STATE MAGAZINE

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November 2017

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The Last Wilderness

After FARC, Colombia's diverse ecosystem hangs in the balance

DIRTY GOLD

Embassy Lima and Peruvian government tackle illegal mining

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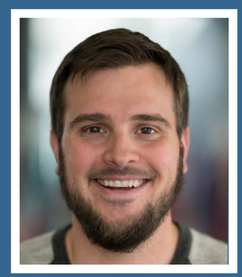

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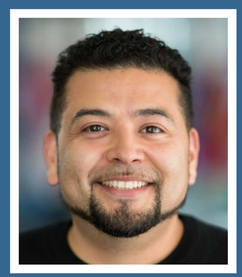

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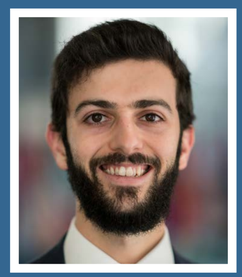

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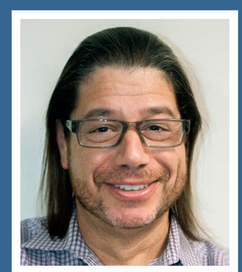

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State Magazine

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STATE
MAGAZINE

Chargé d'Affaires Laurie Meininger tours the disaster area.
State Department photo

OFDA Responds to Freetown Disaster

After torrential August rains caused mudslides and flooding in Freetown, Sierra Leone, killing more than 500 people, displacing nearly 5,000 and leaving nearly 2,000 sheltering at collective centers, USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) in Dakar, Senegal, mobilized to lend help. OFDA disaster experts verified the situation and response options, and then OFDA swiftly made $100,000 available to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) for relief items, including safe drinking water, soap and other hygiene supplies. USAID's Office of Food for Peace also provided food assistance to vulnerable households.

The mission's chargé, Laurie Meininger, and USAID and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) staff then visited the site of the mudslides. U.S. government staff assessed the damage and spoke with affected Sierra Leoneans, and an OFDA regional advisor met in Sierra Leone with IFRC and coordinated with the government of Sierra Leone and relief partners to ensure an efficient response from the international humanitarian community. OFDA staff also worked closely with other donors to ensure that U.S. government funds did not duplicate other partners' efforts.

In addition to USAID, other U.S. government entities were critical in responding to this disaster. The Department of Defense deployed engineers from U.S. Africa Command to assess damage to two of the city's bridges. CDC experts carried out disease prevention and control activities and supported the emergency operations center. ◻

Department Rewards Performance Excellence

Rewards and recognition are an important part of the Department toolkit to engage and motivate employees, and the Quality Step Increase (QSI) is the most prestigious for the Civil Service. This year, the Civil Service Reform Team considered how to best use QSIs. As a result, and in conjunction with the 2016 annual CS performance evaluation cycle, the team introduced centralized Quality Step Increases (QSI) and a new Quality Performance Award (QPA), which offer an opportunity to recognize truly exceptional performers.

To enhance transparency and consistency, address employee concerns raised in the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, help drive performance and improve the link between performance appraisals and reward, the new two-step process is Department-wide and centrally managed. First, bureau awards committees review nominations from supervisors to ensure eligibility, measuring candidates against set criteria. They then forward successful nominees to Department-level panels of volunteers from across the Department. The panels review nominations and rank-order successful candidates using the criteria, basing decisions strictly on the DS-1968 nomination form and the employee's two most recent appraisals, a critical part of the nomination package. Successful nominations fully support the criteria, evidenced by strong examples.

While this year's allotment of awardees was 4 percent of the eligible Civil Service workforce, bureaus were invited to nominate up to 10 percent of their workforce to ensure that pockets of excellence could be recognized regardless of bureau. Historically, the full allotment of awards was rarely, if ever, used, but this year's centralized process enabled the Department to award the full QSI/QPA allotment authorized. As anticipated, there was true competition, with 587 employees nominated for the 404 available opportunities. And though there were many outstanding nominations, in the end, 363 deserving employees received QSIs and 41 received QPAs.

The new QSI and QPA process raises the profile of the Department's pre-eminent means to recognize employees' exceptional, sustained performance and confers wider recognition for the recipients. More information on the QSI/QPA process, including the criteria, and a list of this year's recipients can be found on Diplopedia. ◻

From left, Omar Maldonado and Victor Aguirre of the Office of Security Cooperation-Nicaragua lead a Cine Forum discussion about the film "A League of Their Own."

State Department photo

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Despite generally being less than favorably disposed to the United States, Nicaraguans share an affinity for baseball and American cinema. Combining the two forms of entertainment provided a powerful forum to discuss the importance of women's empowerment, through a screening and discussion of the film "A League of Their Own," about a fictional women's professional baseball league. Volunteers from the Office of Security Cooperation-Nicaragua used the film to highlight the growing role of women in the U.S. military, the importance of women's economic empowerment to national prosperity and the power of women as role models, all areas where women are challenged in Nicaragua.

The U.S. Embassy in Managua's Cine Forum provided a structure to address these key themes in a country where opportunities to discuss such social issues are more limited. Since the forum's launch three years ago, the embassy has engaged with hundreds of students through discussions on such topics as the importance of science and technology studies, women's empowerment and even LGBTQI rights. American employees, local staff and alumni of U.S. programs screen American films and host a lively discussion with the audience.

The embassy, for instance, recently showcased the documentary "Lead with Love" to more than 90 university students. The film shared the emotional reactions of parents who learn their child is gay and allowed the audience to examine questions on sexuality, equality, and gay, lesbian and bisexual issues. In Nicaragua, which is extremely religious and where traditional beliefs are held closely, individuals may struggle to find a safe venue to openly and honestly discuss discrimination in these vulnerable communities. American movies are popular among Nicaraguan youth and can introduce sensitive topics. During the three years of the program, the embassy has expanded the number of participating universities and the size of the audiences, which now reach close to 500 students each year. ◻

A photo, taken using a recreational drone, shows Embassy Kyiv staff sending out their Ukrainian Independence Day greeting from a park near the embassy.

Photo by Vitaliy Makarenko

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The U.S. Mission in Ukraine recently used a recreational drone to capture video of Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch, her colleagues and a Ukrainian rock band. Flying 100 feet overhead, the camera-equipped drone helped document the commemoration of Ukraine's independence. In less than a week, the video gained 700,000 views on the mission's Facebook and YouTube pages.

Since then, more than two dozen television and online outlets have covered the video, which has gained thousands of retweets from the public, including leading musicians, glitterati and even the prime minister himself.

The video also shows embassy staff singing a traditional Ukrainian vyshyvanki and a close-up of Information Officer Geoff Anisman donning his hand-crafted "Yalta" cufflinks, a nod to the core U.S. message #CrimeaisUkraine. Images of the cufflinks, timed to the beginning of Fashion Week in Ukraine, generated coverage in nine Ukrainian media outlets.

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Photo by Festus Bizimana

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The observers said they appreciated the ease and convenience of submitting reports through FAN via iPads and smartphones, rather than filling out paper surveys.

At the post's command center, survey responses were logged and time-stamped, with the FAN survey tool providing real-time aggregation and analysis of observers' reports. As observer teams entered their responses into FAN, bar graphs and pie charts sprang up on the center's screens, providing instantaneous insights into voting patterns.

In addition to its OpenNet computers, the command center had two Wi-Fi-enabled laptops. Thus, despite OpenNet delays and two intermittent main internet server outages, the post had uninterrupted access to FAN and the reports.

In another first, the embassy used WhatsApp to connect the observer teams. The texting app provided an easy way for observers to report their movements, share pictures and observations, and seek command center clarification on what to do when encountering difficulties. It also let observers leverage one another's insights. Thus, concerns reported by one team instantly clued in all other observers to be mindful of similar issues.

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Diversity Notes

GREG SMITH
OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS

The Spirit of Inclusion

November marks the beginning of an extended holiday season, a time when people of diverse cultures and religions observe a variety of holidays and traditions in their own ways. For some, it is a time to give back, express appreciation to friends and colleagues, or simply spend time with loved ones. For others, the holidays bring a mixed bag of emotions: stress, anxiety or even loneliness. The holiday season also ushers in the holiday spirit of gratitude and generosity. In my experience, during the holidays, we generally tend to be more patient, giving and, dare I say, tolerant of one another.

For me, the holidays and end-of-year typically serve as a time of reflection. This year, as I pause and look back, I am reminded of the many times our nation has come together to support one another during the best and worst of times, displaying our commitment to American values. In each of these moments, we have drawn strength from our diversity. From Texas to Florida to the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, people of all backgrounds showed up to support those affected by the hurricanes despite their differences. Tragic events such as those in Charlottesville remind us of our painful past, but even if at times our differences may be the reason we are initially at odds with one another, what often prevails is: *e pluribus unum*—out of many we are one. The reason: Our country values the incredible wealth of our rich diversity and the ways in which it contributes to the fabric of our nation.

Yet, as we go about our daily routines, it is so easy to overlook and take for granted the breadth and depth of our diversity. I've found that the holiday season presents the perfect opportunity to pause and appreciate just that. As people from all walks of life gather to celebrate various observances, let's take time to listen, learn and gain a deeper appreciation of the various cultures and traditions of our colleagues, friends and neighbors.

There are many ways to do this. For starters, as you plan office holiday gatherings, remember to be inclusive and aware that your own personal religious beliefs are not necessarily shared by others at work. Challenge yourself by moving out of your comfort zone to attend a different employee affinity group meeting other than the one you may usually attend. Have a conversation with a friend or neighbor of a different background, to understand his or her cultural norms and traditions. Attend a diversity or commemorative-month event hosted by your bureau or other offices—there are many offerings across the Department.

