U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

# STATE

JANUARY 2010

MAGAZINE

# Burma's Perplexing Beauty

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## On the Cover

Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon glows in the early morning light.
*Photograph by Corbis*

# Resolutions for a Fruitful New Year

2010 is here. For those of you who are still considering your resolutions for the new year, let me offer a few that can help further your—and your staff's—career development in the months ahead.

**Resolution #1: Learn New Skills**

We are fortunate to have access to the Foreign Service Institute, a premier training center for members of the U.S. foreign affairs community. FSI offers 700 classroom courses, more than 180 custom-developed distance learning products and more than 3,000 commercial distance learning courses that are available worldwide through the Internet for those with a job-related need for such training.

Resolve this year to take advantage of this unique resource. Lifelong learning is an excellent way to update and expand your skills, meet new people and establish valuable relationships.

One great way to stay fresh and current on technology is to resolve to master one new IT application this year. Learn SharePoint or expand your ability to use Excel. Of course, if you are a mid-level or senior-level employee, you also will want to keep up with your mandatory leadership and management training.

For the latest course information, please visit http://fsi.state.gov/admin/reg/default.asp?Cat=Course%20Catalog&Top=%20Course%20Listings. You can also request a catalog of FSI courses about language, leadership, area studies or information technology by contacting the FSI Office of the Registrar at (703) 302-7144/7137.

The Department of State also participates in a range of leadership development and fellowship programs, and advanced academic training opportunities. I look forward to telling you more about those opportunities in future columns. In the meantime, you can learn more by accessing the following site: http://hrweb.hr.state.gov/prd/hrweb/cda/upload/fs_cs-longterm-training.pdf.

**Resolution #2: Participate in a Mentoring Program**

Ask senior officials in the Department about their career progression and they likely will tell you that a mentor(s) played a key role. Certainly throughout my own career as an educator and as a Foreign Service Officer, I have personally benefited from mentoring—as both a protégée and a mentor. HR has a formal mentoring program, as well as a situational mentoring program, to help you build mentoring relationships (see http://hrweb.hr.state.gov/prd/hrweb/mentoring/), but you also can set up your own more informal arrangements. With 27 percent of Foreign Service Generalists, 30 percent of Foreign Service Specialists and 36 percent of Civil Service employees having less than five years of experience at State, your participation in mentoring is a meaningful way to give back to the Department and to your colleagues.

**Resolution #3: Take Work Requirements and Evaluations Seriously**

Fair, accurate and timely work requirement statements and performance evaluations are critical management tools for both supervisors and employees in the Civil Service, Foreign Service and Locally Employed Staff. Late evaluations convey the impression that an employee's work is not valued. They also delay often well-deserved promotions and within-grade increases, undermining employee motivation. The e-Performance system we rolled out last year should ultimately make the process of preparing evaluations easier, but do allow more time and take advantage of training tools available online and through the HR Help Desk, to familiarize yourself with how e-Performance works.

Throughout the year, it is imperative that we provide meaningful counseling to let employees know how well their work requirements are being met and address areas for improvement. The sessions are also a good time to discuss specific training and career development opportunities.

**Resolution #4: Encourage Civil Service Employees to Use Individual Development Plans**

The Individual Development Plan, DS Form 1922, provides a systematic approach for employee development. It provides an opportunity for an employee and his/her supervisor to focus on the employee's career goals and to identify collaboratively the developmental assignments and training that will help the employee to achieve those goals. You can find out more about IDPs by visiting the Career Development Resource Center and exploring its numerous resources. The CDRC is located in Room L321, SA-1 (Columbia Plaza). To make an appointment for one-on-one career counseling, call (202) 663-3042.

Thank you for making 2009 such a productive year for the Department—and let me wish you and your families a happy, healthy, and successful 2010. ■

Nancy J. Powell
Director General

# News

Ambassador Donald S. Beyer Jr. and Megan Beyer stand in the embassy vegetable garden.

## Bern Garden Puts Food on the Table

Taking her inspiration from First Lady Michelle Obama's inauguration of a vegetable garden at the White House, Megan Beyer, wife of U.S. Ambassador to Switzerland Donald S. Beyer Jr., has done likewise at post.

In April, Mrs. Beyer attended the first of a series of women's luncheons hosted by the First Lady at the White House, an event where the salad greens came from the Obama garden.

"From the congressional spouse to the corporate professional to the human rights advocate, everyone [at the luncheon] agreed that growing local fresh food makes good sense—not to mention a tasty salad," she said.

On arrival in Switzerland, she said, her thoughts turned to "ground-level diplomacy," and the chef at the ambassador's residence, David Lindsay, was thinking likewise. Lindsay had been a chef at Chez Panisse, organic food guru Alice Waters' San Francisco restaurant that uses all locally grown ingredients. Shortly thereafter, the home's flower garden was a place where carrots and kale flourished.

Lindsay later visited the White House with the Beyers to gain the advice of its assistant chef and garden manager, and a program involving local school children was launched at the residence garden.

In September, the post's "From the Garden to the Table" series taught Swiss, Indonesian, Algerian, American and Mexican youths about planting, harvesting and cooking. The program will continue, and there will be events at the residence for farmers and vendors at the Bern Farmer's Market.

Meals for visiting diplomats at the residence incorporate many of the garden vegetables—and afterward, diners get a tour of the garden. That, plus the educational programs, Mrs. Beyer said, help dispel the view that Americans are slaves to fast food or lack the patience to harvest a garden at just the right time.

She noted that those concepts go away when visitors tiptoe through carefully protected rows of yellow beans.

Embassy officer Dara Canzano, left, responds to questions about Georgetown University.

# Ankara Volunteers Host Unique College Fair

American high school students often attend college fairs, but Foreign Service youths of the same age often miss out when they are overseas. Parents of students at Ankara High School, formerly known as the George C. Marshall School, filled that void in October with a college fair based on volunteer college representatives from the Ankara community.

At the fair, 40 alumni of 67 North American colleges and universities represented the institutions where they had studied. Their involvement also gave Turkish students information about schools that are not represented among the institutions typically found at Ankara college fairs. In fiscal year 2008, the U.S. Mission in Turkey issued more than 16,000 student or exchange visitor visas—one of the highest numbers in Europe.

The volunteer alumni came from nearly every U.S. mission section and agency and from among the Turkish and U.S. graduates living in Ankara. One parent expressed surprise at the number of representatives from first-rate institutions, given the city's relatively small expatriate community. Each representative researched the latest developments at his or her school and handed out admissions materials. Brochures, items with schools' logos and even laptops with links to the schools' Web sites were featured at the representatives' tables.

The event drew high school students from all English-language secondary schools in Ankara, including those attended by embassy dependents. A representative of the College Board, whose visit was sponsored by the Office of Overseas Schools, gave a presentation on the college admissions process.

The fair included the Fulbright Program's student advisor and representatives from the Education USA program and the embassy's consular section. Each outlined their organization's services regarding U.S. educational opportunities, including the new Opportunity Grants program. The fair also publicized such services as the Turkish-American Association's Testing Center and its courses in SAT preparation and language instruction.

# LE STAFF MEMBERS ASSIST EMBASSY BAGHDAD

Since 2005, the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs has offered Locally Employed Staff at posts worldwide the opportunity to serve temporary duty tours in Iraq. In the past year, 11 LE Staff from the U.S. Embassy in Caracas, Venezuela, answered that call, and U.S. Ambassador to Venezuela Patrick Duddy recently thanked them.

Returning staff member Italo Maltese called his experience in Iraq "an unforgettable way to serve the United States." During their tours, Maltese and other LE Staff from Embassy Caracas conducted warehouse inventories within the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad's property section. The financial management, general services and human resources offices also benefitted from the Embassy Caracas team. In Baghdad, Venezuelan LE Staff worked alongside their counterparts from more than 45 countries.

"It was a great opportunity to share my knowledge with my Iraqi colleagues," said Maikol Genovese, who served nine months in human resources.

Displaying a panoramic photo of Baghdad are, from left, Ramiro Guerrero, Ricardo Wildman, Bruzual Amyr, Italo Maltese, Ambassador Duddy, Rodolfo Valentinez, Alejandro Duque, Julio Gil and Hector DeSosa. Not shown are Carlos Amaya, Maikol Genovese and Carlos Ramirez.

# Defense Secretary Receives Marshall Award

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in October praised Defense Secretary Robert Gates for his contributions to public life at a ceremony in the Ben Franklin Room commemorating the 50th anniversary of the death of former Secretary of State George C. Marshall. Gates received the Marshall Award of the George C. Marshall Foundation.

Clinton lauded Gates' support for the Department and his "Marshall view of the world."

Marshall is perhaps best known for the Marshall Plan to rebuild postwar Europe, which Clinton called a model effort that today would cost more than $500 billion.

Gates said Marshall was "a personal hero" known for unshakable loyalty and frankness. Marshall, he said, saved Berlin from collapse, advocated the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and got the departments of State and Defense to work together.

Under Secretary for Management Patrick M. Kennedy noted that Marshall, besides heading the departments of Defense and State, was also Army chief of staff during World War II. Marshall "embodied all the elements of national power," he said.

At the Marshall Award ceremony, Defense Secretary Gates tells attendees of his respect for the man for whom the award is named.

# Renovated Operations Center Opens

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton cut the ribbon in October to open a renovated Operations Center, a facility she said had gone from being staffed by one Foreign Service officer and a phone in 1961 to becoming an around-the-clock, worldwide "nerve center for crisis management."

The renovation has enabled the Operations Center's Watch to assume the after-hours Consular Affairs Watch function, which had previously been provided by contract personnel.

"I'm very grateful for what you do," Secretary Clinton told the celebration's attendees, which also included staff from elsewhere in the Executive Secretariat, the Under Secretary for Management's office and the bureaus of Administration and Consular Affairs.

At the Operations Center's ribbon-cutting, Secretary of State Clinton stands alongside Hank Aldag, branch chief of the Assignment and Utilization Division of the Real Property Management Office.

# Consular Section Gets The Ramadan Spirit

In Algeria, which is 99 percent Muslim, the month of Ramadan is especially important. To recognize the month's spirit of giving, the consular section of the U.S. Embassy in Algiers bought small gifts for women and children undergoing treatment at cancer clinics and school supplies for children at a local orphanage, where the visitors also donated books provided by the public diplomacy section. During Ramadan, the section devoted a morning each week for three weeks to these visits.

Nabila Mouterfi, one of the five Locally Employed Staff involved, took the lead in finding possible locations. Three other staff members selected gifts.

Besides being a post outreach effort, the project helped the consular section promote team building, showed LE Staff that their religious and cultural beliefs were respected by their American co-workers and gave the LE Staff a chance to incorporate their feelings into their embassy work.

The first visit was to the Centre Pierre et Marie Curie d'Alger, a government-funded institute that offers free treatment to cancer patients, including children. The volunteers provided motorized cars for the boys, toy cell phones and purses for the girls and storybooks for all. The mothers received gift bags containing perfumed soaps, deodorants, washcloths and other amenities unavailable at the hospital.

Next, the volunteers visited the women's and children's cancer wards at Hopital Salim Zmirli El-Harrach and again distributed toys to the children and gift bags of toiletries to the women. Lastly, they visited SOS Villages d'Enfants, which replaces institutional care for orphans with a family structure where children live in houses with a full-time "house mother," and siblings are kept together. The consular team gave the supplies and books to the director of the village for distribution to each household.

All told, the volunteers distributed about 70 toys, 50 toiletry gift bags and about seven large boxes of notebooks, pencils, crayons, drawing pads and Arabic storybooks. The consular section has since bought two new pedal cars to replace the worn ones in the toy room at the Centre Pierre et Marie Curie d'Alger.

Staff members show off one of the pedal cars they purchased for the Centre Pierre et Marie Curie d'Alger children's cancer ward.


STATE MAGAZINE

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**Deadlines**

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**Environmental Notes**

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SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY INITIATIVE

Please Recycle This Magazine

# Valuing Religious Tolerance

As we begin a new year, it is important to emphasize respectful tolerance about our beliefs. Our attitudes and behaviors reflect our values. Values, in turn, are based on our beliefs—some strongly held, others less so. Often, our most strongly held values are based on religious, ethical and moral convictions and beliefs. Conversely, many Americans make it clear that their values are not supported by any religious beliefs, and in some cases not adhering to a religious belief system is their most strongly held value.

Varying beliefs can be difficult to deal with in the workplace. According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, religious conflict is occurring at an ever-quickening pace. From 1997 to 2008, the total number of complaints filed with the EEOC alleging religion-based discrimination rose from 1,709 to 3,273.

The First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees freedom of religion (or freedom not to have one at all), and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination, including harassment, based on religion and grants employees the right to request that their employer provide a reasonable accommodation to them so that they may observe sincerely held religious beliefs when at work. A reasonable religious accommodation is any adjustment to the work environment that allows an employee to practice his/her religion. However, an employer is not required to provide a requested accommodation that would create an undue hardship. The most common types of religious reasonable accommodation are leave, alterations to work schedules and providing a time/place to pray.

