

FS Direct



Direct Communication to Foreign Service Employees and Family Members

Published by the Family Liaison Office, Department of State

July 2004

What's Inside

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

[PACKING OUT IS HARD TO DO...](#)

NOT-TO-BE-MISSED INFORMATION

[FOOD IN UAB](#)

[ONLINE LANGUAGE COURSES](#)

[NEW AND IMPROVED CONSULAR INTERNET SERVICES](#)

[LINKS AND TIPS FOR WASHINGTON, DC AREA](#)

[ETHICS WEBSITE](#)

FAMILY MEMBER EMPLOYMENT

[CREDENTIAL EVALUATION](#)

[STRATEGIC NETWORKING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM](#)

EDUCATION AND YOUTH

[COLLEGE APPLICATIONS PROCESS](#)

[SAVING FOR COLLEGE](#)

[FSYF ANNUAL WELCOME-BACK PICNIC](#)

[TRAVELING WITH BABY](#)

SUPPORT SERVICES

[PRIVATE INSURANCE COVERAGE](#)

Click Your Way to FLO Resources

FLO Homepage on the Intranet

<http://hrweb.hr.state.gov/flo/index.html>

FLO Homepage on the Internet

<http://www.state.gov/m/dqhr/flo>

Email FLO – flo@state.gov



EMPLOYMENT

[The Network](#), the monthly FLO newsletter highlighting the Washington, D.C. job search.



INFORMATION & RESOURCES

[Returning to Washington](#) offers links to area reentry resources.



FS FAMILY MEMBERS

[Training opportunities](#) for Foreign Service family members.



FS DIRECT SUBSCRIPTIONS

To subscribe, please use the following links:

Internet: <http://www.state.gov/m/dqhr/flo/c9156.htm>

Intranet: <http://hrweb.hr.state.gov/FLO/FLOSubscription.html>

Via AAFSW: Visit the FLO area of the AAFSW web site at <http://www.aafsw.org> and click on FLO newsletters.

FS Direct is also available on the FLO Internet web site at <http://www.state.gov/m/dqhr/flo/rsrscs/pubs/c5709.htm>

Notes from the Field

Featuring articles submitted by Foreign Service Officers or their family members serving at posts abroad. Please submit your article to the FLO Publications Coordinator at ayerstdm@state.gov.

PACKING OUT IS HARD TO DO...

Adapted by Marlene Nice, former CLO in Montevideo

Please sing along. You know the tune...

*Don't take my plates away from me,
My pots and pans, my cutlery
Got more entertaining to do,
And packing makes it hard to do....*

*Remember when we first arrived
It took so long to get the house just right.
Now I can't wait to start anew,
But packing up is hard to do*

*They say that packing up is hard to do
I already knew, that this was true
But now the tour is at end
And pretty soon I know that we'll be moving in
again.*

*I don't know if I sent it right
Is Barbie on the cruise or on the flight?
I hope my shoes arrive in twos,
PACKING OUT IS HARD TO DO...*



Not-to-be-Missed Information

UPDATE ON FOOD IN UAB AND HHE: REVISED POLICY GUIDANCE FROM FDA

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has revised its policy guidance for prior notice of foodstuffs in shipments, alleviating a concern about in-bound household effects. FDA and Customs agents have been advised to exercise enforcement discretion until the final rule for food imports is published. The revised rule will exempt food imported for non-commercial purposes where the shipper is an individual.

The Bioterrorism Act of 2002 required that the FDA receive prior notice of food imported into the United States beginning December 12, 2003. As initially adopted, the regulation prohibited employees from shipping foodstuffs back to the United States in unaccompanied baggage or household effects shipments. As noted in refetl, the FDA planned to publish changes to exempt personal effects by June 2004 and agreed that the

regulations would not be enforced for personal effects shipment (UAB and HHE) until August 2004. Those changes are outlined below.

The FDA revised the compliance policy guidance (CPG) for prior notice of foodstuffs in Household Effects on June 24. FDA and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) will exercise enforcement discretion until the final rule for foods imported or offered for import for non-commercial purposes is issued. The CPG explains that a “non-commercial purpose” generally exists when the food is purchased or otherwise acquired by an individual for non-business purposes and the shipper is an individual (i.e., the individual delivers the food to a post office or common carrier for delivery to self, family member, or friend for non-business purposes, i.e., not for sale, resale, barter, business use, or commercial use).

