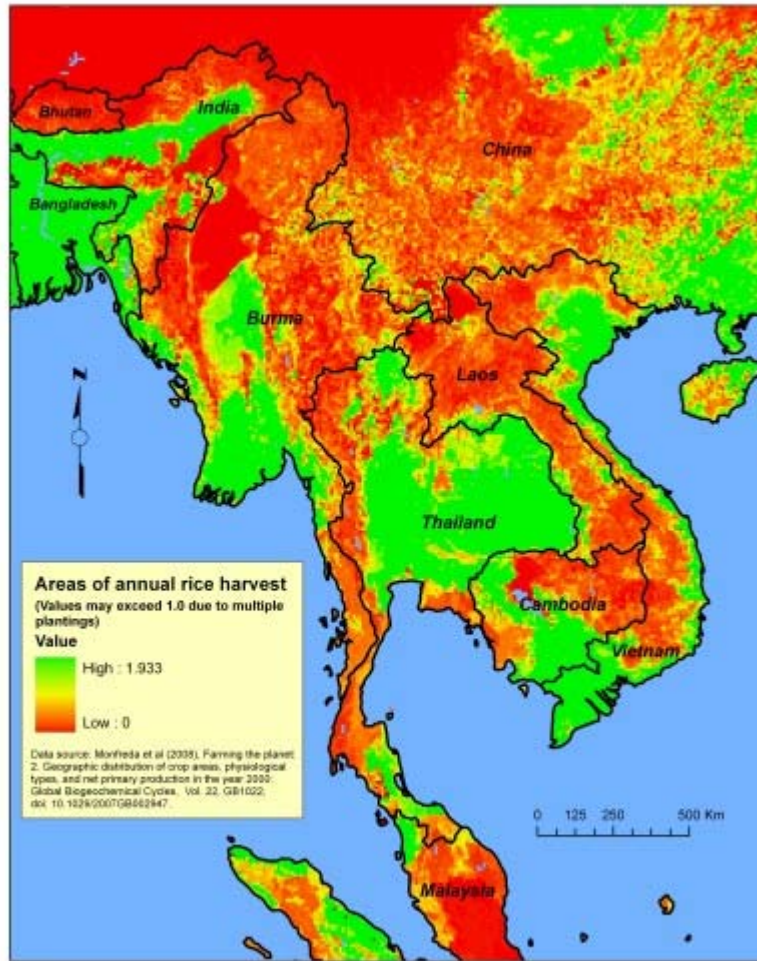
This training workshop in Thailand was an inspiring experience, and I would recommend that anyone who has the opportunity for a GISCorps assignment not hesitate to take it. The head of the sponsoring organization, the convener of the workshop (I cannot praise these two individuals enough for their hospitality and kindness and for the hard work they have put into providing relief for indigenous peoples of Burma) and trainees in Thailand welcomed me with open arms and made me feel like part of the family there and a part of their important efforts. All accommodations and facilities were excellent and made for a comfortable working environment. The trainees treated me with great respect and were appreciative of the training opportunity; they worked hard and diligently and were very interested in the concepts and functions presented. I believe with additional practical experience these trainees have the potential to be very accomplished GIS users and that their goals will be enhanced by ArcGIS technology.

I made a lot of new friends during this assignment and look forward to continuing to work with them and maintaining contact in coming years. The trainees and their organizations are involved in important efforts and I am proud to have contributed a small part to them. I thank GISCorps for providing me with this opportunity and encourage all volunteers to take advantage of future assignments.

*"We are extremely grateful that GISCorps came to train us, a small group of humanitarian workers who are working in a remote area of Burma, which is*

hidden by geopolitical issues. We hope to show the world more effectively by using GIS technology the human rights atrocities that have been happening in Burma for decades."

**PRAD/FBR Host, Tah Doh Moo**



**Comparison of harvested areas of rice in southeast Asia**

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