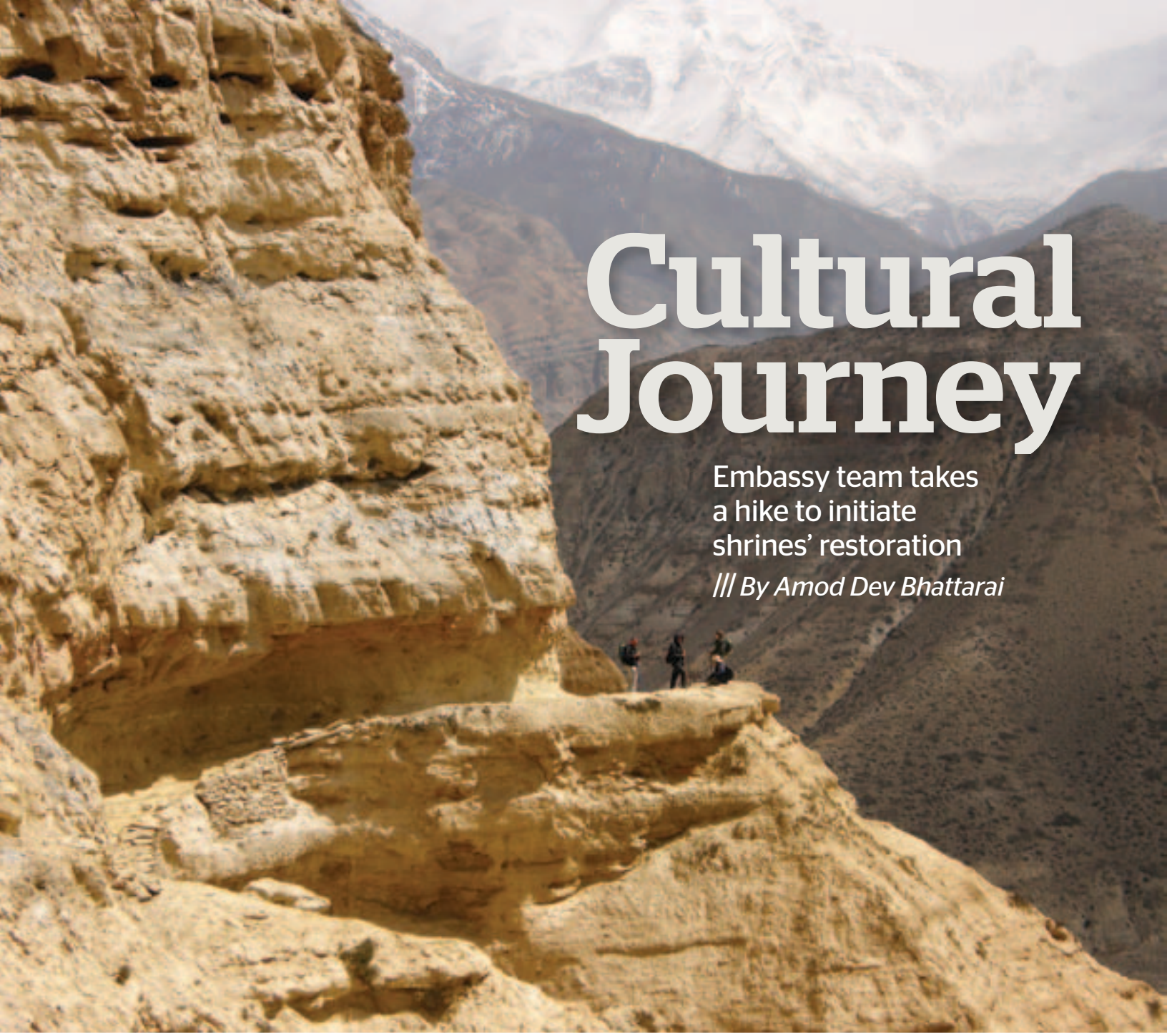
Undue hardship in the context of religious reasonable accommodation means that it would involve more than a *de minimus* cost or hardship for the employer to provide the employee with the requested reasonable accommodation. For example, suppose an employee routinely observes the Jewish High Holidays that typically occur in September and asks for leave for that period of time. This year, however, the President plans to make a two-day stop-over at post during that same timeframe. The Department may deny the requested religious reasonable accommodation by demonstrating that all leave of all personnel has been canceled in order to respond to the demands imposed by the preparations for the President's visit and that permitting this employee to have leave would cause co-workers to have to carry more than their fair share of the increased workload.

In observing their own religious traditions and beliefs, all employees should remember that those beliefs are not necessarily shared by all others in the workplace. Here are some common issues that arise in the context of religious expression in the workplace and the appropriate management response:

- An employee must be permitted to wear religious garb, as long as the wearing of such garb does not unduly interfere with the functioning of the workplace.
- Flexible scheduling, voluntary shift substitutions, job reassignments, modification of grooming requirements, etc., are all routine accommodations based on religion that employees may request of management. Unless the accommodation would pose an undue hardship, the employer must make reasonable efforts to provide the accommodation.
- As a general matter, discussing religion in the workplace is as entitled to constitutional protection as any other form of speech—as long as a reasonable observer would not interpret the expression as government endorsement of religion, and the discussion does not contribute to a hostile work environment based on religion in violation of Title VII.

The right to believe in a supreme higher power, or not to believe, without fear of government restriction or interference has endured as one of the cornerstone freedoms of this country since its inception. As such, the Department employs persons of all faiths, and values all of them for the rich diversity they contribute to our workforce. For more information on religious reasonable accommodation, please visit www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/religion.cfm. ■

John M. Robinson
Office of Civil Rights



# Cultural Journey

## Embassy team takes a hike to initiate shrines' restoration

*/// By Amod Dev Bhattarai*

**Above:** The desolate Mustang landscape encountered on the 12-day trek is dwarfed by the looming Himalayas.

Taking long walks and using the stairs rather than elevators were a few changes that members of our team from the U.S. Embassy in Kathmandu made in preparation for a 12-day trek to Nepal's upper Mustang region, which rests 3,800 meters above sea level and is culturally and archeologically rich. Prior to 1992, the region had been closed to foreigners.

There were five team members: U.S. Ambassador to Nepal Nancy J. Powell, now Director General of the Foreign Service; Public Affairs Officer Mark Larsen; Regional Security Officer Bryan Scruggs; the country representative of the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Transition Initiative, Melissa Rosser; and me, the only Nepali. We visited Mustang in March and April of 2009 to initiate the restoration of ancient Buddhist shrines called chhortens, a project funded by an Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation grant. Besides observing the project, we wanted to study local life and the effects of development in the mountainous region.

### Trek Begins

On March 31, our journey began as the plane took us to the town of Jomsom, 2,700 meters above sea level, while playing hide and seek with clouds and mountains. The fierce wind made it difficult for even the birds to fly. We had heard that roads had reached Jomsom, but were surprised to find the town had ATMs and Internet facilities. Jeeps ran up to Muktinath Temple, from which pilgrims were coming and going. We spent the first night at a hotel to acclimate to the altitude; we'd flown from Pokhara, a town 200 kilometers northwest of Kathmandu that is just 800 meters above sea level.

PHOTOGRAPHS: (ABOVE): BRYAN SCRUGGS; (OPPOSITE PAGE TOP): MARK LARSEN JIGME S. P. BISTA

**Above right:** From a distance, the trekkers look like a silk caravan from older times. **Bottom:** The trekkers were, from left, Mark Larsen, the author, Ambassador Nancy J. Powell, Bryan Scruggs and Melissa Rosser.

The actual trekking started the next day, which was bright and sunny. We started out on horseback along the bank of Kali Gandaki River and after two hours reined our horses and started uphill on foot. On one side, hills soared; on the other, they plunged. As we went north, we passed remote settlements where daily life reflected Tibetan culture.

"The landscape was stunning, yet unforgiving and you quickly developed a profound respect for the inhabitants of Mustang because of their resilience and the great pride they took in preserving their cultural identity," Scruggs said.

Chhortens, also called stupas, are among the most distinctive features of Mustang's landscape. They are Buddhist cultural monuments erected to ward off the spirits found at river confluences, bridges and mountain passes or to commemorate the visit or death of historic figures, lamas or relatives. They range from small votive chhortens to gateway chhortens at the entrance of a village or town.

The chhortens in upper Mustang are in a style found nowhere else in the world. Built with red, orange or black stones found in the villages, they dominate the rugged landscape. Up close, their intricate detail is breathtaking. Because almost all the chhortens in Tibet were destroyed during China's Cultural Revolution, the cultural importance of the upper Mustang chhortens extends well beyond the district's boundaries.

## Unique Shrine

This project focuses on three chhortens in the villages of Ghemi and Tsarang. One of the chhortens in Ghemi is unique for its painted slate panels, similar to those found in the oldest monastery in Mustang. This type of panel is found nowhere else, suggesting that the chhortens date from the same period, the second half of the eighth century. All three were constructed from earth, stone and timber, and have overhanging earthen roofs displaying striking but faded paintings. The structural supports of the chhortens have weakened over the years, threatening collapse.

On the third day, we reached Ghemi, where we participated in a ritual ceremony to initiate the restoration of two chhortens. The lamas started the renovation after worshipping according to Buddhist tradition, reciting mantras from centuries-old scriptures. The incense smoke was so thick it was hard to see anyone's face.

On the way to upper Mustang, we found few trekkers but plenty of pack animals carrying goods. At Lo-Manthang, 3,840 meters above sea level, the villagers warmly received us. We spent two nights at the former king's dilapidated but attractive palace, where mice nibbled at the centuries-old writings. The palace was chilly, desolate and barren because it is not easy to import goods from neighboring Tibet.

Still, we saw that Lo-Manthang was changing. There were satellite dishes on some of the roofs, and people were listening to the radio. Some residents had gained electricity via small hydroelectric projects and solar panels, and motorcycles were traveling the dusty road to Ghemi. The influx of foreign tourists since 1992 had introduced consumerism and led some to question the traditional way of life.

As for the chhortens, once they have been restored and their exterior and interior paintings cleaned, conserved and repainted, they will continue to play an essential cultural role in the lives of the local people. Restoring the chhortens demonstrates U.S. respect for the continuing relevance of the ancient traditions of Mustang's people. ■

*The author is a cultural affairs specialist at the U.S. Embassy in Kathmandu.*

# Offering the Tools

New HR division assists employees with disabilities /// *By Ed Warner*

Patricia Pittarelli addresses a seminar on employees with disabilities as Paul Schafer, head of the Disability Action Group, listens.

The Bureau of Human Resources has reorganized its Employee Relations office to create a Disability and Reasonable Accommodations Division, giving the effort to assist employees with disabilities increased visibility and seven new full-time staff members.

The phrase "reasonable accommodations" derives from a law mandating that federal employees with disabilities be provided the tools, such as screen magnifiers for persons who are blind or have other vision-impairments, needed to do their jobs. The accommodations can also include sign language interpreters, motorized scooters and readers for persons who are blind. Work schedules can be made flexible, too, as long as the employee has a specified arrival and departure time.

Patricia Pittarelli will lead the new division and her eight or so current responsibilities outside of providing reasonable accommodations—such as managing the Department's involvement in the Combined Federal Campaign—will shift to others in the office.

PHOTOGRAPHS: (ABOVE): ED WARNER; (OPPOSITE PAGE): DISABILITY ACTION GROUP

## Congressional Mandate

June Kunsman, HR/ER director, said the reorganization reflects a strategic objective of the office and a congressional directive. Congress mandated that federal agencies establish reasonable accommodation regulations, and the new division will implement these regulations, approved last year by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Pittarelli said the Department has several hundred employees with disabilities and the number is likely to increase due to such factors as the federal-government-wide objective of increasing the number of persons with disabilities to two percent of the federal workforce by the end of next year. The Department has a hiring effort under way that, she said, is likely to bring in new employees who have disabilities, and some current employees may develop impairments or become disabled.

The new division will have a staff member dedicated to recruiting persons with disabilities and a selective-placement coordinator who will match those with disabilities to job openings that fit their skills. The hiring of a person with a disability can occur faster than for a candidate without a disability through Schedule A hiring authority, she said.

## Team Approach

The division will also hire a paralegal, an administrative specialist and three disability resource analysts who will each lead a team focusing on a particular disability. There will be teams for vision, cognitive, dexterity and hearing disabilities. The latter team's analysts are the division's first new staff members besides Pittarelli, since two of HR/ER's part-time sign language interpreters have been converted to full-time status.