The revised CPG includes examples of foods imported or offered for import that may be covered by this non-commercial category, including:

- * Food in household goods, including military, civilian, governmental agency, and diplomatic transfers;
- * Food purchased by a traveler and mailed or shipped to the traveler's U.S. address by the traveler;
- * Gifts purchased at a commercial establishment and shipped by the purchaser, not the commercial establishment.

The revised guidance also clarifies that an individual is a sole human being, not a corporation, and clarifies the difference between a shipper and a carrier. This revised guidance applies to non-commercial shipments with non-commercial shippers, irrespective of the carrier, which could be a foreign mail service, a courier, or a common carrier.

You may find a copy of the revised CPG at the following links:

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~news/whatsnew.html> (top right);

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fsbtact.html> (in the red box at the top, but also under Prior Notice section down below - highlighted with REVISED June 24, 2004.);

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~pn/pnview.html> (in left column, with updated icon)

While these regulations have been eased, please keep in mind that other restrictions on importing foodstuffs to the US remain. Before you ship items back to the US, you should review the Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) pamphlet “Know Before You Go” at http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/leavingarrivinginUS/vacation/know_beforeu_go.xml and “Travelers Tips” from APHIS (<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/travel/usdatips.html>) which provide valuable information on what items are restricted.



FSI'S EXPRESS ONLINE LANGUAGE FAMILIARIZATION COURSES

The Foreign Service Institute's **Express Online Language Courses** provide basic familiarization with a foreign language and culture. Lessons are derived from situations likely to be encountered overseas in a particular locale. The training prepares the learner to get things done despite limited linguistic ability, by making use of essential linguistic and cultural knowledge. The course consists of a CD-ROM that is sent to the learner, plus interactive online mentoring and assessment. Communication between

students and mentor is supplemented with an online bulletin board. Access to the bulletin board is through a logon to the online FSI Learn Center, obtained upon enrolment in the course. The bulletin board may be accessed at home or work. Mentoring takes place privately and/or with the group. Participants are expected to spend six to eight hours weekly in study. Participants who complete the course learn to read the simple texts and engage in elementary every-day interaction. Part one of a two-part course.

Audience:

Department of State employees, Marine Security Guards, their Eligible Family Members, and personnel from other Executive branch agencies.

Prerequisite:

Basic familiarity with Windows environment. Access to OpenNetPlus or the Internet with Internet Explorer V.5.5 or later.

Enrollment:

Distance language learning courses are open to U.S. Government employees involved in the conduct of foreign affairs with a job, career, or mission-related need for training and their Eligible Family Members (EFMs) who are 18 years or older. Department of State employees need approval from their supervisor and Human Resources Officer (HRO) or Administrative Management Officer (AMO) at post. State employees assigned to Washington can ask their Career Development Officer (CDO) to enroll them. State Eligible Family Members must be approved by the sponsor's CDO; supervisor should be listed as "Elizabeth G. Nolte," the Distance Learning Coordinator for FSI. Department of State employees and their EFMs can register via the online DS-755 located on the specific course description page or by submitting [DS-755](#) via fax to the FSI Registrar at 703-302-7152. Non-Department of State employees and their EFMs must submit a [SF-182](#) (or a 1556 for DoD personnel), which may be faxed to the aforementioned number.

Courses Offered:

For a complete listing of FSI's Express Language Familiarization courses visit this link: <http://fsi.state.gov/courses/default.asp?Heading=Express%20Online%20Language%20Familiarization>. **Note:** Participants need to dedicate six to eight hours a week to course work.



NEW AND IMPROVED CONSULAR INTERNET SERVICES

The **Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs** has improved the information and services available on the Consular Internet website at <http://travel.state.gov>. The website has been redesigned to be more user-friendly and improved in appearance and functionality. Visitors to <http://travel.state.gov> will find that improved organization and navigational tools facilitate the ability to find information more quickly and accurately.

In addition to the redesign of the website, the Bureau of Consular Affairs is introducing the **Internet-Based Registration System (IBRS)**. The Internet-Based Registration System will enable U.S. citizens to register themselves and fellow travelers, itineraries, and emergency contact information through the Internet. The system includes the creation of country-specific listservs that registrants can join to receive, via email, updates to Consular Information Sheets, Public Announcements, and Travel Warnings specific to the countries of their choosing.