This year, no matter what you celebrate or what the holiday season means to you, I hope you will find time to appreciate the diversity that surrounds us all. May we engender the spirit of inclusion not just during the holidays but all year-round. ◻

Transportation Experts

Office arranges Department's travel needs

By Mark D. Dellinger, branch chief, Travel Management and Transportation Analysis Branch

Eric Miller of the Bureau of Administration's Transportation and Travel Management Division (TTM) was driving from Washington, D.C., to Cleveland July 28 when he received an emergency call from General Services Officer Carolyn Cooley at the U.S. Embassy in Caracas, Venezuela. In response to civil unrest, she needed immediate assistance getting 43 embassy employees, their family members and three dogs safely out of the country.

Unfortunately, every plane was full.

Miller immediately reached out to TTM's American Airlines representative and asked for larger planes on the Caracas-to-Miami route. He also asked the airline to temporarily waive its pet restrictions. After sorting this out in a McDonald's parking lot in Breezewood, Pa., Miller continued on his drive to Cleveland. As a result of this outreach, airlines over the next two days provided extra seats on larger planes, enough for all embassy travelers and their pets to evacuate Caracas.

Travel, it goes without saying, is essential to U.S. diplomacy. It may appear simple and straightforward, but anyone who has traveled for the U.S. government can relate to its pesky nuances. That's where TTM's Travel Management and Transportation Analysis branch plays an important role.

As branch chief, I lead a team of Civil Service, Foreign Service and contract travel professionals. My team is responsible for complex Department-wide travel policies, programs and initiatives.

Angela Burrill, chief of the Travel Management section, handles day-to-day operations at the domestic Travel Management Center, as well as customer service | *Cont.* |

The Transportation and Travel Management Division staff gathers for a group photo. From left to right: Tyrone Hunter, Mark Dellinger, Shany Philip, Michelle Peters, Ruthie Oliver-Blair, Brandon Nugent, Erika Brodis, Cheryl Capparra, Morgan Curtis, Demetrus Sutton, Angela Burrill, Candice Valencia, Victoria Johnson and Scott Tiedt. Missing team members: Eric Miller, Angela Shaw, Tene Alston, Kiona Graham and Becky Jones Anderson.

Photo by Ed Warner

From left, Division Director Scott Tiedt, Mark Dellinger and Angela Burrill participate in a voice conference with colleagues in other bureaus while planning for hurricane-related drawdown of several posts.

Photo by Ed Warner

strategy and program enhancements. Burrill is also the Contracting Officer's Representative for the CWT/Sato Travel contract, the Department's domestic contract travel provider, and works with team member Kiona Graham to triage customer needs, including after hours and weekends, for an operation that issues nearly 90,000 tickets for official travel each year.

"There's never a dull moment," Burrill said. "We have phones ringing, constant emails, meetings, teleconferences, you name it. We provide guidance to posts and work with external agencies such as the General Services Administration, the airlines and more. If it involves travel, our office has a hand in it."

Morgan Curtis leads TTM's Travel Regulations section. In addition to drafting and coordinating updates to the Employee Logistics-Travel section of the FAM, she answers policy questions from regional and functional bureaus, post management, travelers and travel arrangers. "Working on the travel team for the Bureaus of European Affairs and International Organizations before joining TTM exposed me to how a bureau travels," Curtis observed. "The complexity and nuances of travel is certainly different in TTM from that of a bureau. We deal with Permanent Change of Station travel, Rest and Recuperation travel, different types of visitation travel and medical-evacuation travel. It was quite the learning curve."

Because of the Department's complex mission—not to mention constant changes in the airline and travel industries, management of travel programs and policies—each day brings new and unique challenges for TTM's team. As the Caracas scenario demonstrates, world events find the team responding to a multitude of contingencies.

When EUR was faced with a short-notice requirement to reduce the Department's presence in Russia late in the summer, TTM ensured that new government fares were available in the booking systems and that carriers were ready to assist with larger aircraft and able to provide special "white glove" service to handle an emotional and politically sensitive situation. | *Cont.* |

Demetrus Sutton and Morgan Curtis, at right, confer over a travel policy draft.

Photo by Ed Warner

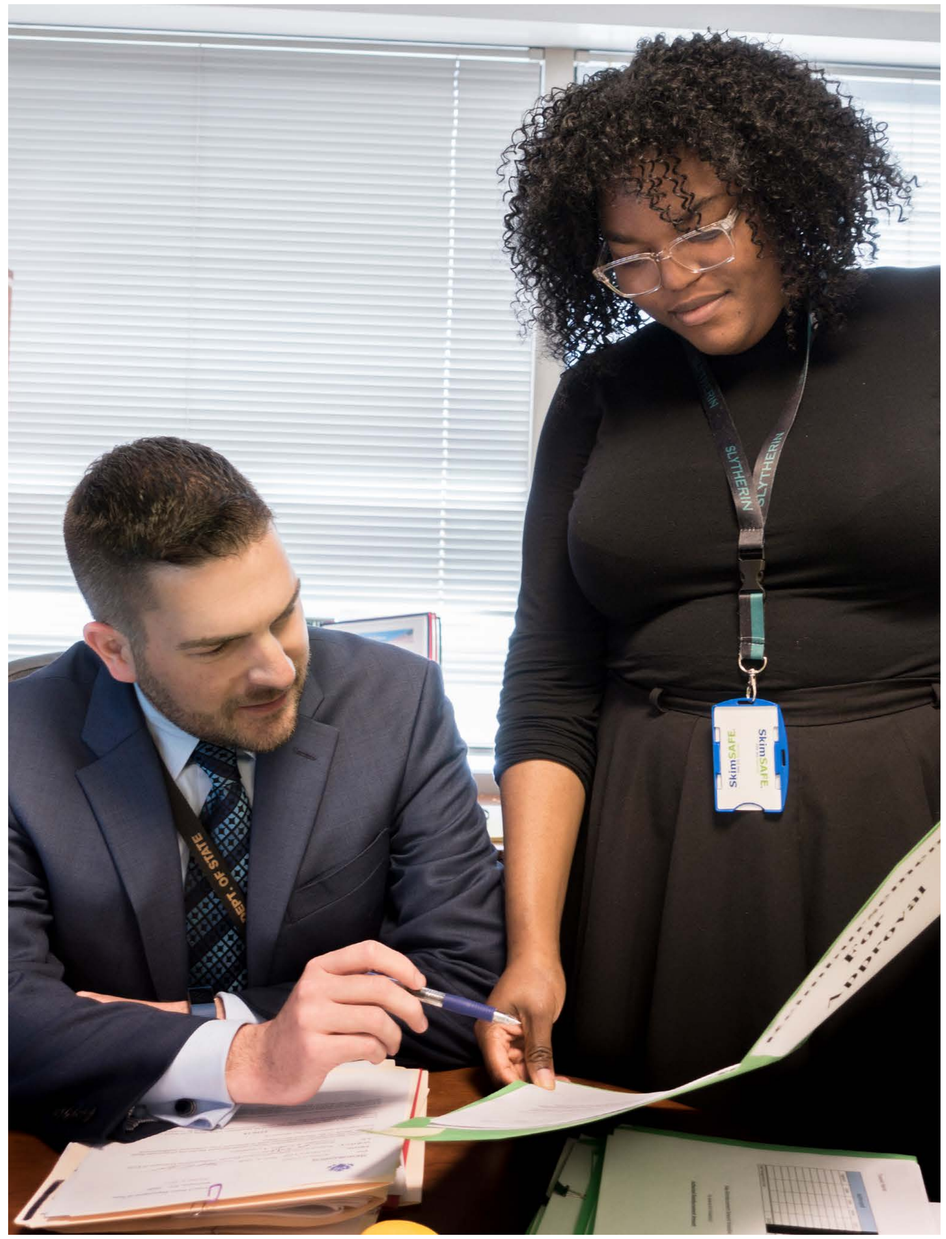
Mother Nature recently threw another task at TTM's door. When hurricanes Irma, Jose and Maria bore down on the Caribbean, TTM sprang into action: Burrill coordinated the issuance of airline tickets for posts that still had commercial flight service, and Miller leveraged his airline industry representative contacts to add commercial flights and reduce the need to charter aircraft. I took part by chartering aircraft to safely transport embassy personnel and American citizens from Santo Domingo and Nassau. TTM Director Scott Tiedt provided oversight and coordinated with the Operations Center, Crisis Management and Strategy to ensure that emergency travel operations ran smoothly and successfully.

In October, TTM was still working with CMS and Department offices, and Department of Defense, Health and Human Services and other agency counterparts on post-hurricane operations.

"In TTM, you make a tangible impact every single day. You don't go home wondering just how much you nudged a policy along; you actually make policy. There's no distance between you and the folks you're helping. You make contacts in every bureau, whether regional or functional," said Brandon Nugent, one of the three FSOs in the branch.

"TTM provides a unique opportunity to build relationships with colleagues both domestically and overseas, while cultivating a reputation as a problem solver and a subject matter expert."

TTM's Director Scott Tiedt agrees. "Travel is complex, confusing and can test one's patience," he said. "No two travel scenarios are exactly the same. Whether TTM is assisting with routine travel, acquiring chartered aircraft, coordinating with cruise lines and ferry companies, or building logistics plans with the Department of Defense to transport U.S. employees, family members and American citizens out of harm's way, our responsibilities are clear. TTM's role is to assess the scenario, identify options and provide clear and expedient assistance. Our contribution to the Department's global mission is focused and is invaluable."



Brandon Nugent, at left, and Michelle Peters assess the details of an Exception Committee memo. *Photo by Ed Warner*

SURF'S UP

Staff in Senegal like to ride the waves

Story and Photos by Maria Harrison, eligible family member (EFM), U.S. Embassy in Dakar

A surfer heads to the water for his surf lesson on Yoff Beach in Dakar.