Pittarelli said the use of teams for each area of disability was adopted from the most extensive reasonable accommodation effort mounted by any federal agency, that of the Department of Defense. DOD, she said, provides 65 other federal agencies with free equipment for accommodating their disabled employees. The Department of State, she said, was the first federal agency to partner with DOD's Computer Accommodations Technology Center. That means much of the assistive technology used by the Department to provide accommodations—other than items like ergonomic chairs and motorized scooters—is provided to the Department at no cost.

> Much of the assistive technology used by the Department to provide accommodations is provided to the Department at no cost.

An employee with a disability receives an individualized assessment. Determination of the accommodation is made on a case-by-case basis.

In general, Pittarelli said, "we provide the accommodation that is effective, although it might not be the exact accommodation that was requested."

Pittarelli said announcements for her division's new jobs will be posted soon. In the meantime, she's seeking detailees to serve until permanent staff members are hired. She said she's interested in getting the best persons for the positions, including qualified individuals with disabilities. ■

*The author is deputy editor of* State Magazine.

# Students with Disabilities Mentored

In October, in honor of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, the Office of Civil Rights and the Disability Action Group hosted a mentoring day for nine high-achieving undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities.

The students were chosen through the action group's collaboration with the National Federation for the Blind, George Washington University and Gallaudet University. Their day at the Department began with a briefing on Department history from the Office of the Historian, and each student was then partnered with a Department representative from a bureau that matched his or her professional goals.

"I think it was a hundred times worth my coming all the way from Colorado to be a part of this event," one student said. "I never knew that so many opportunities were available for blind people here."

Ambassador Steven Steiner of the Office of Global Women's Issues said he enjoyed meeting with the young woman he mentored, who "was very interested in the Office of Global Women's Issues and in future professional possibilities at State."

In the afternoon, speakers from the Department shared career advice and tips for employment and internships.

The action group and Office of Civil Rights said the event in coming years will include more students and mentors from additional bureaus. For more information, contact Paul Schafer at SchaferPP@state.gov or Somer Bessire-Briers at BessireSE@state.gov.

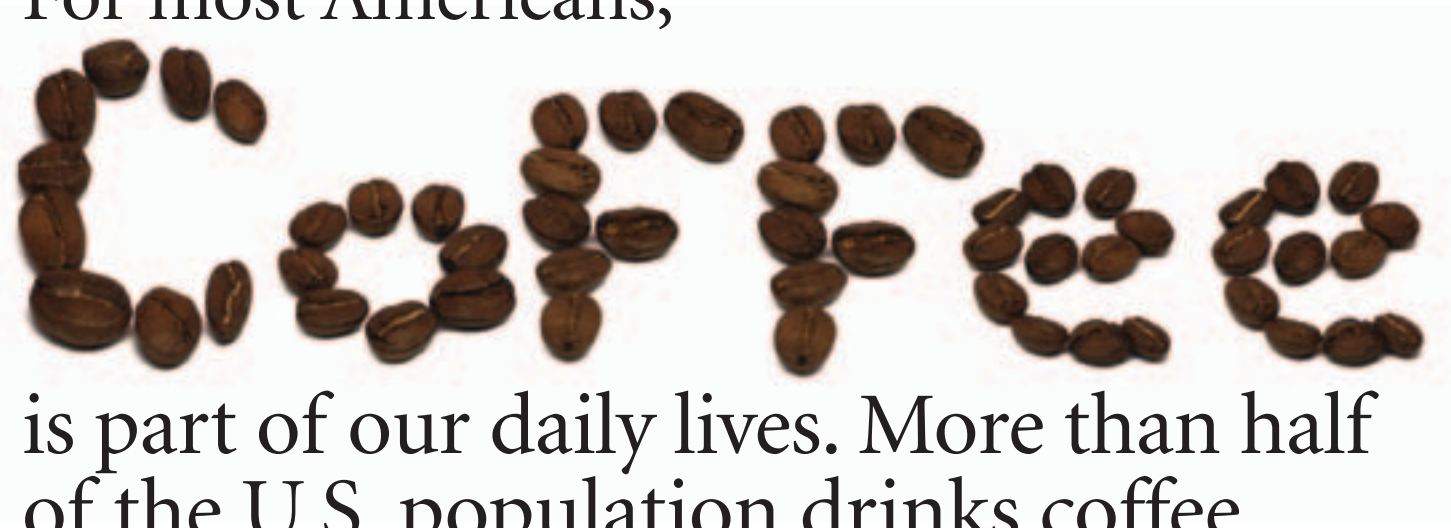
John M. Robinson, center, director of the Office of Civil Rights, speaks as the head of the Disability Action Group. Paul Schafer, listens at Robinson's left.

# Brewing Sustainability

Bureau works with NGOs on sustainable coffee production

*/// By Alexandra Torres and Ed Warner ///*

# For most Americans,




# is part of our daily lives. More than half of the U.S. population drinks coffee daily—approximately 400 million cups a day or 146 billion cups a year.

When we drink our daily cup, however, we rarely think about the many people and countries involved with its production. The environmental, social and economic ramifications of a cup of coffee may not always be obvious, but coffee production's impact on natural resources and the quality of life in producer countries can be far-reaching.

Although Brazil and Colombia lead in coffee production, coffee is responsible for a larger percentage of gross domestic product in most Central American nations, where fierce competition has caused a drop in prices, weakening economies and costing thousands of jobs. Urbanization and mechanized farming have moved coffee production farther into undeveloped lands, and the cultivation of coffee in full sun to increase production has accelerated deforestation. By cutting trees to grow full-sun coffee, wildlife habitat and biodiversity are lost, soil is damaged and water quality is degraded.

## Seeking Sustainability

The Free Trade Agreement among Central America, the Dominican Republic and the United States provides a framework to improve environmental, social and economic conditions throughout the region, while the Environmental Cooperation Agreement with Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua allocates $62 million in U.S. funding to promote environmental cooperation.

These projects, managed by the Department's Bureau of Oceans, Environment and Science and by the U.S. Agency for International Development, include a $1.2 million grant to three nongovernmental organizations to promote sustainable production of bananas, coffee and cacao, which is used to make chocolate.

The coffee-focused part of the grant is shared by the Rainforest Alliance's Coffee Certification Program and the Sustainable Agriculture Network, which trains farmers in the agricultural techniques they need to achieve certification.

Another grantee, the Humane Society International, promotes organic cacao farming in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Organic farming preserves animal habitat, said Aaron Spencer, an OES institutional development adviser who was involved with the grant's initiation.

The Department chose the grantees from among 15 applicants, picking them in part because their environmental programs were already under-way and would not incur startup costs. The Rainforest Alliance's Coffee Certification Program offered an additional benefit because it is market-driven. In other words, consumers learn of the certification and how it promotes sound environmental and economic practices for growers and seek out certified coffee.

## Better Tasting

Consumers of certified coffee may also be getting better taste and quality because the certification program promotes shade-grown coffees, such as those arising from forested areas, which also provide habitat. Spencer said shade provides better conditions for coffee plants' healthy growth, making them less susceptible to pests and decreasing the need for pesticides.

The Department's strategy is to help CAFTA-DR nations achieve environmental practices similar to those in the United States, Spencer said. The Department also helps member nations keep pace with each other environmentally so as to not let one nation gain a competitive advantage through less-rigorous standards.

"We don't want to increase [a nation's] exports at the expense of the people," he said.

PHOTOGRAPHS: HUMANE SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL; (OPPOSITE PAGE LEFT): RAINFOREST ALLIANCE

**Clockwise from above:** Workers harvest shade-grown coffee; A technician examines cacao plants; Bags of certified cacao are ready for shipment.

The Department's program under the Environmental Cooperation Agreement seeks to help CAFTA-DR countries expand their biodiversity, parks and nature-related tourism, and strengthen and enforce environmental laws and regulations. Together, these actions aim to promote environmentally responsible production of such products as coffee, poultry or lumber, in the latter case by helping nations fight the illegal logging of such rare hardwoods as mahogany, Spencer explained.

The Rainforest Alliance's seal on bags of coffee indicates the use of sustainable production techniques. It can be used only if the coffee producer has been inspected and proven to meet the Sustainable Agriculture Network's environmental standards. For instance, a forested coffee farm must maintain a minimum of 70 trees per hectare and a shade density of 40 percent. Ecosystems adjacent to the production area must have vegetated buffer zones, which promote biodiversity and reduce the spread of agricultural chemicals. More than 1,000 coffee farmers have certified farm land in CAFTA-DR countries.

## New Trainers

With OES support, the Sustainable Agriculture Network has hired 60 additional trainers, who will initially train an estimated 3,000 farmers in the management practices needed to achieve certification. Ultimately, more than twice that number will get trained. Farmers get the training for free but as they come to see the economic advantage of certification, they someday may be willing to pay for the training, Spencer said.

Working with these nongovernmental groups, the Department is improving the lives of Central Americans and maybe making for a tastier cup of coffee or hot chocolate. ■

*Alexandra Torres was an intern in OES. Ed Warner is deputy editor of* State Magazine.

# Heels on the Ground

## Political advisors increasingly serve in war zones /// *By Ed Warner*

There would have to be a worthwhile reason for a Foreign Service officer to spend four years at a one-year-tour post or to cause another officer to leave behind her family, including a four-year-old daughter.

In interviews, officers who served at such a post as foreign policy advisors to the U.S. military—POLADs for short—say the experience taught them valuable lessons about what the military does well and helped them see the situation more broadly.

POLAD Martina Strong raises the American flag over a base in Basra.

Now in her fourth year in Iraq, FSO Joanne Cummings is in her second tour as a POLAD, a role in which senior Department officers serve as liaisons to the Department of Defense. In the past, POLADs largely served at major military commands' headquarters, but they now are increasingly also serving on the ground in America's two war zones, said Jonita Whitaker, director of the POLAD program office.

### Alternatives Offered

Having POLADs in war zones is important, Whitaker said, because they help the military consider alternatives. The involvement of a POLAD can "put a different face on a complex, changing environment," she said. Whitaker recently served a two-week temporary duty assignment as a POLAD in Iraq, where she wrote situation reports and organized embassy-military meetings

Cummings has served since June as POLAD to the military's Task Force 714, which focuses on Iraq and Afghanistan. She said her work can be much like diplomacy with a foreign nation, as the two agencies' cultures are sometimes that different. Add in the problems inherent in communication, and "we can leave a meeting and feel we've all decided this—and then people go off in different directions," she said.

That's not to say the U.S. military doesn't get it. If anything, Cummings said, the military can teach the State Department about teamwork. FSOs don't get the same encouragement to operate as a team that soldiers get from boot camp onward, she said.

Cummings said it was invaluable to learn how to explain the Department and its culture to DOD. The ability to state a mission succinctly is something the military does well, she said, and it profits from that skill when explaining itself to Congress.

On the other hand, she said, the Department is smart about knowing when not to take action, and she said she sometimes must explain to action-oriented military leaders why the best approach may at times be to do nothing.

PHOTOGRAPHS: (LEFT): SERGEANT ROSS HEDLUND; (OPPOSITE PAGE): DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

**Above:** Major General Michael Oates, commanding general of the 10th Mountain, Multi-National Division-South, and POLAD Joanne Cummings communicate via headsets aboard a helicopter.
**Right:** At a celebration of St. Barbara's Day—the patron saint of the artillery—POLAD Joanne Cummings stands between Major General Michael Oates, right, and Brigadier General Jefforey Smith.

## Communication Emphasized

Cummings said she values the contacts she's developing since Defense is, with development and diplomacy, part of the "three Ds" that guide U.S. foreign policy.

Another FSO, Martina Strong, said clear communication is essential to her work as POLAD with the National Guard's 34th Infantry Division in Basra, Iraq. Strong said she works to ensure that the division's effort complements the overall mission in Iraq and is coordinated with the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and the region's nine Provisional Reconstruction Teams.

"That means keeping the channels of communication open, serving as an informational resource to the division's staff and providing the civilian perspective on issues the division is tackling," she explained.

Strong said she missed being able to interact freely with the citizenry, due to security restrictions, but valued learning to live simply and "being surrounded by people who are going through the same experiences in a tough environment."

Strong said her POLAD experience has taught her "a profound respect and appreciation for the tremendous service and sacrifices of our men and women in uniform." She said she especially appreciated the military's "seriousness of purpose, unwavering dedication to their mission and profound commitment to their comrades in arms, their families and their country."

Although the military is largely male and all three POLADs interviewed are women, that didn't seem to be a problem.

"In a combat zone, it does not matter whether you are male, female, civilian or military," Strong said. "What does matter is that you are adding value to the mission and are not a burden—and that [is something] you do have to prove. That can mean being on top of the subject matter but also being fit enough to carry all your gear and keep up with the military during the long, grueling days."

Cummings, who previously was POLAD to the Multi-National Division-Center in Iraq, said she became a POLAD because, as a second-generation FSO, she'd already spent much of her life in the Middle East and developed Arabic fluency.

"I've been in the State Department since I was two years old, but now I understand the Department better due to [my] POLAD role," she said.

