

*Our Mission:  
Supporting improved  
educational opportunities for  
the children and youth of the  
isolated Malesia e Madhe  
region of Northern Albania*

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## AAI SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT



The year 2017 has been a year of milestones for one of AAI's alums, Toneta (Durgaj) Olaj. Toneta was born in Ducaj and has two sisters and one brother. With AAI's help, she graduated high school in 2011 and went on to University of Shkodër, not only receiving a bachelors in math, but also a master's degree in math and physics. In 2017, she married another AAI scholarship recipient, Angjelin Olaj, and then accepted a job teaching at the Fran Murriz primary school in Pjetroschan. Angelin is currently employed as the English teacher in Boga, Xhaj and Dedaj. Toneta and Angjelin live in Shkodër. Congratulations Toneta on realizing your dream of teaching math. We are proud of you!

## 2017 VOLUNTEERS

"I found this trip to be an incredible experience." "All of the host families were super kind and welcoming..." "I was able to experience the culture in a very immersive way," "I loved meeting the people and gaining new friendships." These are a few of the responses from volunteers who went to Albania with Steve this summer. Eight high school students and one college student volunteered, spending nearly three weeks in the villages. They were divided into two groups and team-taught conversational English in Vrithe, Boga and Xhaj. In Vrithe, local resident, Bernard Milaj was a huge help. As well as teaching English, they made a long weekend trip to Ulcinj, Montenegro on the Adriatic to swim and be tourists. Steve acted as chaperone, but these students were very responsible, and really didn't need much chaperoning. Steve took all of them on at least one



Albanian Alps Institute  
8600 NW Oak Creek Drive  
Corvallis, OR 97330

Phone: 541-230-1285

Email: [albanianalpsinst@gmail.com](mailto:albanianalpsinst@gmail.com)

Website: [www.albanianalps.org](http://www.albanianalps.org)

long hike, and they made the obligatory climb up Mt. Vilicek near Vrithe. The local kids in both locations kept them so busy that they were often exhausted from volleyball, football, and night hikes. The trip culminated in a gathering of Albanian students in Dedaj complete with cake and ice cream and a wild Jeopardy game. Thank you to all these volunteers for all your hard work and dedication. It's a positive experience for the local Albanian students to hear English spoken and to be able to interact with kids their age. Please see our website for information on volunteering with AAI.



### **Letter from AAI President, Steve Cook**

For the last few years, my trips have followed a pretty consistent pattern, but not 2017, when I had eight high school juniors from Corvallis High School and one Oregon State University student volunteering. I didn't teach any on my own this year but was kept busy facilitating the volunteer classes. We've decided to change our high school scholarship program to focus more on merit, based upon state graduation exams, and will continue with our current successful programs - small supplies/equipment, lending libraries, kindergartens and English language instruction. We will also continue to support qualifying university students.

We are excited to hire Vitore Leshaj as an art teacher in Boga and Xhaj. She will also manage the library books in Boga. And since the state only offers English language classes one day each week in Boga and Xhaj, we are now sending our English teacher, Aleks Vulaj to those schools one day a week to supplement the state program. Next year we will put on another Career Day which has proven to have much interest from the students.

Again a big thank you to all of you who continue to support our organization. The students in these small villages benefit so greatly from your generosity.



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