All U.S. citizens traveling or resident abroad will have the ability to register under two separate registration categories: short-term or long-term. Short-term registration is for those travelers who will be on temporary visits to a country or countries. Long-term registration is for those travelers who are resident in a foreign country and members of their household, or persons making frequent or extended trips to a country or countries. Groups and organizations may also establish accounts to register travelers. For more information, please visit <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs>.

The Department of State uses information collected only to inform and assist Americans traveling or residing in foreign countries. All personal information received by our overseas embassies and consulates pursuant to the registration process, whether in person or otherwise, is safeguarded against unauthorized disclosure by the Privacy Act of 1974. The personal information obtained in the registration process is used only to provide emergency services or routine information to individual American citizens.

The improved website design and the Internet-Based Registration System are part of a continuing effort by the Bureau of Consular Affairs to better serve U.S. citizens and international travelers. Consular Affairs continues to provide up-to-date information and utilize current technologies to expand existing services to the traveling and resident abroad U.S. citizen public.



LINKS AND TIPS FOR RETURNING TO THE WASHINGTON, DC AREA

The Overseas Briefing Center provides a wealth of reentry information on a variety of topics. Visit the [OBC Internet site](#) or email the OBC at FSIOBCinfoCenter@state.gov for specific information you may be looking for on:

- **Housing:** Apartment Shopper's Guide to Virginia, Maryland, and Washington DC; Hotels for short-term training at NFATC; Short-term housing options when assigned to NFATC training; Tips on renting and buying housing in the Washington Metropolitan Area; Recent rental listings; Furniture rental; and Lists of real estate agents.
- **Transportation:** Bus and metro information, maps and schedules; Short-term car leasing information; and Automobile purchase information.
- **Living in Washington DC:** Guide books; Washington Consumer Checkbook; Washingtonian magazine; Pet information; Maps; Activities for families in the DC area; and Phone books for the area.
- **Schools:** Basic information on the public and private school systems in the area; Child care options; Summer Camps and Educational Programs (brochures and videos); Miscellaneous School Information (articles on schools, standardized tests, home schooling, financial aid)
- **Youth Information:** AWAL (Around the World in a Lifetime) information on activities and programs for returning youths; Contact information on various organizations that offer programs to help with the adjustment; and Children's Resource Guide to Northern Virginia
- **Career:** Career Transition Center Newsletter and Job Leads; and Referrals to career resource centers
- **Miscellaneous:** AFSA Tax Guide; Organization for stay-at-home parents; Elder care information; and various catalogs for clothing and other goods.

The Family Liaison Office provides additional reentry information, including job-seeking networking for family members returning to the DC area, on the [Internet](#) and [Intranet](#).

Email the FLO staff at flo@state.gov with your questions relating to education and youth issues, job searching in the Washington area (for networking and career management advice), and family support services.

Subscribe to [The Network](#), FLO's publication for helping FS spouses locate employment in the Washington, DC area

The Associates of the [American Foreign Service Worldwide \(AAFSW\)](#) Internet web site also has reentry information with links to preschool information, schools and county programs, organizations for parents, toys stores/book stores/restaurants, libraries, temporary housing, and more, in the greater Washington, DC area.



WHEN YOU AREN'T SURE OF THE ANSWER, GO TO THE ETHICS WEBSITE

The **Ethics Program** website <http://ethics.state.gov/> covers a wide range of topics, many of which a wise employee will want to become acquainted with.

“Choose a Topic” - read key points, summaries, or frequently asked questions about a particular topic or use the links to read significant laws and regulations pertaining to that topic. Topics include:

- Conflicting Financial Interests
- Conflicting Personal or Business Relationships
- Employee Responsibilities Abroad
- Fundraising in a Personal Capacity
- Gifts Between Employees
- Gifts from Outside Sources
- Outside Activities, Generally
 - Participating in Outside Organizations in Official Capacity
 - Participating in Outside Organizations in Personal Capacity
- Political Activities
- Post-employment
 - Seeking Employment
 - Teaching, Speaking, and Writing
- Use of Government Position, Information, Property, and Time

“Financial Disclosure” - read an introduction to public or confidential financial disclosure, select forms, and receive instructions.