Strong said she chose to serve in Iraq because it's important to the Department's mission and because other FSOs had already answered the call. Another factor, she said, was that her family came to the United States in 1983 as political refugees from then-communist Czechoslovakia.

"I know that the opportunities and freedoms the United States offers are not free and do at times require sacrifices from all of us," she said.

She also credited the support of her husband, a retired U.S. Army officer, who is caring for their four-year-old daughter. ■

*The author is deputy editor of* State Magazine.

# Campus Connection

## Department offers students 'virtual internships' /// *By Tiffany Smith*

When did you first get interested in joining the State Department? Was it in a university course, when you traveled overseas or simply when you read the global affairs section of a newspaper? Today's prospects can access the Virtual Student Foreign Service, a new way to get college and university students actively involved in the Department's work overseas.

Announced by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in her 2009 New York University commencement speech, the VSFS is part of a growing Department effort to harness technology and a commitment to global service among young people to facilitate new forms of diplomatic engagement.

Digital internships are becoming popular in the private sector, but the VSFS is the first United States government initiative of its kind. Its development involved solving a unique set of puzzles. For instance, the Office of eDiplomacy had to consider the issues of identification and clearances and had to think about where communication and information-sharing could take place.

For the pilot year, the office has followed the model of the Foreign Affairs Campus Coordinators, a successful program coordinated by the Bureau of Public Affairs. Like the campus coordinators, VSFS participants have already had formal internships with the Department and wanted to retain that relationship. The posts involved in VSFS were happy to oblige, and over the summer of 2009, 37 diplomatic missions and associated projects partnered with 44 current or former interns, who are now attending U.S. universities.

### Worldwide Projects

The 2009–2010 VSFS program began in September with a video posted on the Dipnote blog, http://blogs.state.gov, and VSFS' Facebook page, www.facebook.com/usdos.vsfs. In recent months, projects in every region of the world have moved forward with VSFS help.

For instance, the policy and coordination officer at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, Henry Haggard, and VSFS participant Antoinette Pick-Jones at the University of Wisconsin have collaborated to build connections between Iraqis and Americans in ways that increase mutual understanding. An Iraqi student has signed on as Pick-Jones' counterpart to help boost VSFS membership and translate postings into Arabic.

"There are a lot of great things to do, and so much you can do with it," Pick-Jones said.

By mid November, VSFS Iraq had more than 200 fans on Facebook and had began a blog at http://usiraqconnect.blogspot.com.

Colleges and universities are teeming with potential future members of the Foreign Service.

PHOTOGRAPHS: (LEFT): FOTOLIA; (OPPOSITE PAGE): NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

The VSFS was promoted by the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs at the Global Public Affairs Officer Conference in Washington, D.C., in October and has since piqued more posts' interest.

"The Virtual Student Foreign Service enables leading American students to make substantial contributions to American foreign policy," said Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Judith McHale. "Our missions have important priorities and needs, and American students have impressive skills and abilities. The VSFS brings the two together, spanning the miles to create real achievements on behalf of the Department and our country."

For more information about the VSFS, contact the Office of eDiplomacy or visit www.state.gov/m/irm/ediplomacy. ■

*The author is a program analyst in the Office of eDiplomacy.*

**Above:** Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announces the Virtual Student Foreign Service at the New York University commencement. **Right:** The Virtual Student Foreign Service Web page was designed with current and prospective participants in mind.

Meanwhile at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, Robert Raines created the "chinaweboutreach" group on Yammer, a micro-blogging platform, to promote the analysis of social media in China being done by VSFS participant Lauren Caldwell, a student at the University of Virginia.

He said Caldwell provides a good overview of how Kaixinwang, China's version of Facebook, can be used by institutions such as the Department. Her research is valuable, he continued, because, to do Web-based outreach in China, institutions must learn to work with alternative means. The research also indicates how VSFS can help posts do more with limited resources.

## Student Life

At the U.S. Embassy in Oslo, Anne Charlotte Lindblom said VSFS participant Cristina Procaccino has provided Norwegian students with an insider's view of a U.S. student's academic and social life. Each month, the post gives Procaccino four to five topics to write about, and she sends in one each week for her blog on the embassy's Web site. When the post arrives, it's linked to the embassy's Facebook page, and the embassy sends out a notice on Twitter. The posts are at http://norway.usembassy.gov/virtualstudent.html.

The embassy has even sent Procaccino, a student at the University of Pittsburgh, a Flip camera so that she can film university events and other activities. The videos will be posted on the embassy's YouTube channel.

# Making It Real

FSOs educate hometowns about diplomacy

*/// By Aaron Snipe*

Engaging foreign audiences and explaining American foreign policy are all in a day's work for a typical Foreign Service officer overseas. As official representatives for the United States abroad, U.S. diplomats are uniquely positioned to explain all things American—foreign and domestic policy, religion, values, culture and the subtle nuances that invariably accompany these topics.

While FSOs' primary focus of engagement remains overseas, an increasing number of them use their home leave for more than just rest and relaxation. The Hometown Diplomat Program—one of the Department's lesser-known but important public outreach initiatives—provides returning FSOs an opportunity to share their experiences with domestic audiences.

## Outside the Beltway

Launched in 2002, the program assists FSOs in designing and implementing outreach programs to engage hometown audiences about the work of diplomacy abroad. People in smaller U.S. cities and towns often know little about the work of the diplomatic corps. FSOs from all 50 states have practiced diplomacy in their own backyards as part of this program.

Located in the Bureau of Public Affairs, the program coordinates engagements at hometown universities, high schools, religious and civic organizations, and media outlets.

"As of December 2009, the Hometown Diplomat Program has had a presence in almost every state in the U.S.A.," said Schere Walker, the program's coordinator. "I'd like to see Hometown Diplomats engaging the public in all 50 states.

"Foreign Service officers young and old are reaching out to audiences where it counts—at home. They are informing and inspiring the public."

## Personal Perspective

Having recently completed a year on a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Iraq and with home leave on the horizon, I welcomed the opportunity to enjoy my mom's home cooking and do local diplomacy—a perfect recipe for some old-fashioned outreach in Red Sox country.

I participated in a roundtable discussion with students from the University of Massachusetts-Boston. The students were interested in pursuing a career in foreign affairs and were eager to learn about opportunities to

PHOTOGRAPH: ARLINGTON HIGH SCHOOL

The author speaks to students at Arlington High School.

sign up for the Foreign Service written exam and what it was really like to be an American diplomat.

With the Department's Diplomats in Residence strategically placed at colleges across the United States, Hometown Diplomats can help the DIRs identify students interested in learning more about Department of State careers.

The highlight of my experience was returning to Arlington High School—my alma mater—in Arlington, Mass., where I spent the day with some of the school's best students. They were engaging, knowledgeable and eager to learn more about diplomacy abroad. I was at one point cornered by a student near a bank of lockers. A bit unsure of himself, he asked, "You're from the State Department, right?"

I responded affirmatively. He said he'd grown up abroad and was really interested in a Foreign Service career. Imagine, a high school student who wants to become a diplomat. At his age, I had never heard of the Foreign Service; my interests included lunch and not being late to class. His interest in diplomacy made me proud that students from my alma mater were already thinking globally.

## Engagement Needed

The student's interest also said something about the importance of diplomatic outreach at home. Our men and women in uniform are quickly recognizable, and their experiences are easily understood in their hometowns. However, hometown presentations by diplomats are a rarity. Explaining what we do in the places where we grew up helps connect the dots for an American public eager for firsthand information about what's going on around the world.

"The more diplomats we can get speaking to audiences, the better," Walker said. "Our Hometown Diplomats are our most credible voices. They've been on the front lines of diplomacy and can tell stories that no one else can." ■

*The author is on home leave after a tour at a PRT in Iraq.*

Access program students, teachers, and administrators in Buenos Aires hear from U.S. astronaut Chris Cassidy.

# Brighter Futures

## Embassy helps Argentine youth learn English /// *By Candace Brasseur and Kathleen Corey*

"No one has ever given my child a chance in life," said a tearful single mother to Tom Kelly, deputy chief of mission at the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She was proud that her 15-year-old son had been selected for the English Access Microscholarship Program at the bi-national center in the city of Mendoza.

She had good reason to be proud: her son was one of 90 students chosen from 1,000 applicants for the program, which offers two years of after-school and summer-long intensive study.

"I can't thank you enough for caring about the young people of our country," the mother said.

### Extensive Participation

The State Department's Access Program brings English language skills to marginalized communities that have had little prior contact with Americans or U.S. officials, providing after-school classes and summer activities. The materials expose students to American society and culture, and the new language skills can open up economic and academic opportunities. The students may even compete for future U.S. exchange and study programs, like Fulbright scholarships.

Since its inception in 2004, approximately 44,000 students in more than 55 countries have participated in the Access program. Although the program was initially designed for Muslim countries, in 2007 its scholarships were made available to bright, economically disadvantaged youths ages 14 to 18 worldwide.

Argentina was one of the first Latin American countries to take part in the program. In 2010, more than 600 students will study in 11 bi-national centers there, which will soon give it one of largest Access programs in the region.

The Access program supports one of the embassy's top priorities, fostering understanding between the people of Argentina and the people of the United States. Several polls have found anti-American sentiment in Latin America to be highest in Argentina, higher even than in

PHOTOGRAPHS: (ABOVE): SOL RUBIO; (OPPOSITE PAGE): JORGE GOMEZ

**Above:** Access students and their families proudly celebrate being selected into the Access Program at a commencement certificate ceremony. **Below:** On a public affairs section-sponsored visit to Argentina, American singer Kathy Chiavola teaches Buenos Aires Access students country-western songs popular in the United States.

Venezuela and Cuba. When the post in 2008 surveyed Argentines on which embassy programs they most appreciated, it found the Sarmiento Mann English Scholarship Program for disadvantaged Argentines, a post program similar to Access, had almost twice as high an approval rating as the next-highest offering. The rating was highest among 20- to 25 year-olds, indicating that it makes sense to reach out to youth through language training.

Access is supported by the embassy's English Language Team, consisting of a public diplomacy officer, an assistant cultural affairs officer specifically devoted to Access and a local English programming liaison with the bi-national centers.

"Access is one of the most successful programs I have seen in nearly 30 years of designing language programs," said Public Diplomacy Officer Kathleen Corey, who oversees the program. "It's successful because the post has an exceptionally strong working relationship with the bi-national centers, Argentine teachers' English teaching competence is outstanding, Argentines have a heart for helping the less fortunate and these students are extremely honored to be a part of this program."

## Familial Support

Beyond gaining English skills that lead to better jobs and educational prospects, the students become part of a larger "family" based around the centers, which supports each student and his or her community. The students help their communities by activities such as visiting orphanages and convalescent homes, and the centers help students with personal needs, such as finding a dentist to replace a tooth at no cost and counseling a pregnant teen against dropping out of the program.

"By being involved in activities with our students, we become aware of their needs," said Denise Bartolomeo, academic director of the Mendoza Bi-National Center. "This makes it easier for us to help them and touch their lives forever."

"I am personally committed to this program, and I look for ways to provide additional support, because I have seen its power firsthand," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said recently.

The post's new ambassador, Vilma Martinez, is spearheading a post initiative to garner public-private partnerships to expand the reach of Access in Argentina. Such a partnership would benefit Access scholarship recipients and supporting corporations.

Meanwhile, the future looks bright for the more than 600 Access students in Argentina.

"I am happy for having been chosen from among so many students who do not have the opportunity to afford a course like this," said one scholarship recipient. "I'm learning a lot of American language and culture in every class that will help me get a good job in the future."

Access program teacher Yanina Zagarrio and Gabriella Venesia, Access coordinator from the bi-national center in the town of Rosario, recently wrote the program to say it "has allowed us to reach out to students who otherwise couldn't afford to study English."

The program's students, they said "are highly committed to their communities and to assisting their peers and exhibit respect and responsibility. They are partaking in a marvelous experience which they will never forget. Through the Access program, we are helping students become better individuals who will transform our society into a better place to live." ■

*Candace Brasseur is the assistant cultural affairs officer and Kathleen Corey is the public diplomacy officer at the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires.*

# * Post of the Month

# Rangoon

U.S. makes a difference in isolated Burma

*/// By Colin Furst*

# Welcome to Burma. Or is it Myanmar?

In Rangoon—or is it Yangon?—what to call places is only the first of many questions that arise when pondering this strange, beautiful and perplexing land:

• Should tourists travel here to help counter the country's isolation? Or will tourist dollars find their way into the wrong pockets?

• How can Western countries encourage democratic change in a country where leaders have stifled basic freedoms for decades?

• To what extent should the world engage with the military rulers?

The U.S. government has been grappling with such questions since 1962, when the military took charge. In the ensuing decades, the generals have isolated their nation from the international community, brutally suppressed dissent and profited personally. Even today, newspapers and billboards exhort citizens to "crush all internal and external destructive elements!"