Images of surfing often bring to mind picturesque beaches in Hawaii or California, but West Africa is a well-kept secret on the international surfing scene. That fact often comes as a pleasant surprise to embassy employees newly arrived in Dakar, Senegal.

Situated on the westernmost point of Africa, Dakar enjoys tropical weather most of the year, which provides ideal surfing conditions almost year-round. Marine Security Guard Sgt. Trevor Echols, an avid surfer well acquainted with California's coast, said he surfs several times a week in Dakar.

Dakar has 13 different surf spots. The locations are relatively close to one another, so it is possible to check for swells at each beach before deciding where to go for the day. For instance, Ngor Island, popularized in the movie "The Endless Summer," offers large and relatively constant waves. But Echols says that another beach, Secret Spot in Almadies, is his favorite because of its accessibility and consistent breaks.

Others at post only learned to surf after arriving in Dakar. EFM Kendra Morgan, for instance, joined a ladies' beginner surf class just to support a friend, but after one lesson she says she was "completely hooked!" She has since enlisted her spouse and two children as well.

Morgan says she's witnessed some amazing sights from her surfboard in Dakar, including turtles and dolphins. What really cemented her loyalty to the waves, however, was the camaraderie she found among surfers. "Surfers, even complete strangers, are friendly and supportive," she observed. "They offer advice and cheer you on. The line [of surfers in the water] never gets busy waiting for a wave, and it is more relaxed here." | *Cont.* |

Surfboards against a thatched hut await a surf class at the Malika Surf Camp on Yoff Beach.

Clockwise: A local instructor explains the surf to a student on Yoff Beach in Dakar; A local boy runs past fishing boats in front of the Mosque of the Divinity, headed to the ocean at Ouakam Beach in Dakar; A family member's child listens to her instructor teach surfing poses on Yoff Beach.

Echols shared this view, saying that, unlike other places he's experienced around the world, Dakar's surfers take turns catching waves, and everyone is polite.

Dakar hosts an annual surf camp open to embassy children. Started in 2015 by Jane Preston, an EFM formerly located in Dakar, the camp is run in conjunction with a local surf school. Before the camp was put together, embassy children found it hard to learn to surf, often due to the French-only instruction. When Preston identified this barrier, she and a parent from the American school in Dakar formed a weekly surf club, translated the needed French information into English and provided transportation for all the children. The club now offers summer and winter camps, which consist of a full week of surfing for different levels during the day, and nighttime activities such as surf movies and training.

The surf scene at Embassy Dakar is swelling, with new recruits adding to those who arrive at post with their surfing gear. The next time you think of surfing, give West Africa a try.

A beginner surf class gets in the water after one hour of instruction on Yoff Beach in Dakar.

DIRTY GOLD

Peru, U.S. Embassy tackle crime-financing illegal mining

By Marlene Stearns, economic officer, U.S. Embassy in Lima, Peru

Peru's transnational criminal syndicates earn more than $3 billion annually from illegal gold exports, well more than the $500 million to $1 billion they earn from cocaine. Since illicit gold becomes legal on entering the United States, and 28 percent of Peru's gold production is illegally mined, significant controls are needed before the dirty gold hits the market.

Thus, in February, Ambassador to Peru Brian A. Nichols and Peru's foreign minister signed an agreement to cooperate in the illegal-gold-mining fight. Joint priorities include fighting transnational organized criminal networks, eradicating illegal mining from protected areas, reinforcing transparent and traceable supply chains for small-scale gold, stimulating alternative economic opportunities and reducing the use of mercury—a highly toxic chemical—in small-scale gold mining. More information is on Mission Peru's website.

"Illegal gold mining represents the frontier of transnational organized crime in its worst forms," said Ambassador Nichols, noting that it facilitates money laundering, fuels trafficking in persons, funds corruption, and damages health and the environment. "Reaching a multifaceted agreement with the Peruvian government to combat it was crucial to both of our countries' national security," he explained. | *Cont.* |

Filipino miners, from left, Leoncio Na-Oy and Rudy Onos, teach informal miners how to smelt gold using borax, instead of mercury, in Peru during a Department-sponsored workshop. *Photo by Pure Earth*

In March, U.S. authorities arrested three U.S. citizens for laundering $3.6 billion in suspected drug money through Peru's illegal gold industry. The three were reported to have bought billions of dollars of gold from illegal mines in the Amazon rain forest and then sold the gold to U.S. refiners, with the proceeds sent to drug traffickers and other criminals in South America.

The three arrests may be just the tip of the iceberg. "If anyone looked for connections between drug traffickers and illegal gold miners in Peru, it would be like shooting fish in a barrel," said a former U.S. law enforcement agent who worked in South America. "But nobody's looking."

Lives are cheap in the lawless environment created by illegal gold mining. By one 2010 estimate, 50,000 child laborers are forced to work in illegal gold mines, mostly in Peru's remote areas of Puno and Madre de Dios, and thousands of female minors have been forced into prostitution in the illegal camps. In the jungles of Madre de Dios in February, police uncovered a mass grave of 20 burned bodies of illegal miners and trafficked persons. Park rangers in the protected rainforest areas say they frequently find dead bodies in the rivers.

Other victims suffer a long death. Each year, illegal miners release an estimated 40 tons of mercury into rivers, lakes and air when using it to extract gold from ore. By one estimate, 78 percent of human adults and 60 percent of the fish species in Madre de Dios have methylmercury levels that exceed the EPA's limits. Women of child-bearing age have the highest average levels.

The environmental damage, too, is massive. The Monitoring of the Andean Amazon Project (MAAP) used satellite imagery to find that, from 1999 through 2016, alluvial gold miners deforested 154,440 acres in the Madre de Dios, Cusco and Puno regions, including inside several protected areas.

"It is shocking to visit the mining areas and realize that what is now a lunar landscape used to be primary rainforest a short time ago," said Holly Ferrette, director of USAID's Environment and Sustainable Growth office in Lima. "The environmental devastation is extensive and permanent, and the human toll is absolutely heartbreaking."

Illegal gold mining is exacerbated by laws allowing "small-scale" gold mining that, in fact, uses heavy machinery and can move up to 350 tons of earth per day. Peru's Ministry of Environment estimates small-scale gold mining affects almost a fifth of the country's landmass. The illicit nature of small-scale gold mining skyrocketed in 2010 in Madre de Dios after a new highway opened, allowing entry of large machinery and laborers.

Narco-traffickers and transnational organized syndicates have taken advantage of high gold prices, the lack of government presence in the remote Amazonian and Andean mining areas, and corrupt officials to increase their control of the mines, supply chains and transportation routes. | *Cont.* |

A team of Peruvian police, prosecutors and judges work with international experts to collect evidence at a simulated illegal mining crime scene during a workshop in Peru on Illegal Mining and Environmental Crimes in April.

Photo by INL Lima

A team of students from the Colorado School of Mines and Peru's University for Technology and Engineering join NGO staffers to meet with small-scale Peruvian gold miners to discuss mining techniques in a Department-funded project.
Photo by Nicole Smith

Terrorists also use money from illegal mining: As early as 2012, Peruvian newspapers reported that illegal gold mines were a source of financing for Peruvian and Colombian terrorist groups.

Heidi Gomez, deputy director of the embassy's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) office, said, "Illegal gold mining in Peru undermines the rule of law and fuels a criminal ecosystem that threatens the integrity of the international financial system."

In May, U.S. Science Envoy Dr. Thomas Lovejoy and Ambassador Nichols hosted a group of high-level Peruvian officials on an overflight of the illegal mining areas of the Amazon and at a meeting to discuss increased law enforcement. Video in Spanish of the overflight and an interview with Lovejoy are available online.

The day after the meeting, Peru's Ministry of Interior announced it would increase raids of illegal mining camps and criminal prosecution of illegal miners. Peru's police have carried out 141 operations against illegal mining camps so far in 2017, arresting 186 illegal miners. In raids over 11 months, Peru's navy and National Park Service eradicated 85 percent of the illegal miners from the Tambopata National Reserve in the Amazon. The navy established permanent checkpoints on the reserve's northern border. However, if no permanent law enforcement presence remains in the nonriverine areas, illegal miners restart their operations within days.

To counter criminal networks that profit from dirty gold and threaten regional and U.S. security, U.S. law enforcement agents and attorneys are training Peru's police, prosecutors and judges to more effectively prosecute illegal mining. In parallel, INL's joint program with the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol is working with Peru's Tax and Customs Agency to improve its airport and border procedures to better identify smuggling of drugs, gold, mercury, humans and other contraband.

Another tool to stop illegal mining is simply making information available. Thus, Embassy Lima placed a commercial advisory on its website. Economic Officer Ben Yates, who led the post's interagency effort to draft and

Filipino miners turned trainers teach informal gold miners in Peru to use a sluice box before panning for gold, a mercury-free technique used in the Philippines.
Photo by Pure Earth

From left, the director of Formalization in Peru's Ministry of Energy and Mines, Maximo Gallo; the deputy superintendent of Operations at the Tax and Customs Authority, Claudia Suarez; and Attorney General Pablo Sanchez listen to Dr. Hadrien Vanthomme of the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Conservation and Sustainability explain what they will see during the embassy-hosted overflight of illegal gold mining areas in May. *Photo by Heidi Gomez*

publish the commercial advisory, said, "We have a mandate to protect our national security, the interests of U.S. citizens abroad, and to provide U.S. investors with accurate information about the investment climate." In addition, the Commerce Department's Country Commercial Guide now advises U.S. businesses of Peru's dirty gold problem. The guide encourages U.S. companies to conduct deeper due diligence to ensure their gold supply chain is clean.

The embassy's Illegal Mining Working Group coordinates more than 40 activities that amplify Peru's efforts to help legal miners meet labor and environmental laws and strengthen Peru's enforcement efforts against illegal mining and the criminal forces driving it.