“Read the Law” - go directly to a particular law or regulation pertaining to the ethics program.

“Ask a Question” - direct a question to ethics staff.

The website includes some surprises, including a poetry corner and an invitation to contribute to the ethics program by directing your comments, suggestions, and creative works to the site’s webmaster.



CREDENTIAL EVALUATION

A reminder: Applicants must provide verification of their education credentials from the granting institution when applying for federal employment. In many instances, our family members have degrees from foreign universities, which need to be evaluated for educational equivalency. The National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES) is an umbrella organization whose members include over fifteen credential service providers. Details about the organization and its members can be found on the NACES web site www.naces.org. Fees and services vary with each organization. We advise family members to carefully review the sites and services to identify which organization might best fit their needs.



SNAP Strategic Networking Assistance Program

Strategic Networking Assistance Program

The Family Liaison Office's **Strategic Networking Assistance Program (SNAP)** -- the program designed to help spouses identify work opportunities on the local economy, outside the U.S. mission -- is delivering services in **London, Brussels, Warsaw, Cairo, Singapore, Seoul, Mexico City, Almaty, Berlin, Budapest, Frankfurt, Geneva, Pretoria/Cape Town/ Durban/ Johannesburg, San Jose, and San Salvador!**

The number one tool in landing a job is networking. As part of the SNAP initiative, Local Employment Adviser (LEA) positions were funded at each SNAP post. LEAs are primarily responsible for developing a wide-ranging network of contacts and connecting job-searching spouses with these contacts. This service will hopefully eliminate some of the time spouses spend making contacts upon arrival in a new location. LEAs also provide ***culturally-specific job search assistance provided through one-on-one counseling, workshops, and access to published resources.*** Spouses interested in pursuing local economy employment can meet with the LEA at pilot posts to develop an action plan.

State of SNAP Survey - The Family Liaison Office conducted the "[State of SNAP](#)" survey at pilot posts where the Strategic Networking Assistance Program is in effect. Of the 520 employees and spouses from 13 pilot posts who responded, 93% indicated that the SNAP program should be expanded. Beyond EFM job placement, additional benefits to post as a result of an active **SNAP** program included higher post morale.

If you are the spouse of a USG employee located at or relocating to a **SNAP** post, and if you are interested in working on the local economy, contact the Local Employment Adviser (LEA). For LEA contact information, email the Family Liaison Office at flo@state.gov



"GETTING YOURSELF READY FOR THE COLLEGE APPLICATIONS PROCESS"

The Family Liaison Office and the Foreign Service Youth Foundation announces this interactive, experiential workshop for high school juniors and seniors:

When: Saturday, August 28
Time: 9:30 - 12:30 p.m.
Place: Call the Family Liaison Office for details.

Open to Foreign Service teens from all agencies. This session will feature hands on workshops on how to package your activities, volunteer experience and help you to get started on your essays. A nationally known college counselor will help lead the essay workshop portion of the event. Don't miss this opportunity to get some advice tailored just for the Foreign Service youth population! RSVP to FLO at 202-647-2314 or grappoRN@state.gov.



SAVING FOR COLLEGE: THE SOONER YOU START THE BETTER!

A Message from Tom Turner, CFP, Financial Network

College Saving Plan Available through the State Department Federal Credit Union

It's no secret: the cost of college tuition is going to continue to rise. Historically, the rise in college tuitions costs has outpaced inflation. And between everyday expenses, mortgage and car payments, childcare bills and trying to save for your own retirement, do you ever wonder where you'll get the money to send your child to college?

Being prepared for the soaring costs of higher education means getting started early and exploring new investment opportunities. The sooner you start to save, the better off you'll be when that tuition bill's due! One of the newest options for saving is the 529 college savings plans and it has many attractive features, such as:

- A 529 College Savings Plan is an investment specifically designed to help you save for college. A 529 plan offers you several important benefits.
- Earnings can grow tax free from federal tax.