The United States still refers to the country as Burma and the former capital as Rangoon out of support for the country's pro-democracy parties, which rejected the junta's name changes and whose landslide victory in 1990 elections was denied by the military.

## Better Days

The U.S.-Burma relationship wasn't always adversarial. Burmese independence figures initially allied with Japan during World War II but later fought alongside U.S. and British troops to expel the Japanese from the country. Upon independence from Britain in 1948, Burma had a democratic, parliamentary government and the strongest economy in Southeast Asia. In the postwar years, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, Vice President Richard Nixon and jazz legends Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington and Count Basie paid much-heralded visits to Rangoon.

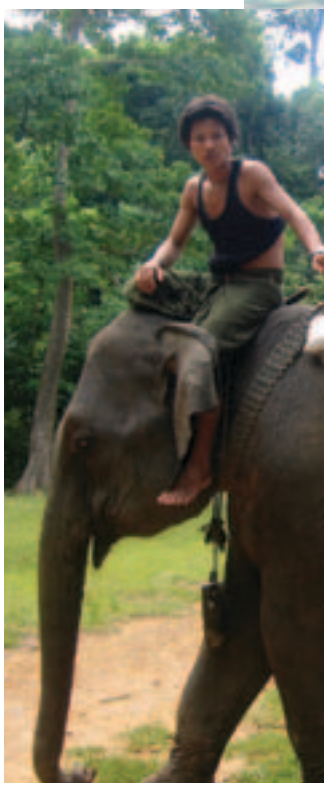
A half-century later, the affection of ordinary Burmese for things American remains intense. From cab drivers to political dissidents, many Burmese consider the United States to be their most steadfast ally.

In 1988 and in 2007, the Burmese people took to the streets to demand democracy, only to be brutally struck down. The United States has called attention to the regime's abuses, worked for democratic change and demanded the release of political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, the world's only incarcerated Nobel Peace Prize laureate, who has been under house arrest for 14 of the past 20 years.

The U.S. Embassy in Rangoon's staff is busy making tangible differences in people's lives, whether acting officially or volunteering after hours.

## Chance to 'Vote'

The public affairs section runs an American Center in downtown Rangoon where Burmese citizens gather to learn English from American instructors, read uncensored news and literature and attend cultural events. There is nothing else like it in all of Burma. At the center's November 2008 presidential election night party, 800 Burmese of all ages cast "votes" for senators Obama and McCain, experiencing vicariously a free election—something they have not had in nearly 20 years.



PHOTOGRAPHS: (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP): JULIE SPIELMANN; TAMAR WEISERT; TAMAR WEISERT; AND AMY SEBES

**Above:** Young men of the villages around Inle Lake hold boat races during a festival. **Right:** Young monks in Bagan solicit contributions from the local population. **Below:** These feet belong to the Shwethalyaung Buddha in Bago, an hour's drive from Rangoon. Some 55 meters long and 16 meters high, it is considered one of the most life-like of all reclining Buddhas. **Left:** Deputy Chief of Mission Tom Vajda and his daughter Bette enjoy an elephant ride.

Following Cyclone Nargis, which devastated the Irrawaddy Delta in May 2008, Burmese authorities stunned the world by initially refusing all foreign assistance. Embassy volunteers took matters into their own hands, packing pickup trucks full of rations and medicine and visiting affected communities. When, after three weeks, the Burmese government relented on foreign aid, the Defense attache office secured the approval for 185 cargo flights into Burma that delivered 62,000 gallons of water, 210 tons of food, 75,000 mosquito nets, 44,000 hygiene kits and 104,000 blankets. Operation Caring Response was unprecedented; never before had the U.S. military been granted permission to conduct humanitarian operations on Burmese soil. In total, the U.S. government has provided $74 million to assist the storm survivors, with more aid on the way.

Visitors to Burma often remark that the country has the feel of Southeast Asia decades ago. Rangoon, a city of five million people, must be one of the last major cities in Asia—if not the world—in which traffic jams are a rarity and motorbikes are banned. Despite decades of neglect, many buildings from the British colonial period are still in use. Downtown Rangoon's Bogyoke Aung San Market, a hive of activity with more than 1,600 shops, has been a must-see attraction for tourists since 1926.

## Buddhist Culture

A stroll anywhere in Burma offers vibrant evidence of Buddhist culture: monks in burnt orange receiving alms or nuns in pink seeking shade beneath parasols. Rangoon's majestic Shwedagon Pagoda, sheathed in gold, adds sparkle to the skyline. Tranquil pagodas and monasteries dot the countryside.

Although the beaches of Thailand and temples of Cambodia's Angkor Wat are temptingly close, embassy employees have found that local alternatives are cheaper and arguably more impressive. Ngapali Beach, on the Bay of Bengal, is one such treasure, offering affordable resorts fronting pristine beaches with few tourists in sight and succulent seafood. Bagan, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, where 2,200 temples from the 10th to 12th centuries bask at sunset virtually undisturbed by tourists, is a short flight from Rangoon. An early morning hot-air balloon ride over the ruins, with the sunrise reflecting off the mist and temples below, exemplifies the "once in a lifetime" experience.

Closer to home, the American Club, on the shore of Rangoon's Inya Lake, has been the place to go for a swim or game of tennis since 1966. The club has recently added flat-screen TVs, Wi-Fi, a modern gym and playground equipment, and even Wii bowling tournaments. It is home to one of the most picturesque ballparks outside of Cooperstown, with giant banyan trees towering over the fences and a majestic, golden pagoda rising above right field.

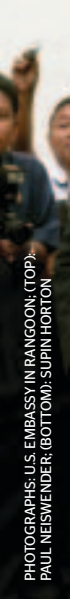
Burma's isolation has been intense, but the modern world is finding its way to Rangoon. Coffeehouses are all the rage, and the city boasts good Italian, French, Thai and Indian restaurants, as well as new supermarkets and shopping malls.

## Looking Ahead

In 2005, the military regime, reportedly on advice of astrologers, suddenly moved the capital from Rangoon to a remote plain in central Burma. The United States, which opened a new embassy complex in Rangoon in September 2007, has no plans to move to Nay Pyi Taw, four inconvenient hours away. The embassy has 48 direct hires, 11 family-member appointments and 277 Locally Employed Staff.

A sculpture of a U.S. soldier and a Kachin Ranger from World War II stands outside the embassy as a fitting reminder that, before the generals seized power, the people of Burma strove side by side with Americans to gain and sustain freedom. It is a testimony to shared values that nearly 50 years of military dictatorship have not extinguished that spirit. ■

*The author is the consular section chief at the U.S. Embassy in Rangoon.*



**Top:** Foreign Service Health Practitioner Julie Spielmann pours water over a marble Buddha at the Shwedagon Pagoda to cleanse the spirit. **Above:** Some of Bagan's 2,200 temples look serenely undisturbed. **Left:** Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi pauses for photographers after a November meeting with Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs Assistant Secretary Kurt Campbell. **Below:** Chargé d'Affaires Office Manager Supin Horton and her husband Ralph sightsee at the Shwedagon Pagoda on a sunny day.

PHOTOGRAPHS: U.S. EMBASSY IN RANGOON; (TOP): PAUL NEISWENDER; (BOTTOM): SUPIN HORTON

## At a Glance >>> Burma

**Country name:** Burma

**Capital:** Rangoon

**Government type:** Military junta

**Area:** 678,500 sq. km.

**Comparative area:** Slightly smaller than Texas

**Population:** 48.8 million

**Languages:** Burmese (official) and minority ethnic languages

**GDP – per capita:** $1,200

**Export commodities:** Natural gas, wood products, pulses, beans and fish

**Export partners:** Thailand, India and China

**Import commodities:** Fabric, petroleum products, fertilizer, plastics and machinery

**Import partners:** China, Thailand and Singapore

**Currency (code):** Kyats (MMK)

**Internet country code:** .mm

*Source: Country Background Notes*

# Help for All

HR Shared Services builds on a year of success

*By Lisa Bell and Sarah Evans*

PHOTOGRAPH: JEFF LEE

At a November ceremony recognizing the first anniversary of the Bureau of Human Resources' Office of Shared Services, held at the HR Service Center in Charleston, S.C., Director General Nancy J. Powell said the HR Shared Services initiative is transforming the culture of human resources.

For most employees, the internal workings of human resources remain hidden in the background until a promotion date approaches, an address needs updating or a problem arises. HR Shared Services, however, adopts a preferred practice from the private sector to improve the Bureau of Human Resource's ability to effectively meet employee needs with efficiency and accountability.

The bureau's implementation of HR Shared Services expanded what employees can do online and improved their "self-service" options. It also provided access to the HRSC, a single point of contact for addressing employees' more complex needs.

The self-service tools available to employees via HR Online include automated performance evaluations and the online application form to request the ability to telework. Employees can also seek answers using Ask HR, a database of frequently asked HR questions. In fact, the bureau's Executive Office plans in 2010 to introduce 20 expanded and improved online self-services that will give customers improved online access and represent streamlined workflow and increased efficiency.

## Beyond Tools

When online tools aren't sufficient to address an employee's concern, he or she can e-mail or call a customer service representative at the HRSC. After they're received, inquiries are tracked through resolution, and progress on the inquiry can be viewed by all HR offices because they all have access to this case-management system. That means that, whether the employee calls or e-mails the HRSC, the customer representative will create an online "ticket," answer its question or concern when possible or transfer the ticket to the appropriate subject matter expert.

The ticket system makes it possible for employees to see to whom an inquiry was assigned and how long it has been in that employee's in-box. This new level of accountability will help to identify problems and make HR more effective. Ultimately, it will reduce the time it takes to get an answer or see a result. As of October 2009, the HRSC received and tracked more than 3,000 inquiries, and each was resolved in an average of three days.

Over the past year, employees of eight bureaus have joined the HR Shared Services family and, as a result, a full 13 percent of the Department's domestic workforce now enjoy the benefits of these new resources. These bureaus include Consular Affairs, Overseas Buildings Operations, Educational and Cultural Affairs, International Information Programs, Legislative Affairs, International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, and Economic, Energy and Business Affairs.

Additionally, in coordination with the HR bureau's Office of Retirement, the HRSC is now the first point of contact for the Department's annuitants. All inquiries to "Ask RNET" and "RET Services" are now sent through the HRSC.

## Growth Ahead

As HR Shared Services contemplates its second year of operation, it plans several steps toward increased efficiency, effectiveness and accountability in HR. It will increase the number of employee and manager self-service applications, in part through the Executive Office's roll-out plans. It will also continue to update and expand Ask HR to make it a more useful tool for customers and HR professionals.

The HR Service Center will continue to grow and is expected to relocate into permanent space in November. All bureaus using the HRSC will continue participating in the Quality Assurance Program, a continuous improvement process that seeks to ensure that the answers given to inquiries are accurate, timely and responsive. The remaining bureaus will be integrated in HR Shared Services by October 2010.

At the Shared Services celebration, HRSC Manager Ann Thompson, left, and Director General Nancy Powell stand at the front, surrounded by Shared Services staff.

While several important milestones have been reached and much progress has been made over the past year, HR Shared Services believes it still has far to go. Every Department employee and annuitant will by year's end have access to HR Shared Services. Since one of the biggest challenges ahead is overcoming resistance to change, HR Shared Services encourages Department employees, its customers, to use these services.

For itself, in 2010 the Office of HR Shared Services looks forward to working as a team to help the Department meet its strategic goals and it will continuously strive to improve the services offered to the Department's most valuable asset, its employees. The office welcomes feedback. Inquiries may be sent to HRSC@state.gov. ■

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*Lisa Bell is an HR specialist and Sarah Evans is a management analyst at HR Shared Services.*

Members of the USNATO Afghanistan team stand before the entrance to the United States Mission at NATO Headquarters in Brussels: from left, Deputy Political Advisor Hoot Baez, Operations Division Director Steve Mirr, Political Officer Alison Blosser, Lieutenant Colonel Florentino Carter, Political Officer Ronita Macklin and Public Affairs Advisor Kate Byrnes.

# Team Effort

## Diplomats and military collaborate at USNATO /// *By Tanya R. Brothen*

The ongoing mission to disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan is a U.S. foreign policy priority and a priority security operation for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which has troops stationed there. Addressing this priority requires a whole-of-government approach in the United States and intensive coordination abroad with allies and partners. It's a tall order, but the U.S. Mission to NATO, which sits at the crossroads of both objectives, has adopted an approach that answers the call.

Housed at NATO Headquarters on the outskirts of Brussels, Belgium, this distinctive civilian-military team works closely to advance U.S. interests at the world's most powerful military alliance. Staff members—roughly half Department of State employees and half from the Office of the Secretary of Defense—constantly interact with one another and the adjacent U.S. Military Delegation. In working on issues with NATO allies, each of the three groups receives instructions from, and reports back to, its leadership in Washington, D.C. Meanwhile, Ambassador Ivo Daalder, the U.S. permanent representative to NATO, communicates jointly developed ideas and strategies to the White House.