With these efforts and those of the Peruvian government, Mission Peru hopes to tip the scales against the illegal miners and dangerous criminal bands.

The Last Wilderness

After FARC, Colombia's diverse ecosystem hangs in the balance

By Nathaniel Rettenmayer, ESTH officer, and Karen Lips, former Science Fellow, U.S. Embassy in Bogota

When the Dec. 1, 2016, pact between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) ended the hemisphere's longest-running armed conflict, unique environmental opportunities emerged. During the more than half-century-long conflict, land controlled by FARC remained relatively untouched and uncataloged by researchers, scientists and tourists. But FARC's departure and increasing security in these areas have offered scientists the first opportunity in decades to explore Colombia's captivating biodiversity.

The government, however, has yet to establish a firm presence in many of these areas, and ranchers, loggers, miners and criminals are capitalizing on vast swaths of this once-off-limits land. Recognizing the country's rich environmental endowment and its potential to support sustainable development, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos has called for "reconciling with nature" as a priority. Colombia is the world's second most biodiverse country. It is home to 10 percent of the world's species, to the greatest number of bird species and to the second greatest number of plant, amphibian and freshwater fish species. Sustaining that biodiversity is a complex geography: from paramos, a high-elevation ecosystem above the tree line that provides fresh water to millions of Colombians, to the Amazon basin; from the llanos, or wet lowland prairies, to the Pacific/Chocó region, one of the rainiest places on Earth. Now, though, environmental challenges threaten that biodiversity, including unchecked economic expansion, high rates of deforestation, illicit crop cultivation and mining, and the loss of biodiversity due to population settlement and agricultural expansion. In 2016, there was a 44 percent increase in the deforestation rate, compared with 2015, with the government reporting more than 178,000 hectares of natural forests lost per year, or 20 hectares every hour.

| *Cont.* |

The Chingaza Paramo provides more than 85 percent of Bogotá's fresh water.
Photo by Luis A. Bernal Romero

Dr. Thomas Lovejoy visits Chingaza National Park during his May 2017 tour in Colombia.
Embassy Bogota photo

Colombia's signature programs to preserve its natural wealth involve multinational stakeholders. One, Colombia Sostenible, is a fund administered by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), which will leverage more than $600 million in expected donations to maximize the environmental, social and economic benefits of peace, while promoting sustainable rural development, conserving biodiversity and combating climate change, including deforestation. The second, Colombia BIO, is led by the national science agency Colciencias, and organizes expeditions to review and catalog biodiversity in areas that scientists had previously not been able to explore due to the armed conflict. Colciencias has launched 11 investigations under the initiative, driving cooperation between diverse scientific entities and uncovering dozens of new species.

As the U.S. Embassy works to support Colombia's transition to peace, it is important that the development of legal economic opportunities and the increased governmental presence in what were FARC-held lands dovetail with the need for increased environmental stewardship. To this end, the embassy employs a whole-of-mission approach to addressing environmental concerns, including through USAID programming to support biodiversity conservation and counter illegal mining, and providing law enforcement capacity-building activities run by the post's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) office. Throughout conflict-affected rural Colombia, USAID is implementing more than $100 million in biodiversity conservation, environmental services and sustainable rural development programs. Other embassy activities include INL-funded training that uses U.S. agencies' expertise, including that of the U.S. Forest Service, Department of the Interior, EPA, and Fish and Wildlife Service. INL has also hosted multiple U.S. study trips for Colombian prosecutors to work with the Department of Justice and various state attorney general offices on the prosecution of environmental crimes.

| *Cont.* |

The Chingaza Paramo.
Photo by Luis Alveart

The embassy has explored how to advance the Colombian government's ambitious environmental initiatives through such science diplomacy as the bilateral science and technology joint committee meeting. It is also using the Science Envoy and Science Fellows programs to underscore U.S. support. In May, Science Envoy Thomas Lovejoy, who coined the term "biodiversity" and is a member of the Colombia Sostenible advisory board, brought together senior government officials, scientists, the IDB and environmental leaders to discuss post-accord environmental priorities. They also discussed Colombia's rising deforestation rate and how Colombia Sostenible could provide solutions.

Lovejoy also joined scientists from Colciencias and the Alexander Van Humboldt Institute in Bogotá, Colombia's premiere biodiversity research organization, and park service rangers for a field visit to Chingaza National Park, a paramo located above Bogotá that provides more than 85 percent of the capital's fresh water. (More than 70 percent of Colombians depend on the paramos for fresh water.) The field visit strengthened the two scientific organizations' relations, demonstrated embassy support for the Colombia BIO initiative and opened opportunities for future U.S.-Colombia collaboration. Several additional expeditions are planned for 2018, and Colciencias General Director César Ocampo has invited Lovejoy and the embassy to participate and support future excursions.

Embassy Science Fellow Dr. Karen Lips stands in the jungle in the Pacific/Choco natural region of Colombia, where she was on a Colciencias-organized expedition to examine biodiversity loss.
Photo by Jenniffer Solorzano

Embassy Bogotá is also leveraging the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs' Embassy Science Fellows program to support Colombia's post-accord environmental planning. Embassy Science Fellow Karen Lips, an expert in amphibians and frogs, was recently embedded with the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for two months, working with researchers to analyze economic, socio-cultural and environmental patterns of land use in post-conflict territories. The team's findings underscored the biological diversity of Colombia's post-conflict lands, which hold half of the nation's national parks.

The team also discovered that the distribution of high-priority habitats (i.e., paramos, dry forests) was uneven among post-conflict areas. These areas are important sources of water and other natural resources, and protecting them could unlock unique bio-economic opportunities while simultaneously protecting critical ecosystems. Overall, the project confirmed the need to quickly conserve at-risk conservation lands, but also identified the tremendous opportunity for indigenous groups and other communities to harvest Colombia's biodiversity to realize legal, sustainable livelihoods. Embassy Bogotá will also use the Science Envoy program to bring a mercury expert to help Colombia address widespread use of that environmental poison in illegal gold mining.

As Colombia works to catalog and protect its ecosystems, the embassy has partnered with Colciencias to bring five U.S. researchers to Colombia in 2018 to work with the nation's | *Cont.* |

top five environmental research institutions. As part of the Colombia BIO program, the researchers will work in Bogotá and in post-accord areas on such issues as biodiversity and forest conservation, bioprospecting and valuation of ecosystem services. The post has also worked with OES, the Embassy Science Fellow program and the Science Envoy program to make the U.S academic community more aware of Colombia's potential and thereby attract top-tier U.S. scientists to strengthen research ties and provide technical support to scientific institutions.

As Colombia emerges from its troubled past, the country's rich natural endowment offers opportunities for scientific discovery, sustainable economic opportunity and tourism. Yet these opportunities are not foregone conclusions—the government, private sector and civil society must work together to create the conditions to ensure that these ecosystems are not squandered for short-term gains. It is in the United States' interest to ensure that Colombia protects its biodiversity, while providing opportunities for legal livelihoods for its rural population.

A rural community sits among rolling hills in northern Colombia.
Photo by Tom Muller

Botswana

Building partnerships in Africa's hidden gem

By Jacqueline Mourot, acting public affairs officer,
U.S. Embassy in Gaborone, Botswana

Opening photo: Botswana is home to the world's largest population of elephants, with the city of Kasane having the highest density of elephants in the country.

The nation of Botswana has world-class safaris, pristine natural wetlands, picturesque desert vistas, the world's largest diamond mines and one of Africa's most stable and longest-running, continuous, multiparty democracies. With credentials like these, it's unlikely Botswana will remain one of Africa's best kept secrets much longer. Voted No. 5 on *The New York Times* 52 Best Places to Go in 2017, Botswana has amazing natural resources, a growing economy and a stable democracy—all propelling the country into the global spotlight.

Roughly the size of Texas with a population of about 2.2 million, Botswana is a chiefdom-based society and one of the few African countries that did not fight a liberation struggle. Known as Bechuanaland while a British protectorate, Botswana gained independence in 1966 through a peaceful transition, but was then the third poorest country in the world, with only 23 college graduates, eight secondary schools and just 12 kilometers of paved roads. A year later came discovery of the first of several of the world's largest, most prolific diamond mines. The government prudently invested diamond revenues, which allowed Botswana to build significant infrastructure and achieve one of the highest rates of economic growth in the world between 1966 and 1980.

Botswana's people have sought unity and consensus since independence, having neither suffered under apartheid nor ostracized their white inhabitants but instead followed the example of their first president, Sir Seretse Khama, whose marriage to Ruth Williams, a white English woman, was dramatized in the film "A United Kingdom." Botswana's racial harmony and pluralism, in fact, are reflected in the national flag with its sky blue background against black and white bands. The blue represents water, a precious resource in a country defined by the Kalahari Desert. Water is so important here that its currency is the pula, meaning rain.

An embassy family member, at microphone, recites a poem on the Statue of Liberty alongside Ambassador Miller during the U.S. Mission's July Fourth reception.
Photo by Monirul Bhuiyan

Embassy Gaborone's 65 direct-hire and 225 LE staff are spread over seven agencies at a mission whose budget exceeds $80 million. Mission Botswana finds its host government to be friendly and supportive of many aspects of U.S. foreign policy, which translates into active diplomatic engagement at all levels. The U.S. Mission's priorities include supporting HIV prevention and treatment; building and maintaining strong institutions of good governance; encouraging economic diversification through private-sector-led economic growth; combating wildlife trafficking; promoting sustainable management of natural resources; advancing a positive and fruitful military and security relationship; and engaging with the Southern African Development Community, whose secretariat is based in Gaborone. | *Cont.* |

The increase in construction and growth in Gaborone reflects the country's emerging economy. *Photo by Greg Winston*

Botswana had one of the most severe HIV epidemics in the world, one that a former Botswana president saw as threatening to drive his people to extinction. An estimated 22 percent of Botswana aged 15 to 49 years are HIV positive. Concerted prevention and treatment efforts by the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and other stakeholders over the past 13 years have brought the country close to controlling the epidemic. However, with 10,000 new infections every year—or nearly 30 every day—the struggle is not over. A significant portion of the post's human and financial resources go to helping Botswana address the high HIV infection rate, by far the nation's most significant social and economic challenge. Through PEPFAR, the U.S. Mission has supported the government of Botswana with more than $750 million since 2004. The funds respond to HIV and tuberculosis (TB), including the provision of care and support for orphans and vulnerable children, and addressing gender inequalities that contribute to the spread of the disease.