- A number of states allow a deduction from state taxes for all or part of a contribution to an in-state 529 plan.
- Withdrawals for qualified higher education expenses are free from federal tax.¹
- There are no income limits. You can contribute no matter how much you earn.
- You can contribute until your account value reaches \$250,000.²
- You can contribute up to \$11,000 (\$22,000 for married couples) each year without gift-tax consequences, and under a special election, you can contribute up to \$55,000 (\$110,000 for married couples) at one time by accelerating five years' worth of investments.
- You maintain control of the assets.
- You can open a 529 plan for anyone – your child, grandchild, spouse, or even yourself.
- The plans are sponsored by states – and all 50 states now sponsor 529 plans – but you can use a plan to pay higher education expenses at any accredited college, not just schools in the state that sponsors your plan.
- Expenses covered by the plan assets can include tuition, room and board, books and supplies.
- And if your beneficiary doesn't end up going to college, you can select a new beneficiary who is a member of the previous beneficiary's family without tax or penalty. Or you can withdraw the funds, but you will have to pay federal income tax and may face a 10% federal tax penalty on the earnings.

For more information on the 529 Plan or other college savings options, call to schedule your *no cost or obligation appointment*. We're here to help you develop a personalized college funding program that's tailored to your lifestyle and other financial goals. Call **866.CUSERVE** or visit **www.sdfcu.cuserve.org** to get started today!

¹ This tax benefit is effective through 2010 unless extended by Congress. ² Once the account value reaches \$250,000 through investments or growth, no more contributions will be accepted. Registered representatives of and investments offered through Financial Network Investment Corporation. Member SIPC. Program made available through UniTrust Financial Services located at 4875 Eisenhower Ave, Alexandria, VA 22304. UniTrust Financial/Credit Union and Financial Network are not affiliated. Investments are NOT NCUA/NCUSIF INSURED, NOT A DEPOSIT, NOT INSURED BY ANY FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AGENCY, NO CREDIT UNION GUARANTEE, MAY LOSE VALUE.



FSYF ANNUAL WELCOME-BACK PICNIC

The **Annual Welcome Back Potluck Picnic** sponsored by the Foreign Service Youth Foundation is an excellent way to link up with other Foreign Service kids and families. It will be held on **Sunday, September 19, 2004** from 4:00 pm to 6:30 pm. Please contact FSYF for location.

FSYF will provide hotdogs and drinks. Please bring a dish to share with six people. A speaker will discuss transitioning to the DC area with kids. Youth Program Directors will offer activities for teens and pre-teens. Activities will be offered for the younger children.

Please take this opportunity to connect with old and new Foreign Service friends and to tell returnees about the current Washington scene. Parents can learn about the re-entry adjustment process and what the FSYF youth development programs offer your family. If you know of any Newcomers or Returning Foreign Service families in the area, please invite them to join in the fun.

Reservations are requested by Wednesday, September 15. Please RSVP to Melanie Newhouse at 301-404-6655 or e-mail fsyf@fsyf.org.



TRAVELING WITH BABY

ExpatsExchange.com's recent review of the new book, [*Global Baby: Tips to Keep You and Your Infant Smiling Before, During, and After Your International Move*](#), predicts "this book may quickly become the expat parent's 'bible' for those moving and living abroad with an infant."

Are you or anyone you know preparing to move to a new country with an infant? *Global Baby* answers the following questions and more:

- Which items parents absolutely must put in their carry-on bag for the trip? Hint: not everything is for baby.
- The advantages of raising a bilingual child?
- That saying "My baby's shots are up to date," will not mean anything to a doctor in another country because immunization recommendations and requirements differ from country to country?

The book [*Global Baby: Tips to Keep You and Your Infant Smiling Before, During, and After Your International Move*](#) addresses these issues and many more!

To order contact:

Kelly Brennan
Director of Administration
The Interchange Institute
Tel: (617) 566-2227
fax: (617) 277-0889
www.interchangeinstitute.org



PRIVATE INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR SHIPPING PERSONAL PROPERTY

Transfer season is once again upon us and we remind employees that they should insure their private personal property against possible loss or damage. Personal property of employees transferred on official orders is covered by the Military Personnel and Civilian Employees' Claims Act of 1964 (hereby stated as the Claims Act), however, under 6 FAM, the maximum recovery allowed in most cases is the depreciated value of the lost or damaged item. Cognizant of this limitation, the Department strongly recommends that employees carry their own private insurance.