For the men and women at USNATO, interagency collaboration isn't uncharted territory. It's business as usual.

PHOTOGRAPHS: TANYA BROTHEN

## Policy Coordination

USNATO's Afghanistan team improves U.S. effectiveness in a multilateral context by offering a working-level model for interagency cooperation. The team formally engages with the other 27 NATO member countries through NATO's Policy Coordination Group. Employees of the Department and Office of the Secretary of Defense regularly attend the coordination group's meetings, where they advance U.S. policy and engage in hands-on diplomacy to influence the policies of U.S. allies. Together with their counterparts from among the NATO members, who represent their own countries' ministries of foreign affairs and defense, the U.S. team uses the coordination group's meetings to discuss with key actors such matters as troop levels in Afghanistan, Afghan security forces training, counterinsurgency strategies and NATO cooperation. Because this is an interagency group, it brings a more complete representation of U.S. thinking and policy to the table.

This is equally true for sit-down meetings that occur with the U.S. ambassador, who actively seeks a variety of perspectives. Personnel from the Department and the Office of the Secretary of Defense provide the ambassador with wide-ranging advice, helping USNATO reach the best possible conclusions. Department of Defense officials and Foreign Service officers at this mission both see their diverse backgrounds as strengths, value the mission's interagency setting and find work there personally rewarding. Lieutenant Colonel David Pursley from the Afghanistan team said working with his Department of State colleagues at the U.S. Mission to NATO is refreshing.

The multilateral discussions on Afghanistan at NATO Headquarters aim to build strong political decisions and defense plans that will support security operations taking place thousands of miles from Brussels. Therefore, it's crucial to avoid a distance-generated information gap and make sure the U.S. Mission's actions support the objectives of Washington, the U.S. Embassy in Kabul and NATO's commander in the field.

## Consistent Communication

Because there's a need for consistent communication, despite the distance, USNATO has launched a rotational assignment program that is the first of its kind at the State Department. Under the program, Political Officer Ronita Macklin will spend two years changing places on a six-month basis with her counterpart, Kristine Pelz, in Kabul. The partnered officers are in constant contact, trading information and ideas that Macklin said, "can't always been learned through a cable or e-mail." The program envisions participants engaging in regular visits to both cities to build professional relationships, cultural awareness and on-the-ground knowledge, assets that will help the mission and the U.S. Embassy in Kabul achieve their objectives.

Every office has a part to play to ensure smooth interagency operations at USNATO. The Civil Emergency Planning Office, led by a Department of Homeland Security officer, provides civilian interagency advice and support to U.S. and NATO military authorities, the Afghan disaster management authority and USNATO's Afghanistan team.

The members of the mission's Public Affairs Office from the departments of State and Defense work with their counterparts in the mission and at U.S. embassies to build public support for political decisions that assist the effort in Afghanistan. For instance, one program brings journalists from NATO member and partner countries to Brussels and to NATO operations in Afghanistan for consultations with U.S. and NATO officials, providing information and sources the media can use to explain the international effort.

There is no room for miscommunication or jumbled messaging at the U.S. Mission to NATO. Advancing U.S. national security and the security of America's NATO allies through collaboration on Afghanistan and key issues such as piracy, missile defense and the Balkans requires a focused, coordinated team effort. For the civilian-military team in Brussels, an interagency environment helps get the job done. ■

*The author is deputy press officer at the U.S. Mission to NATO.*

Sergeant First Class Reeba Critser, second from left, military liaison for the public affairs office at USNATO, leads a group of international journalists on a tour of Afghanistan.

# Inspired by Ideas

Office promotes management excellence /// *By Miranda L. Longstreth*

During an M/PRI meeting, Carlene Roy, right, makes a point as the author listens.

Have you ever wondered why you can't find needed information on the Intranet or why each bureau does things differently? Many Department employees probably think about this daily, but there's good news: The Office of Management Policy, Rightsizing and Innovation is helping the Department become an organization that operates on standard platforms, using standard operating procedures.

Under Secretary for Management Patrick F. Kennedy's vision for M/PRI is an office that works with valued partners to improve how the Department does business by linking ideas and finding solutions to common problems. Created in September 2007, M/PRI has assisted in many of the Department's toughest management challenges, such as coordinating greening and sustainability efforts, culminating in the Greening Council launch in August 2009.

On behalf of all Department bureaus, the office supports many special projects and works toward the Secretary of State's vision of a "State of Management Excellence." According to the office's director, Marguerite Coffey, achieving management excellence includes "consolidating support platforms and projecting accountability and responsiveness." Consolidating support platforms is difficult but crucial to creating an atmosphere where employees aren't repeatedly struggling to learn new ways of doing things.

## Working Together

The office wants to help Department employees improve the way the Department does business. M/PRI does not do this in a vacuum, nor does it wish to. Everyone wants the Department to run as smoothly as possible, but everyone can't make improve-

PHOTOGRAPHS: ED WARNER

ments unless everyone works together. Therefore, M/PRI helps bureaus implement good ideas and then makes them available to other bureaus, producing an atmosphere of continuous improvement. Its job is to bring key stakeholders together, keeping lines of dialogue fresh.

Every day, the Department's bureaus develop homegrown procedures, and M/PRI seeks to combine similar bureau initiatives to maximize their reach. For instance, the office recently explored how bureaus hire new employees and bring them on board. It learned that the Bureau of Administration had a Web site to assist new employees, as did the Bureau of Human Resources and Foreign Service Institute. Thus, three entities had invested time and resources toward the same objective. To avoid multiplying this situation, M/PRI invited all bureaus' executive directors to see the three bureaus' "entry on duty" systems and select the best. Now, all bureaus use one standard "entry on duty" portal.

To achieve larger Department goals with long-term benefits, the office is looking to engage Department employees in collaborating and forming partnerships. For the past two years, its Innovation Office has been implementing the Collaborative Management Initiative (*State Magazine,* December 2009), working with posts abroad to build a worldwide platform for post-to-post collaboration using eServices software.

What does this mean for you? It means, for instance, that someone at the U.S. Embassy in Lagos who needs a motor pool car can log onto eServices and order one. The same thing can be done in Paris or any other post that provides eServices for employees. Need a box of printer paper in Jakarta? Log on to eServices and order it.

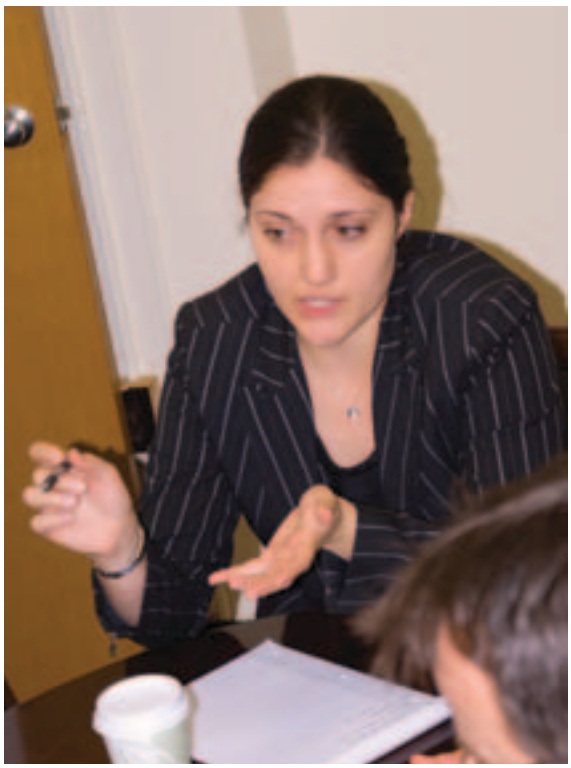
Using a similar approach, the office plans to work with domestic bureaus to develop a shared management platform in Washington, D.C. For instance, if a Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs employee needs to order supplies, he or she would log onto a central Web site and fill out a request form. The order would be directed to the appropriate service provider in the bureau's executive office. The same thing would be done at any other bureau, saving time and reducing frustration.

## Crosscutting Issues

The office also constantly communicates with all Department bureaus and Under Secretary Kennedy, seeking to assist with several crucial Department functions. Notable examples include the Greening Diplomacy Initiative and the Department's compliance with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

M/PRI supports the Secretary's Greening Diplomacy Initiative by serving as the Executive Secretariat to the Greening Council. This Department-wide initiative brings together a diverse group of stakeholders, each offering

**Below left:** At an M/PRI staff meeting, Leslie Moeller urges attendees to consider an action. **Right:** Margot Shoemaker, right, notes a line in a proposal as, from left, Sandra Cimino and Steven Gibson ponder the matter.



Lynn Bullivant considers a proposal put forth during the M/PRI staff meeting.

different perspectives and priorities, but all focused on working together to achieve a shared outcome—infusing greening and sustainability into the Department's policies, management and public diplomacy.

M/PRI's Rightsizing Office works with several bureaus on crosscutting issues. Many people think "rightsizing" means "downsizing," but it actually means helping chiefs of mission get the staffing they need to achieve strategic goals. M/PRI also works with the U.S. Agency for International Development on consolidating overseas infrastructure, thus saving the government money and bringing its overseas community closer together. The Rightsizing Office also facilitates the NSDD-38 process, which allows chiefs of mission to control the number of people at post, ensuring the safety and comfort of Department employees.

## Recovery Act

The office also assists Under Secretary Kennedy in his role as the senior accountable official for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, under which the Department has received $602 million. Some of those funds will be used to create and save jobs, and repair, modernize and "green" Department facilities, providing better office space and equipment.

M/PRI manages the Accountability Review Board process on behalf of the Secretary. When a security-related incident is found or occurs at a U.S. mission and results in loss of life, serious injury or significant destruction of property, the Secretary is required by Congress to convene such a board. The board determines whether, at the time of the incident, there were adequate security systems that were properly implemented and whether anyone was responsible for the incident. Typically, the board recommends changes to existing security procedures to better protect U.S. government personnel.

The office is committed not only to these programs but also to supporting other Department initiatives, such as providing logistical support at the Pittsburgh G-20 Summit or supporting the Quadrennial Development and Diplomacy Review.

M/PRI believes in continuous improvement, which takes time and patience. Management professionals who have a better way of doing something are encouraged to put the idea on The Sounding Board on the Intranet. M/PRI will support these ideas to improve how the Department does business. The office looks forward to working with you as the Department moves toward a "State of Management Excellence." ■

*The author is a management and policy analyst with M/PRI.*

PHOTOGRAPHS: ED WARNER

## What's Hot

### PT401: No FEAR Act Training

For the period ending 5/21/2009, there were 16,659 completions of the online PT401 course and 3,294 in progress. U.S. citizen Department of State employees, Foreign Service and Civil Service, who have not yet registered to take PT401 should sign up at: http://fsi.state.gov/admin/reg/default.asp?EventID=PT401. Students will learn about the No FEAR Act (Notification and Federal Employee Antidiscrimination and Retaliation Act of 2002), which prohibits discrimination and retaliation in the workplace. They will learn what avenues of recourse are available to employees who suspect they are the victims of illegal discrimination or retaliation. This course fulfills the No FEAR Act requirement to train government employees regarding their rights and remedies under Federal antidiscrimination and whistleblower protection laws.

## Upcoming Classes

| Security | | Feb | Mar | Length |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| MQ911 | Security Overseas Seminar | 1,8 | 1,8,22 | 2 days |
| MQ914 | Security Overseas Seminar, Youth | 6 | | 1 day |
| **Foreign Service Life Skills** | | **Feb** | **Mar** | **Length** |
| MQ104 | Regulations, Allowances and Finances | 25 | | 2 days |
| MQ107 | English Teaching Seminar | | 17 | 2 days |
| MQ115 | Explaining America | | 2 | 1 day |
| MQ116 | Protocol and the U.S. Representation Abroad | 20 | | 1 day |
| MQ117 | Tax Seminar | 17 | | 2.5 hours |
| MQ200 | Going Overseas for Singles & Couples w/o Children | | 27 | 4 hours |
| MQ210 | Going Overseas for Families | | 27 | 3 hours |
| MQ220 | Going Overseas - Logistics for Adults | 24 | 27 | 2.5 hours |
| MQ703 | Post Options for Employment and Training | 11 | | 1 day |
| MQ704 | Targeting the Job Market | | 10 | 1 day |
| MQ802 | Communicating Across Cultures | 6 | | 1 day |
| MQ803 | Realities of Foreign Service Life | | 5 | 1 day |
| MQ950 | High Stress Assignment Outbriefing | 5 | 5 | 4 hours |
| **Career Transition Center** | | **Feb** | **Mar** | **Length** |
| RV101 | Retirement Planning Workshop | 23 | | 4 days |
| RV102 | Job Search Program | | 1 | 8 weeks |
| RV103 | Financial Management and Estate Planning | 25 | | 1 day |
| RV104 | Annuities, Benefits and Social Security | 24 | | 1 day |

For information on all the courses available at FSI, visit the Schedule of Courses on OpenNet at http://fsi.state.gov. See Department Notices for announcements of new courses, new course dates and periodic announcements of external training opportunities sponsored by FSI. For additional information, please contact the Office of the Registrar at (703) 302-7144/7137.