The U.S. Mission seeks to strengthen education and economic opportunities throughout Botswana, especially in rural areas such as Kazungula in the north. *Photo by Richard Miles*

PEPFAR supports Botswana's "Treat All" strategy, which seeks to control the epidemic by 2019. The strategy provides all HIV-positive Botswana citizens immediate lifelong antiretroviral treatment and will prevent more than 120,000 new infections and an estimated 554,000 deaths over the next 15 years while also cutting new TB-related deaths, which are associated with HIV.

To expand its public health reach, the mission uses such public diplomacy tools as a new mobile American Corner, called America on the Move, which launched during a visit by former president George W. Bush and first lady Laura Bush in April. The mission also focuses on HIV treatment and vaccination, screening and treatment programs for cervical cancer, the leading cause of death among women in Botswana. The Peace Corps, which has had more than 2,500 volunteers in Botswana since 1966, has reached more than 94,000 individuals, offering HIV interventions and contributing to the drafting of the first national budget, construction of 3,100 miles of rural roads and the education of 37,000 students. | *Cont.* |

Botswana has taken leadership in protecting African Rhinos, and the U.S. Mission actively supports wildlife conservation efforts, such as those led by the Khama Rhino Sanctuary.
Photo by Richard Miles

The U.S. Mission works with Botswana's government and civil society to protect the country's unique natural treasures, such as the Okavango Delta, a wetland site of global significance that in 2014 became a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Okavango River Basin is a critical shared natural resource for Angola, Botswana and Namibia, and a rich but fragile source of biodiversity. USAID has worked for decades to improve water resource management, biodiversity, climate resilience and livelihoods in the Okavango River Basin.

Reinforcing these efforts, the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA), which is on the grounds of the Botswana Police College, delivers law enforcement and criminal justice training programs to help 34 African partner nations, including Botswana, combat wildlife trafficking and transnational organized crime. ILEA has trained more than 10,000 law enforcement and criminal justice officials from across sub-Saharan Africa.

Helping Botswana diversify its economy is another key mission priority, as diamond mining revenues are expected to decline in coming decades. Therefore, the mission promotes fiscal transparency, U.S. direct foreign investment and private-sector-led growth. The United States is the world's top purchaser of polished diamonds (which constitute more than 80 percent of Botswana's exports), and American tourists are the biggest per capita spenders in Botswana. USAID's Southern African Trade and Investment Hub recently opened its Gaborone branch as a five-year, $70 million program to increase the region's trade and food security. Botswana's 84 Young African Leaders Initiative Mandela Washington Fellowship alumni are also aiding its economic diversification through and skills building and entrepreneurship.

Botswana has one of Africa's most professional and responsible militaries, and offers a model for civilian-military relations for the rest of the continent. Since 2000, the United States has provided $11 million | *Cont.* |

Bahurutshe Cultural Village is a re-created traditional village 5 kilometers outside Gaborone where visitors can experience traditional rural housing, music, dance and cuisine. *Photo by Fabien Mourot*

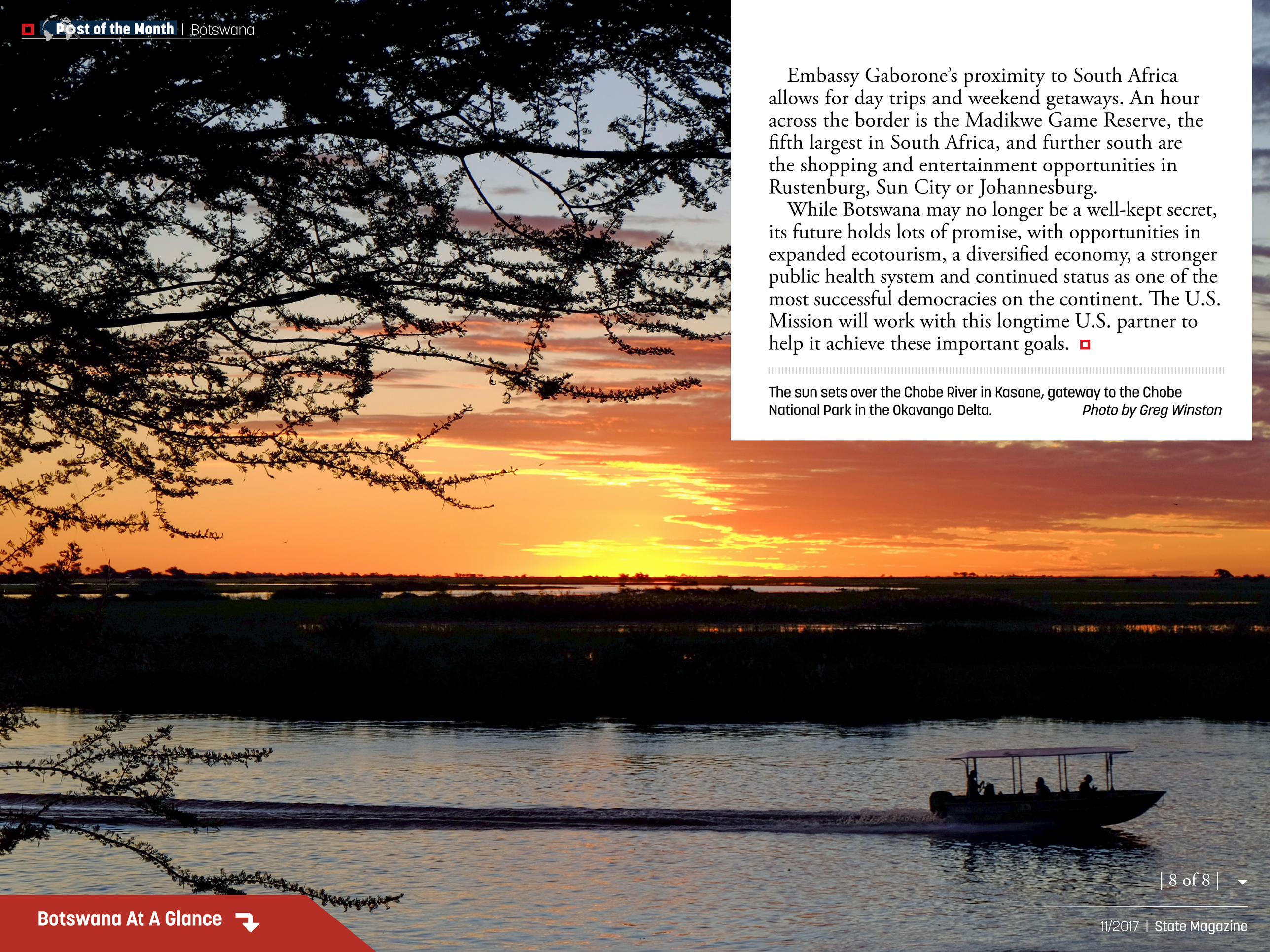
The U.S. Mission's American and Botswana staff pose as they celebrate the 50th anniversary of Botswana independence in September. There was also a march from the embassy to the ambassador's residence to meet with former President Ketumile Masire. *Photo by Douglas Seremane*

dollars to train members of the Botswana Defence Force (BDF) in the United States, and has provided the BDF with $5.1 million dollars in foreign military financing and almost $15.5 million through PEPFAR for safe medical male circumcision, condoms and HIV/AIDS-awareness training.

While the U.S. Mission is a busy place, life in Gaborone is not all work and no play. The many activities available in Botswana and neighboring South Africa, only a half-hour drive from central Gaborone, include lunch at a local tea garden and plant nursery, Sanitas, where monkeys swing from branches above the outdoor seating. Staff can also dine on wood-oven pizzas and sip homemade lemonade in a green oasis-like setting, or go to the Bull & Bush for its Monday rib nights, thick steaks and lively outdoor beer garden. Once a month, there's an outdoor farmers' market with live music, fresh vegetables and local arts and crafts.

Of course, enjoying the outdoors is an imperative for those at post, and in the Gaborone area, favorite natural areas include the Mokolodi Nature Reserve and Gaborone Game Reserve. Mokolodi, about a 20-minute drive from Gaborone, has a variety of animals, including some rare and endangered species, and offers game drives, rhino and giraffe tracking, and a cheetah interaction where visitors can pet the speedy hunters.

At just 5 square kilometers in size, the Gaborone Reserve is the third busiest safari destination in Botswana and boasts wildebeest, elands, gemsboks, kudus, ostriches and warthogs. For larger budgets and longer trips, there's the Okavango Delta or Chobe National Park, home to one of the world's largest concentrations of elephants, about 50,000. There, one can go on riverboat cruises and walking safari tours, stay at luxury lodges, and make day trips to Victoria Falls. | *Cont.* |



Embassy Gaborone's proximity to South Africa allows for day trips and weekend getaways. An hour across the border is the Madikwe Game Reserve, the fifth largest in South Africa, and further south are the shopping and entertainment opportunities in Rustenburg, Sun City or Johannesburg.

While Botswana may no longer be a well-kept secret, its future holds lots of promise, with opportunities in expanded ecotourism, a diversified economy, a stronger public health system and continued status as one of the most successful democracies on the continent. The U.S. Mission will work with this longtime U.S. partner to help it achieve these important goals.