## FSI Web Page

Find everything you need to know about FSI and its training opportunities at http://fsi.state.gov. This site is constantly updated to give you just-in-time information on services such as:

- Online Catalog: Up-to-the-minute course schedules and offerings from live classroom training to distance learning.
- Online Registration System: Submit your training application for classroom, distance learning and even external training, using the Online Registration link found on virtually every course description or the External Training Web page.
- Training Continua: Road maps to help you effectively plan your training for the year or beyond.
- About FSI: Get a snapshot view of FSI's history and enrollment statistics.
- Links to training resources: View information on specific countries, language learning and testing and myriad helpful reference materials.

## Student Records Online

Located on the FSI Web page, Student Records Online is a secure, password-protected site that provides access to all FSI training information. Features include:

- Reviewing and printing your training schedule.
- Reviewing and printing your student transcript.
- Tracking the status of your training request.
- Canceling an already-scheduled FSI course.
- Requesting changes or canceling an External Training registration.
- Creating and submitting your Individual Development Plan/Work and Development Plan for Locally Employed Staff.
- Retrieving your FasTrac password.

For more information and to establish your logon, visit the Web site at https://fsiapps.fsi.state.gov/fsirecs/Login.aspx.

## Ask FSI

Looking for information on a specific course, training location or distance learning? Experiencing a problem with registration, accessing a course or technical issue? "Ask FSI" is your answer. Found on the home page of FSI (http://fsi.state.gov), "Ask FSI" allows you to review frequently asked questions or submit your own inquiry. Questions are routed quickly for prompt response.

## FasTrac Distance Learning

Learn at your own pace, when and where you want. Most Department of State employees, including personal service contractors and eligible family members, in constant paid status for at least one year, are eligible. With your FasTrac password, you may access the entire FasTrac catalog of more than 2,500 courses, from home or office. To view the complete FasTrac catalog, visit the FasTrac website at http://fsi.state.gov/fastrac.

For more information on all of FSI's distance learning opportunities, visit the FSI Web site at http://fsi.state.gov and click on "Distance Learning." ■

Kelly flies a J-3 Piper Cub seaplane, for which she has an instrument license.

# HIGH FLYER

## Employee's off-duty plans are in the air /// *By Sapna Mehra*

As an information management specialist, Laura Kelly is desk-bound by day but after work is a National Guard helicopter pilot who also likes aerobatic "barnstormer" flying in an open-cockpit biplane.

"Nothing beats flying at 3,000 feet above the ground and hanging upside down, looking at the ground, with the only thing between you and the ground being your shoulder harness and seat beat," she said.

Someday, she hopes to compete in an international aerobatic competition.

She is also an author. She recently wrote a book chronicling the exploits of a World War II fighter pilot.

Kelly began aerobatic flying after receiving her private pilot's license in 1985. In 1988, she joined the U.S. Army and began piloting a helicopter after flight school. She has served in Germany, the Middle East and Colorado, where she flew search and rescue missions in the Rockies.

### Helicopter Pilot

She said she joined the Army because she "wanted to be part of the force that protects the United States" and to learn how to fly a helicopter.

"The military is the only way to go if you want to learn to fly helicopters," she said. "Over the years, I have come to really love flying helicopters, although I don't know if it is so much helicopters or just the love of flying."

Kelly joined the Bureau of Information Resource Management's Office of Information Assurance in 2000, where she said the leadership and decision-making skills she learned in

PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF THE KELLY FAMILY

Laura Kelly stands beside a Piper Apache 23 that she rented to get her multi-engine commercial-pilot's rating. **Right:** At a civilian airfield, Laura Kelly prepares to fly an OH-58C helicopter similar to the National Guard helicopter she flies over the D.C. area.

the military have helped her tremendously. She focuses on implementing internal process improvements that will reduce the cost and burden of information technology security and on improving the Department's scores on the Federal Information Security Management Act and President's Management Agenda assessments.

Outside of work, Kelly is a part-time helicopter pilot for the Washington, D.C., National Guard. On a recent evening, she flew 3.5 hours on a joint mission with the D.C. Police focusing on drug-related crime. She also flies service and support missions in D.C. area emergencies and for special events such as the President's State of the Union speech.

Another aspect of her Guard work is to support its counter-drug mission, which includes encouraging children to say no to drugs by offering positive role models—such as Kelly. Kelly said she enjoys working with local youth as part of the Guard's drug demand reduction missions.

"We fly the helicopter in [for these missions] and provide a static display for many different types of civic and military events," she said. "The children are wide-eyed and fascinated, and a delight to work with."

## Published Author

In recent years, Kelly has conducted interviews and research to write a book about Lieutenant Colonel James Griffis, who flew a P-38 fighter plane during World War II.

"Griffis learned the pre-jet-age style of aerial dog fighting and told me such amazing stories that I realized his stories would be lost when he died unless I documented them beforehand," she said.

The book is replete with exciting anecdotes. For instance, she quotes Griffis on a dogfight when his plane and a Nazi fighter aircraft were headed straight for each other: "I broke right and [the other pilot] broke left, [and] as we broke, I was firing all four .50-caliber machine guns and the 20mm cannon at the same time, and I watched as he exploded after rolling out at 20,000 feet."

Kelly self-published the book, *On the Wings of a Dream*, in 2008, the year Griffis died at age 87. ■

*The author is a senior analyst in the Bureau of Information Resource Management.*

PHOTOGRAPH: FOTOLIA

# ‘O Gentle Sleep’

## Deep sleep fosters ‘fresh thoughts and joyous health’ /// *By Kate Bradford*

You reach for the alarm clock. Do you awaken rested or hit the snooze button and fall back to sleep? If most days you hit the snooze button, you are probably not getting enough sleep. On average, we get less sleep than our grandparents or parents did. This trend has serious consequences for safety and health.

The amount of sleep each person needs depends on many factors, especially age. Infants generally require about 16 hours, teenagers about nine hours and adults from seven to eight hours a day. The National Sleep Foundation estimates that at least 20 percent of the population averages fewer than six hours per night. Lifestyle choices or sleep disorders can create a constant sleep deficit. We stay up later than we should because of too much to do or because we have insomnia, sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome or narcolepsy. Department of State personnel have the additional burden of working long shifts and dealing with jet lag and time zone changes.

### Safety and Health Consequences

The National Sleep Foundation reports that sleep deprivation impairs mental performance almost as much as being drunk. It can also alter the degree of concentration, alertness and speed of reflexes, increasing the likelihood of accidents. The National Academies’ Institute of Medicine estimates that between 50 and 70 million Americans suffer from inadequate sleep.

Sleep deprivation can have serious safety consequences. One woman who suffers from sleep apnea learned of her condition only after suffering two serious automobile crashes. Since she did not fit the physical profile of someone prone to this disorder, doctors tested her only after the collisions. She has since stopped driving, now resides near a Metro station and has had to dramatically alter her lifestyle.

The consequences of sleep loss and sleep-related disorders are reflected in nearly every key indicator of public health: mortality, morbidity, performance, accidents and injuries, quality of life, family well-being and healthcare utilization. One 2006 study found that during prolonged work shifts the risk of injury from accidents increases 13 percent after a 10-hour shift and 28 percent after a 12-hour shift.

### Driver Drowsiness

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, driver fatigue is responsible for an estimated 100,000 motor vehicle accidents annually. In 2008, fatigue accounted for 849 deaths and 47,000 injuries. Drowsiness increases a driver’s risk of a crash or near-crash by at least a factor of four.

The National Institutes of Health’s “Brain Basics” Web site, www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/brain_basics/understanding_sleep.htm, explains that sleep is necessary for our nervous systems to work properly. Too little sleep leaves us drowsy and unable to concentrate. It also leads to impaired memory and reduced physical performance. If sleep deprivation persists, hallucinations and mood swings could develop. This translates to being less effective on and off the job.

To get a good night’s sleep:

- Go to bed and get up at a set time. Sleeping in on weekends makes it harder to wake up early on Monday morning because your sleep cycle resets for a later awakening.
- Get daily exercise, but do not exercise too close to bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine and alcohol. Caffeine acts as a stimulant and keeps you awake. Smokers tend to sleep very lightly and often wake up early because of nicotine withdrawal. Alcohol deprives people of deep sleep and rapid eye movement sleep, the stage of sleep where vividly recalled dreams predominantly occur. It keeps individuals in the lighter stages of sleep.
- Relax before going to bed. A warm bath, reading or another relaxing routine makes it easier to fall asleep. You can train yourself to associate certain restful activities with sleep and make them part of your bedtime ritual.
- Make your bedroom quiet and set a temperature conducive for sleeping. Use curtains to darken the bedroom. Keep the home office out the bedroom.
- If you cannot fall asleep, do not lie in bed. Get up and do something else such as watch television or read. The anxiety produced by being unable to fall asleep may add to insomnia.

If you constantly have trouble falling asleep or always feel tired the next day, see your doctor or a sleep specialist. Most sleep disorders can be treated effectively.

Make getting enough sleep a priority. You will be safer, more productive and healthier. ■

*The author is a certified industrial hygienist in the Office of Safety, Health and Environmental Management in the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations.*

## U.S. Ambassador to The Bahamas

Nicole A. Avant of California, a leader in education, entertainment, politics and philanthropy, is the new U.S. Ambassador to the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. Most recently, she was vice president of Interior Music Publishing and Avant Garde Music Publishing. She was Southern California finance co-chair of the Obama presidential campaign. She has actively supported programs that help people with disabilities and fund pediatric cancer research. She is married and has two children.

## U.S. Ambassador to Georgia

John R. Bass of New York, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, class of Counselor, is the new U.S. Ambassador to Georgia. Previously, he led the Baghdad Provincial Reconstruction Team. Before that, he was director of the Department Operations Center. He has been a special advisor to former Vice President Dick Cheney and chief of staff to former Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbott. His postings include Rome, Brussels and N'Djamena.

## Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs

Jeffrey D. Feltman of Ohio, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, class of Minister-Counselor, is the new Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs. Previously, he was principal deputy assistant secretary in the bureau. Before that, he was ambassador to Lebanon. He was acting principal officer in Jerusalem and has also served in Iraq, Israel, Tunisia, Hungary and Haiti. His wife is also a Foreign Service officer.

## Under Secretary for Economic, Energy and Agricultural Affairs

Robert Hormats of New York, former vice chairman of Goldman Sachs (International), is the new Under Secretary for Economic, Energy and Agricultural Affairs. Before joining Goldman Sachs in 1982, he was assistant secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs and deputy U.S. Trade Representative. Before that, he served on the National Security Council as senior economic advisor to Henry Kissinger, Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski.

## U.S. Ambassador to Canada

David C. Jacobson of Illinois, former special assistant to the President for Presidential Personnel, is the new U.S. Ambassador to Canada. Before serving in the White House, he spent 30 years working on commercial, class action, securities, insurance and business litigation as a partner with Sonnenschein, Nath & Rosenthal LLP. He founded AtomWorks, an organization to bring together corporate, civic and academic leaders to foster nanotechnology in the Midwest.

## U.S. Permanent Representative to UNESCO

David Killion of the District of Columbia, an expert on international organizations, was accorded the rank of Ambassador as the U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Previously, he was a senior staff member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. He coordinated the committee's initiatives to improve U.N. management and worked on legislation authorizing U.S. re-entry to UNESCO. He has worked in the Department's Bureau of Legislative Affairs.

## U.S. Permanent Representative to the OECD

Karen Kornbluh of New York, a high-level official in the executive and legislative branches, is the new U.S. Permanent Representative to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development with the rank of Ambassador. Previously, she was a visiting fellow at the Center for American Progress. Before that, she was policy director in then-Senator Barack Obama's Senate office. She has been deputy chief of staff at the Treasury Department and worked for the Federal Communications Commission.

## U.S. Ambassador to Tanzania

Alfonso E. Lenhardt of New York, former chief executive officer of the National Crime Prevention Council and senior vice president for The Shaw Group, is the new Ambassador to United Republic of Tanzania. Previously, he served as the 36th Sergeant at Arms for the U.S. Senate. He also served as chief operating officer of the Council on Foundations. Capping three decades of military service, he served as commanding general of the U.S. Army Recruiting Command. He is married and has three daughters.

## U.S. Ambassador to Burundi

Pamela J.H. Slutz of Texas, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, class of Minister-Counselor, is the new U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Burundi. Previously, she was deputy chief of mission in Nairobi and before that ambassador to Mongolia. Other postings include Kinshasa, Jakarta, Shanghai and the American Institute in Taiwan. She is married to retired Foreign Service officer Ronald Deutch. They have two sons and five grandchildren.