The sun sets over the Chobe River in Kasane, gateway to the Chobe National Park in the Okavango Delta. *Photo by Greg Winston*

Botswana At A Glance

At a Glance

Botswana

Capital:
Gaborone

Government Type:
Parliamentary Republic

Area:
1,030,700 sq km

Area comparative:
Slightly smaller than Texas

Population:
2,214,858
Note: estimates for this country explicitly take into account the effects of excess mortality due to AIDS; this can result in lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality, higher death rates, lower population growth rates, and changes in the distribution of population by age and sex than would otherwise be expected (July 2017 est.)

Major urban areas:
Gaborone (capital) 247,000 (2014)

Languages:
Setswana 77.3%, Sekalanga 7.4%, Shekgalagadi 3.4%, English (official) 2.8%, Zezuru/Shona 2%, Sesarwa 1.7%, Sembukushu 1.6%, Ndebele 1%, other 2.8% (2011 est.)

Ethnic groups:
Tswana (or Setswana) 79%, Kalanga 11%, Basarwa 3%, other, including Kgalagadi and white 7%

Religions:
Christian 79.1%, Badimo 4.1%, other 1.4% (includes Baha'i, Hindu, Muslim, Rastafarian), none 15.2%, unspecified 0.3% (2011 est.)

Exports (commodities):
diamonds, copper, nickel, soda ash, beef, textiles

Imports (commodities):
foodstuffs, machinery, electrical goods, transport equipment, textiles, fuel and petroleum products, wood and paper products, metal and metal products

Currency:
Botswana pula

Internet country code: .bw

* The CIA World Factbook

Return

Investing in People

FLO fellowships support career development

By Patti Boerner and Natacha Gislard-Butterworth, employment program officers, Family Liaison Office

"When our family decided to go into the Foreign Service, I knew that my career would forever change," says FS family member Kate Mangino, whose prior experience included working with D.C.-based international NGOs. She loved her work with those groups and was well paid.

It was difficult to "leave a career that was very much a part of my identity," she said.

Mangino decided to make a career change: to pursue her life long goal of earning a Ph.D. Her Ph.D. program's tuition at a Tokyo university was funded in part by a Professional Development Fellowship (PDF) from the Family Liaison Office (FLO) in the Bureau of Human Resources. The PDF program helps family members from all agencies under chief-of-mission authority maintain, enhance and develop professional skills while overseas. Each spring, FLO announces the fellowship season, and FS spouses and partners planning to pursue projects while posted overseas can then apply for fellowships of $1,000 to $2,500.

Since its inception in 2005, the PDF awards have grown from 19 to 112 in 2017, and awards have gone to more than 1,200 spouses and partners.

While the program's budget is limited and competition for awards is strong, the fellowship reduces the financial burden of family members' professional development activities. Anne Cernyar, for instance, used her PDF to complete a master's degree. She said the fellowship "opened many doors both locally and online, including invitations to speak to local schools and families about learning disabilities and online employment as an educational therapist working with children around the world."

Kate Mangino, at center, did field work in Indonesia for her Ph.D. program, which was financed in part by a PDF. *Photo courtesy of RUMPUN*

Family members often use the fellowship to go back to school, retool careers or assess overseas employment options. Recipient Dr. Abigail Hankin-Wei, whose spouse works for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, used her PDF to register for a conference in Cairo and pay for her American Board of Emergency Medicine re-certification exam. Both projects led to her meeting several potential collaborators, one of which she was able to work with. She said the recertification helped her retain her status among American colleagues: "When I travel back to the U.S. to work clinically at the hospital, my knowledge remains cutting edge."

Fellowships are awarded by regional bureaus, and therefore applicants compete with others posted in their bureau's geographic area. Selection committees made up of volunteers from FLO, the regional bureau and the Office of Overseas Employment read and score all applications submitted from that geographic bureau. Scores are based on how the applicant presents the case, shows the connection to an overall

| *Cont.* |

employment strategy. and the outline of the plan. Those applicants at hard-to-fill posts or in countries without a bilateral work agreement get special consideration.

Kate Netherton, who served on the EUR selection committee for the two previous years, said the program builds eligible family members' skills. "Often the breadth of talent that spouses carry with them is forgotten, and this program really helps identify the skills and strengths that would otherwise go unnoticed," she observed.

Many projects stem from an applicant's desire to continue a career path by getting certified in a particular skill or updating a license. Claire Och, a two-time PDF recipient, used her fellowships to complete a certificate in Independent Education Consulting. "The fellowship allowed me to feel like I was still up to par with my peers," she said.

Sometimes, though, applicants decide they need new skills for the future. Craig Houston used his PDF to fund coursework in data visualization at Harvard Extension School. "First, I wanted to learn some skills that would be valuable no matter where in the world our family was posted," he explained. "Learning how to code and build websites incorporating data seemed like a good skill to have. Second, I was concerned about the impact of local air pollution on the health of my young son and wanted to understand the problem better to see if I could contribute in some way to a solution."

Victoria Robinette at right used her PDF to pursue a new career as a custom cake designer.
Photo courtesy of Victoria Robinette

Many family members also want a portable career they can take from post to post. Yohanca Delgado, for instance, said she always enjoyed writing and thought professional writing would be a good portable career option, especially since it can take time for a job to become available at post and the position requirements could "deviate significantly from our areas of professional expertise and interest." Her PDF helped her get started with Professional Writing and Editing certifications at University of California's Berkeley Extension. "Without the impetus of the PDF, and of applying and outlining my goals and objectives for myself as much as for the awards committee, I'm not sure I would have found my way quite so fast," she said.

Craig Houston used his PDF to fund coursework in data visualization at the Harvard Extension School.
Photo courtesy of Craig Houston

All PDF applications reflect the diversity, talent, creativity and resilience of FS family members. After being out of the U.S. job market for 14 years, Victoria Robinette discovered a new career path while in Hong Kong. She returned to the United States last June to seek work as a custom cake designer. "Having taken these internationally recognized classes will be a great advantage in my job search," she enthused.

Brian McIntire, who used a PDF to become a financial planner, reflected that his "biggest challenge was completing the coursework in a timely manner, because Post Istanbul went on ordered departure for five months. During that time I was a full-time dad and a student. Concentrating on my studies was difficult."

The PDF program is just one of FLO's resources. The office also does advocacy for programs and provides support and guidance for family members serving abroad or returning to the United States. Since 1978, FLO has supported family members and advocated for such causes as specialized hiring programs, the development of the Family Member Appointment and bilateral work agreements. Unique initiatives such as the PDF program are crucial to supporting family members and assisting them in realizing their career and professional aspirations.

Fellowships also help participants become more reflective. Recipient Angie Collins said completing the application "lends to deeper thinking and inner reflection." More information is on FLO's website www.state.gov/flo, is a list of all FLO resources and services.

Instant Messengers

CA social media alerts Americans abroad

By Hana Adeni, summer editorial intern, State Magazine

Chaos. Confusion. Fear. These are some of the emotions felt by the people of Manchester, U.K., during the terrorist attacks in May. In times of mass calamity and destruction, though, U.S. citizens have a place to turn for accurate and timely information: the Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) and its social media outreach operation. The heart of that operation is CA's Digital Engagement (DE) team, Alyssa Zalenski, Jessica Dancel, Lori Lawson, Doug Vazquez and Natasha Tekeste-Jackson. The team, part of CA's Office of Policy Coordination and Public Affairs (CA/P), manages CA's @TravelGov Twitter, Facebook and Reddit accounts, as well as the Yelp pages of the 26 passport agencies nationwide, and the CA website, travel.state.gov. While the team also advises on digital outreach for domestic and overseas audiences, such as U.S. citizens needing passports for traveling abroad, one of the team's most crucial tasks is responding to crises.

On the day of the Manchester attacks, the DE teams in both Washington and at U.S. Embassy London were ready. "[We] had trained the embassy in London on what to do and they were right on top of that," Zalenski said. The embassy Twitter account put security messages on its own feed and re-tweeted breaking information from local authorities' accounts. The accounts @TravelGov and @USinUK both told their followers to go to the Manchester Police Twitter account for live local security updates. But alerts for crises weren't always so smooth.

"We have been on the forefront of digital crisis communications," Zalenski explained. Her team is currently working with the Bureau of Public Affairs to create a position for a crisis task force chairperson to serve as a digital communication advisor, so that during a crisis there'll always be someone on the task force from the digital side. "Our crisis communications policy has been our most important initiative the last two years, and we've gotten to a place now where we're training

posts," she continued. CA informs U.S. citizens through Twitter and Facebook, providing up-to-date security information as it becomes available. Previously, CA had an email-based system to disseminate security messages. Those messages took longer to clear and would only be seen by those who'd subscribed. "We weren't reaching everyone who needed to be reached," said Zalenski. With former team member Kaitlin Turck at the forefront of the initiative, the CA digital engagement team developed a digital communication strategy for overseas use that pushes out those messages immediately without waiting for levels of clearance.

"It's been an uphill battle," she observed. "So much is changing with technology and trying to get the policy in place, have leadership on board and train the rest of the department. But it's been great." With the Manchester incident, Embassy London did exactly what CA wanted. "We want the embassies to be on the forefront of these crises," she noted. "It's difficult to be on the lookout for crises 24/7, and with Manchester, the embassy messaging worked like clockwork."

Zalenski explained her team's role within CA/P, which has four major divisions. Zalenski works with Digital Engagement and Outreach, which is "an umbrella of outreach" to key audiences domestically and overseas using social media, websites, and traditional forms of outreach and public/private partnerships. "For example, we work with airlines to put our messages in their inflight magazine," she added. The office communicates on topics ranging from health insurance abroad to the importance of renewing your passport in a timely manner, and what to do in a crisis.

CA/P's press team works with the Bureau of Public Affairs to disseminate media messages and answer inquiries from the press on consular issues. The office's legislative team works on consular policies with congressional offices, and the office's Consular Notification and Access Unit works with U.S. law enforcement to ensure foreign embassies are notified when their citizens are arrested or detained in the United States.

Of the office's many functions, though, it's the Twitter account @TravelGov that gets the most crisis use, since Twitter alerts are used to share verified and critical information, making the account

a source for U.S. citizens to find news alerts when in need. "We have built up our TravelGov brand over the past decade to be a reputable source of information," said Zalenski. "Using TravelGov properties for crises is now on the forefront of [CA] messages for U.S. citizens overseas."

The office puts out messages so well that some major news agencies sometimes simply take screenshots of them and share them with their viewers and readers. Though @TravelGov has been around for 10 years, Zalenski insists it needs to keep up with ever-changing technology. "We have to constantly adapt and figure out what's the next way people are going to be communicating with each other," she explained. "It's not going to be [a world composed of] Twitter and Facebook forever."

For instance, in Brazil, WhatsApp is the largest method of communication. "We want to be in a place where we're using the platforms people already use," said Zalenski. To get a sense of the

future, she and her colleagues go to panel discussions at conferences, such as the Social Media Week NYC multiday interactive conference, to see what's new and going to be part of the future of communications.

Zalenski also keeps up to date by receiving breaking news alerts on her phone and emails from the press team and from posts abroad. There is so much happening—the difficulty can be deciding whether to post it on @TravelGov. "It does require a moment of human judgment," she noted.

To make that judgment, the DE team uses a systematic method of receiving information and then posting about it. For example, in April when there was a shooting near the Champs Elysées in Paris, the DE team posted to @TravelGov telling U.S. citizens to monitor the news for updates. Next, the DE team worked with the press team, Embassy Paris and CA's liaisons with U.S. citizens overseas to gather additional information. The liaisons helped the DE team understand what was happening on the ground in Paris. Then, they had to decide whether this issue warranted multiple updates or just an initial message. In this case, her office posted to @TravelGov only two messages: one saying there was a security incident and the other advising readers to monitor the news. Embassy Paris then drafted a security message that Zalenski posted on Facebook.

Occasionally, when a post cannot draft its own messages or update its own Twitter accounts for alerts, the DE team uses an online service that manages Twitter accounts and can automate the post's accounts during a crisis.

Since this article was originally drafted, CA's social media messaging played a major role in the response to Hurricanes Irma, Jose and Maria. Working around the clock to share evacuation information for U.S. citizens stranded on islands in the Caribbean, the DE team complemented the efforts of consular officers working on the ground to evacuate more than 2,600 U.S. citizens.

If you find yourself overseas during a crisis, you can count on CA/P's Digital Engagement team to get you the information you need to stay safe.

Startup Expert Promotes African Markets

At the American Corner in Pretoria, Christine Souffrant Ntim, an award-winning Forbes 30 Under 30 speaker and business startup expert, addresses aspiring arts entrepreneurs. She also spoke on July 24 to more than 50 students at the Tshwane University of Technology on turning their passion for art into sustainable businesses. Souffrant Ntim's one-week speaker program in Pretoria, Johannesburg and Cape Town provided hundreds of budding entrepreneurs with information on branding themselves and their businesses. The message of Souffrant Ntim, a third-generation Haitian-American street vendor, resonated on traditional and social media. ▫

Photo by Leza Smith

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CG Sapporo Encourages Study Abroad

Harvey Beasley, public affairs officer at the U.S. Consulate General in Sapporo, Japan, poses in August with some of the students at Asahikawa Commercial High School, where he spoke about American perceptions of Japan and the value of studying abroad. During the 30-minute session, some 40 students asked him and the EduUSA advisor questions. The students, in an intercultural-understanding program, began studying Korean and English in 2016, and many are expected to participate in an exchange with Bloomington-Normal, Ill., Asahikawa's sister city. ◻

State Department photo

Photo by Leza Smith

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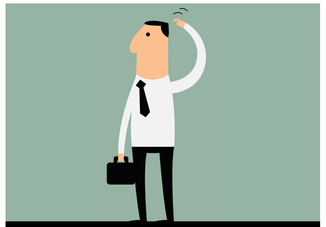
Speaker Holds Labor Day Discussion

To celebrate the U.S. Labor Day holiday, guest speaker Asha Varma discusses the history of the American labor movement to a group of 27 participants at the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa's Satchmo Center. Attendees discussed and debated the differences in labor practices between the U.S. and their home countries. Participants included South Sudanese and Eritrean citizens who raised concerns about labor abuse, including child soldiers and unfair compensation.

Photo courtesy of Kefelegn Mekonnen

Retirements



Ethics Answers

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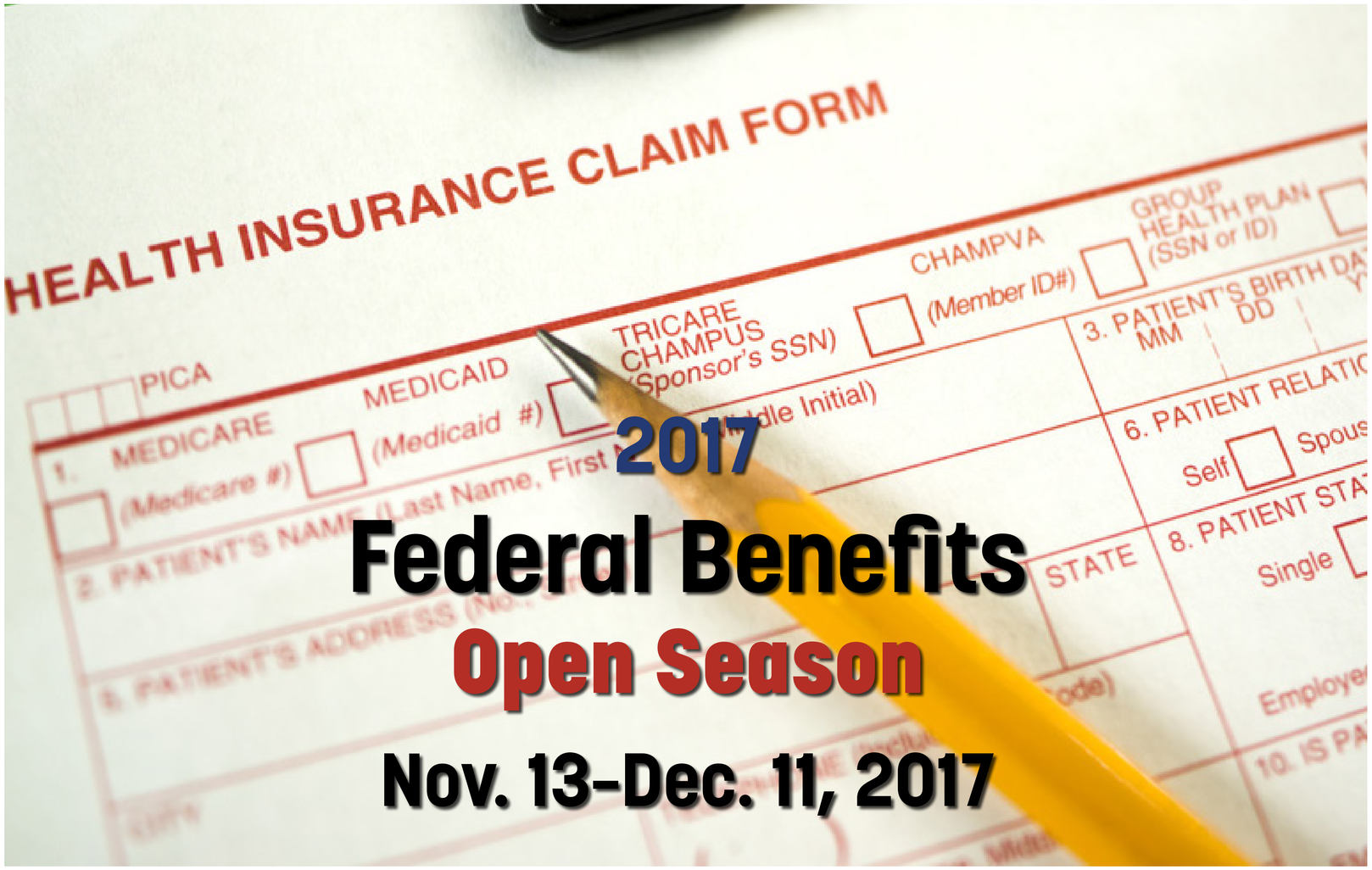
Open Season This Month



The Federal Benefits Open Season runs Nov. 13–Dec. 11, offering employees an opportunity to change their Federal Employee Health Benefits coverage or enroll in dental and/or vision coverage through the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP), as well as enroll in the Federal Flexible Spending Account Program (FSAFEDS).