## U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia

James B. Smith of New Hampshire, a business executive, is the new U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Previously, he worked with Raytheon Co. in corporate strategic planning, aircraft manufacturing and international business development. He spent 28 years in the Air Force, retiring as a brigadier general. Trained as a fighter pilot, he served in operational assignments around the world and flew combat missions during Operation Desert Storm. He is married.

## U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom

Louis B. Susman of Illinois, a banker and lawyer, is the new U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. He was vice chairman of Citigroup Corporate and Investment Banking and worked for Salomon Brothers. Before that, he practiced law with a focus on mergers and acquisitions and general corporate law. He was on the board of directors and management committee of the St. Louis Cardinals. He is married and has two children and three grandchildren.

## U.S. Ambassador to Italy

David H. Thorne of Massachusetts, an investor and entrepreneur, is the new U.S. Ambassador to the Italian Republic, to serve concurrently as Ambassador to the Republic of San Marino. He is a co-founder of Adviser Investments, specializing in mutual funds and electronically traded funds. His business ventures include marketing consulting, real estate, publishing and financial services. He was president of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. He served in the Navy and authored *The New Soldier.*

## U.S. Ambassador to Belize

Vinai K. Thummalapally of Colorado, an engineer and business executive, is the new U.S. Ambassador to Belize. Previously, he was President of MAM-A Inc., the nation's leading manufacturer and distributor of archival recordable optical discs. He served in similar roles for several other companies. Originally from India, he moved to the United States in 1974. He holds two U.S. patents for design of optical disc manufacturing.

## U.S. Ambassador to Norway

Barry B. White of Massachusetts, a lawyer, is the new U.S. Ambassador to Norway. Previously, he was chairman and managing partner of Foley Hoag LLP, where he worked in the firm's business, corporate, international and government strategies practice areas. He co-founded the Lex Mundi Pro Bono Foundation, which provides pro bono legal advice to social entrepreneurs around the world. He was active with many organizations, boards and community services in the Boston area. He is married and has three sons.

# Retirements

## Foreign Service

Aaron, M. Eugene
Able, Patricia J.
Ahring, Raymond C.
Anderson, Constance A.
Anyaso, Claudia E.
Bakalar, Michael E.
Boucher, Richard A.
Dumont, Cedric E.
Flora, Brian M.
Folensbee, Lester S.
Fox, Stephen R.
French, Philip Charles
Furey, Thomas P.
Harnish III, Reno Leon
Krawitz, Howard Mark
Lamb, Lynne Dorothy
Martino, Daniel Joseph
Olmstead, Gregory P.
Pham, Peter Phuong
Polt, Michael Christian
Siekert, Magda S.
Simpson, Richard G.
Stone, Curtis A.
Taylor, Merle E.
Uhlmann, Gunther
Vaughan, Rupert D.
Weisberg, Robert I.

## Civil Service

Bonsaint, Marie E.
Brown, Sharon A.
Cantu, Mario
Churchill, Ngoc-Anh La
Egan, Michael C.
Gilliam, Adele
Hampton, Josetta Marshall
Hayes, Vershell Eunice
Hope, Colleen Ann
Jackson, Celeste A.
Mitchell, Roger D.
Rindler, Edward P.
Schultz, Katherine Mary
Wainscott, Kathryn K.
Wolloch, Cynthia L.
Young, Charles R.

**Gypsie C. Berckman**, 79, a retired communications program officer, died June 24 of chronic obstructive lung disease. She lived in Madison Heights, Va.

**John H. "Johnny" Berg**, retired chief of the travel and visitors unit at the U.S. Embassy in Paris, died in January 2009 after a long illness. He fled Nazi Germany and began working for the U.S. Army in Paris in 1947. Two years later, he was hired by the embassy. A legendary facilitator and problem-solver, he secured an entire train to transport 10,000 American veterans and family members from Paris to Normandy for the 40th commemoration of D-Day. His service was recognized by the granting of U.S. citizenship. He retired in 2005.

**John George Collias**, 83, a retired diplomatic courier, died Oct. 6 in Falls Church, Va. He served in the Navy during World War II and joined the Department in 1956. That year, he helped evacuate the U.S. Embassy in Cairo during the Suez crisis. He retired in 1986. He was a lifelong tennis player.

**Vilma Mae DiLisio**, a retired Foreign Service executive secretary, died Feb. 2 in Pittsburgh, Pa. During her 28-year career, she served in Nicosia; Rio de Janeiro; Ottawa; the U.S. Mission to the United Nations; Rotterdam; San Jose; Hamilton, Bermuda; and St. Georges, Grenada. She retired in 1988.

**Terence Flannery**, a retired Foreign Service officer, died Oct. 28 in Paris after a short illness. He served in the Air Force and worked in the private sector before joining the Foreign Commercial Service. His postings included Paris, Algiers, London and Brussels. After retiring in 1997, he worked for a lobbying firm and the *Wall Street Journal*-Europe Future Leadership Institute.

**Lloyd R. George**, 67, a retired Foreign Service officer, died Oct. 11 of complications from a stroke. He worked for the Peace Corps in Turkey and the U.S. Agency for International Development in Vietnam before joining the Department. His postings included Athens, Ankara, Amman, Pretoria, Belgrade and Stockholm. He retired in 1996 and in 1998 moved with his wife to Asheville, N.C.

**Lois Doland Hartwell**, 76, wife of retired Foreign Service officer Ralph Hartwell, died Oct. 7 in Hudson, N.H., after a period of declining health. She accompanied her husband on military and Foreign Service postings to England, Spain, Portugal, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Italy and Barbados. She worked at U.S. embassies in Nigeria, England and Spain. She loved travelling and visiting old churches and architecture around the world. She and her husband moved to Hudson in 1988.

**William K. Hitchcock**, 90, a retired Foreign Service officer, died Nov. 8. He lived in Boulder, Colo. He served in the Army Air Corps during World War II. After joining the Department, he served in London, Paris, Madrid, Calcutta and Saigon. He was also deputy assistant secretary for Educational and Cultural Affairs. He retired in 1978 and settled in Boulder, where he closely followed international affairs and politics.

**Steven G. Liapis**, 76, a retired Foreign Service officer with the U.S. Agency for International Development, died Oct. 1 in Vero Beach, Fla. He was taken hostage by the Yemeni government in 1967, an incident featured in the book *Tales of the Foreign Service*. After retirement, he worked for USAID as a consultant. He was active in bridge and tennis clubs.

**Elisabeth "Bette" Mark**, 82, widow of retired Foreign Service officer David Mark, died Nov. 25 in Leawood, Kan., from complications due to Alzheimer's disease. She met her husband while working as director of the Anglo-American School in Moscow and accompanied him on postings to Geneva and other countries in Europe and Africa. She was known for her artistic, horticultural and musical talents. In retirement, she enjoyed travelling, gardening, reading and quilting.

**Dan and Barbara McCarthy**, 61 and 59 respectively, died at separate times in 2009. Dan was a retired Diplomatic Security agent and Barbara a management officer for the U.S. Information Agency and the Department. They served together in Dhaka, Lagos, Riyadh, Damascus and New Delhi. After Dan's retirement, Barbara served in Beirut and the Bureau of Human Resources.

**Michael Mennard**, 86, a retired Foreign Service officer, died Oct. 24 in Potomac Falls, Va. He served in the Army. A native of Yugoslavia, he joined the Voice of America as a broadcaster in 1955 and later opened the South Asia Branch of VOA in New Delhi. He joined the Foreign Service in 1974 and was posted to New Delhi and Bonn. After retiring in 1985, he was a consultant on Yugoslav affairs during the breakup of that country.

**Walker W. Smith**, 89, a retired Civil Service employee, died Aug. 27. He lived in Charlottesville, Va. He joined the Department in 1941, then served in the Army during World War II. He later worked in the Department's Budget Office and Department of Far Eastern Affairs. After retiring in 1973, he returned as controller for the Vietnam Refugee Task Force. He was active in church and community work and loved to garden.

**Colleen Ann Wardlaw**, 51, a retired Foreign Service nurse practitioner, died Sept. 9 in McKinleyville, Calif. She joined the Department in 1986 and served in Lilongwe, Moscow and Rabat. She travelled extensively in Africa, Russia and Europe. After retiring in 1996, she taught English to foreign students in Wyoming. Later, she moved to McKinleyville and taught English at a medical school in China for a year. She had previously toured China by bicycle.

**William B. Whitman**, 73, a retired Foreign Service officer, died Oct. 30 in Washington, D.C. He joined the Department in 1960 and served in Palermo, Milan and Rome, Italy, as well as Bolivia and Yugoslavia. After retiring, he worked as a Foreign Service inspector in Burkina Faso, Germany, Mexico, Niger and Madagascar. He was head of mission in Macedonia for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. In recent years, he became a well-known travel writer and author of six books.

## In the event of a death

Questions concerning employee deaths should be directed to the Office of Casualty Assistance at (202) 736-4302. Inquiries concerning deaths of retired employees should be directed to the Office of Retirement at (202) 261-8960.

# Business as Usual

A Department program designed to strengthen U.S. ties to Muslim countries has been put to good use in Latin America to counter growing anti-American sentiments in that region. Developed and implemented in 2004, the Access Program provides after-school classes and summer activities that teach basic English skills to young students from communities with little previous contact with Americans. Around 44,000 students in more than 55 counties have participated in the program.

Argentina—one of the first Latin American countries to join the program in 2007 when its scholarships were made available worldwide—has embraced the program with enthusiasm. In 2010, more than 600 Argentine students will study English in 11 bi-national centers. The idea is to expose foreign youth to American culture and society and also offer them new economic and academic opportunities.

Coordinating the joint efforts of the U.S. and its partners, especially the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, to defeat Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan is a monumental task, but the U.S. Mission to NATO in Brussels has found an approach that works—interagency collaboration. With about half its staff from the State Department and the other half from the Department of Defense, the USNATO Afghanistan team also works with the U.S. Military Delegation in Brussels to advance U.S. interests at the world's most powerful military alliance.

This tightly coordinated team practices hands-on diplomacy to influence U.S. allies on issues such as troop levels in Afghanistan, training Afghan security forces, counterinsurgency strategies and NATO cooperation. The work is intense, often grueling, but for these dedicated teammates, it's business as usual.

State continued its aggressive acceptance of new media and technology with its recent endorsement of the Virtual Student Foreign Service as a new way to involve college students in the Department's overseas mission. Announced by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton late in 2009, VSFS is the first U.S. government initiative of its kind, even though digital internships are growing more popular in private industry. As part of the pilot, 37 diplomatic missions and associated projects, including the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, partnered with 44 current or former interns over the summer of 2009. By mid November, VSFS Iraq had more than 200 fans on Facebook.

Last but never least, a final salute to our colleagues en route to their final posting: *Gypsie C. Berckman; John H. "Johnny" Berg; John George Collias; Vilma Mae DiLisio; Terence Flannery; Lloyd R. George; Lois Doland Hartwell; William K. Hitchcock; Steven G. Liapis; Elisabeth "Bette" Mark; Barbara McCarthy; Dan McCarthy; Michael Mennard; Walker W. Smith; Colleen Ann Wardlaw; and William B. Whitman.* ■

Rob Wiley
Editor-in-Chief

## COMING IN FEBRUARY

>>> Embassy Baghdad Tries High Tech Diplomacy

>>> RSO Introduces Parisian Firefighters to EMT Services >>>

>>> State Honors Its Foreign Service Nationals

... and much more!

DIPLO THE MAGNIFICENT'S AMAZING PREDICTIONS FOR 2010!
BLOHARDISTAN WILL TEST LONG-RANGE BALLISTIC TALKING POINTS CAPABLE OF REACHING AND ANNOYING THE WESTERN UNITED STATES.
BLAH BLAH BLAH
BLAH BLAH BLAH
IF ASKED
IF PRESSED
AT HER NEW POST, CONSULAR OFFICER NADINE MUGMORE-GUNN WILL SAY "THE WAY WE DID IT AT MY LAST POST..." 3,892 TIMES.
...AND THEN IF WE WANTED THE BATHROOM PASS, WHAT WE DID WAS...
DEPUTY OFFICE DIRECTOR VERN SLEEKER WILL HAVE A SUDDEN FEELING THAT HE SHOULD STOP MICROMANAGING AND SECOND-GUESSING HIS COLLEAGUES. THE FEELING WILL PASS.
WHEW.
AGAZIER 2009
BIGFOOT WILL BE TENURED. BUT NOT PROMOTED.
AN OFF-COURSE SHUTTLE BUS WILL DISCOVER A LITTLE-KNOWN ANNEX STAFFED ENTIRELY BY MEERKATS.
WE MAY BE SMALL, BURROWING MEMBERS OF THE MONGOOSE FAMILY, JOHNSON, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN WE SHOULDN'T PRODUCE PITHY FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS!

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