Photo by Leza Smith

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Retirements

Foreign Service
Abbott, Lucy K.
Aguayo, Daniel E.
Arvizu, Alexander A.
Bachman, Brian
Baroody, Judith R.
Batchelor, Jeffrey B.
Bates, Pamela Marie
Bauer, Kristen F.
Boardman, Chase H.
Boohaker, Richard L.
Bowen, Andrew
Boyle, David William
Boyle, Leilani J.
Brand, Paul Eugene
Brems, Frederick G.
Brennan, Michael F.
Brooks, Carolyn O.
Brown, Diana F.
Brownfield, William R.
Bryan, Judith L.
Bucher, Lisa K.
Butler, Eldred P.
Cable, Floyd Steven
Campbell, Robert W.
Carrington, Ralph Wesley
Childs, Gary L.
Colin, Thomas J.
Comiskey, Tamara G.
Demaria, Joseph
Dogonniuck, Joseph A.
Doman, Susan C.
Donahue, David Tannrath
Engle, Thomas Scott
Eshelman, Stephanie
Ferguson, Joseph P.
Frazier, Robert A.
Garrett, Stephen W.
Gayle, Michael A.
Gfoeller-Volkoff, Tatiana
Gilles, Joanne
Gonzalez, Francisco Javier
Green, Hollyn J.
Groth, Gregory S.
Grover, Charles H.
Gwaltney, Sheila S.
Harold, Christine Anne
Harper, Steven F.
Harrison, Jennifer A.
Hawkins, Jeffrey J.
Hays III, Joseph G.
Hegendorfer, Daryl R.
Heien, Debra P.
Henifin, David Edward
Henke, Marcia K.
Hennessey, Kathleen M.
Hoza, Michael Stephen
Jefferson, Sheila R.
Johnson, Eric A.
Johnson, Kathy Ann
Jones, Deborah A.
Jones, Laurence Kent
Jones, Stuart E.
Kirkconnell, Laura Jean
Kotto, Violet F. Henderson
Kubiske, Lisa Jean
Landherr, Karen E.
Langston, Ellen C.
Lanzet, William H.
Lattimer, Timothy Peter
Lepuschitz, Judith K.
Lesh, Vivian M.
Long, Kemp L.
Loo, Edward
Lyle, Dale Kendall
Marut, Christopher J.
McCarthy, Nancy H.
McCormick, Georges F.
McKean, Margaret Bernard
McKennan, Jacqueline K.
Meagher, Patrick Joseph
Meradith, John W.
Meurs, Douglas J.
Midura, Christopher
Miller, Thomas S.
Milstead, Eric N.
Moffit, Stephen L.
Moore, Patrick J.
Moore, Teresa
Morley, Edward P.
Morris, David T.
Morris, Richard C.
Muelder, Timothy A.
Neil, Elizabeth Ann
Odlum, Geoffrey M.
Ogot, Onnie Berber
Palmatier, Gary J.
Pannell, Sheila Marie
Patterson, Greg S.
Penn, Brian A.
Perrone, Daniel M.
Pifer, Jerry Dean
Pifer, Karolyn
Piness, Peter
Pollard Jr., Ralph Thomas
Prespare, William R.
Randolph, Charles
Rettberg, Dirk
Reynolds, Robert H.
Rice, Kurt R.
Richards, Stuart A.
Robinson, Sandralee M.
Rodriguez, Deborah Ann
Rosenman, Richard G.
Rowan, Christopher
Sardelli, Adrienne K.
Schulz, Kirsten A.
Schwartz, David J.
Sheppard, Gary
Siebentritt, Carl R.
Silver, Richard R.
Smith, Adam L.
Smith, Robin Angela
Smoak, Rebecca B.
Soule, Robert E
Staeben, Derwood Keith
Stafford, Nancy M.
Stofko, James August
Taylor, John C.
Taylor, Teddy Bernard
Thomas-Greenfield, Linda
Titus, Daphne M.
Tracey, Debra C.
Voorhies, Michael R.
Waldo, Jeffrey Scott
Warlick, Mary Burce
Weinstein, William
Weller, Wesley A.
Wenig, Mark L.
West, Terrence
Westfall, Gary W.
White, Terry J.
Wise, N. Ridgway
Wolfe, David C.
Woolridge, Rudolph T.
Yeager Jr., Loren R.
Yip, Sau Ching
Zebley, David C.
Zwach, David M.

Civil Service
Al-Sharbati, Haifa
Baker, Pauline Roberta
Boyd, David J.
Brown, Joyce A.
Bumgardner, Randell David
Burridge, Lisa Marie
Cabrera Deleon, Ramon
Carter, Carol P.
Cook, Richelle M.
Evans, Billy Joe
Evans, Michael A.
Filson, Charles R.
Gress, Oksana
Hayes-Crow, Mary Patricia
Hoffman, Kenneth J.
Hollingsworth, Cecilia L.
Holmes, Corlis A.
Kotler, Vladimir J.
McKelvey, Margaret Jane
Mitchell, Bahia
Odell, Deborah M.
Paredes, Eileen M.
Pareti III, David .
Parsons, June
Peterson, Susan F.
Rahman, Ejazur
Reifsnyder, Daniel A.
Riva-Geoghegan, Margarita M.
Rosiecki, Gary Patrick
Schmidt, Maria Crocco
Stewart, Tucker Richmond
Teel, Elizabeth Wynne M.
Thomas, Terese H.
Trivisani, Francesca
Youmans, David
Zackery, Marsha Tillman
Zielyk, Marta Natalia
Zoller, Julie Napier
Zozom, Michele E.

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Ethics Answers

Q: My bureau administers a large grant that the Department of State awarded to an international nonprofit. As part of administering this grant, my supervisor wants me to become one of the board members of the nonprofit. Since I will be doing this in my official capacity, I assume there are no ethics issues to consider, correct?

A: Despite the fact that your board membership would be in your official capacity, you could still have a conflict of interest because you would need to simultaneously look out for the interests of the Department and the organization to which you owe a fiduciary duty. Thus, depending on the type of organization and other legal considerations, you may still need a waiver of the conflict of interest to serve on the nonprofit's board of directors. You should consult with the Office of Legal Advisor's Ethics and Financial Disclosure unit about a waiver by emailing EthicsAttorneyMailbox@state.gov before you accept the position. Please reach out to L as soon as you learn about an outside position, as the waiver process can be time consuming.

Ethics Answers presents hypothetical ethical scenarios Department employees might face. For help with real ethics questions, email ethicsattorneymailbox@state.gov

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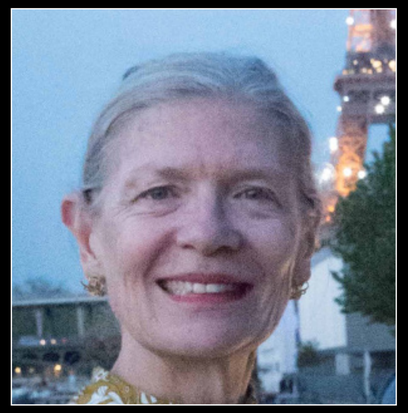
In Memoriam

Barbara S. “Babs” Aycock



Barbara S. “Babs” Aycock, 65, of Bucksport, Maine., died July 24. A retired member of the Senior Foreign Service, she served in Ankara, Baghdad, Belgrade, Bucharest, Mexico City, Paris, Rome and Washington, D.C. A collector of fine art and antiques from markets throughout the world, she worked in finance at Dean Witter before turning her attention to international affairs at the Peace Corps, where she served in Kenya, and the Foreign Service. Secretary of State John F. Kerry presented Aycock with the Secretary’s Career Achievement Award at a ceremony at Embassy Paris in 2016.

Return

In Memoriam

Melville E. Blake Jr.

Melville E. Blake Jr., 93, a retired FSO, died Aug. 5 following a stroke, in Bethesda, Md. Blake served in the U.S. Army from 1943–1947, then entered the Foreign Service in 1951 with postings in Germany, England, Costa Rica, Italy, Switzerland, Panama and Bermuda, and at the U.S. Treasury. He retired in 1987. He enjoyed gardening, chamber music and the company of his seven grandchildren.

Return

In Memoriam

Philip Remington Cook, Jr.

Philip Remington Cook Jr., 92, of Hubert, N.C., died Aug. 20. An FSO for 35 years, he served in France, Italy, Kenya, South Africa and Vietnam. Cook served in World World II as a bombardier on a B-26 aircraft. He received two Purple Hearts and was honorably discharged from the Army Air Force. After retirement in 1984, Cook embarked on a second career with the Department as a WAE employee. His many interests included traveling, sailing, fishing and reading.

Return

In Memoriam

Jeffrey R. Cunningham

Jeffrey R. Cunningham, 73, died May 10 in Tacoma, Wash. An FSO from 1967 to 1998, Cunningham was posted to nine countries across Asia, Europe and the Americas, and held the position of counselor for Economic Affairs in Denmark and Guatemala. After retiring to Tacoma, he was executive director of the World Affairs Council-Tacoma, president of the Tacoma Historical Society and treasurer for Associated Ministries. He was also a member of the Consular Association of Washington and was involved in other community and church activities.

Return

In Memoriam

Harriet Turner Holleran

Harriet Turner Holleran, of Springfield, Va. died Sept. 11. Holleran joined the Department as a clerk-typist in 1949 while attending George Washington University. She graduated in 1952 and between then and 1962 she served in Cairo and Khartoum, and as the ambassador's secretary in London, Jakarta and Tripoli. In 1962, she resigned, married and accompanied her husband on assignments in Asia, South America and Europe. In Washington, D.C., in the 1980s, she worked in the Bureau of International Organization Affairs until retirement in 1989. She enjoyed family history research, travel, going to the opera and the theater, and life with her family.

Return

In Memoriam

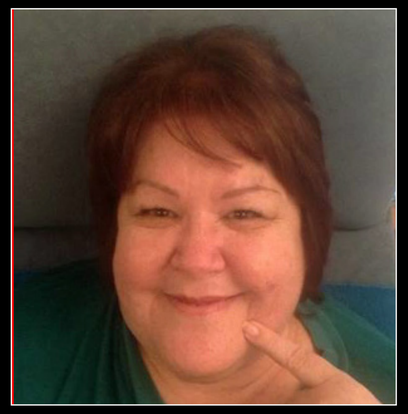
Genevieve Margaret Girsch

Genevieve Margaret Girsch, 91, of Chicago, died on Sept. 10. Girsch worked and studied at Loyola University in Chicago and then began her career in the Foreign Service serving in posts in Costa Rica, France, Germany, Greece, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Vietnam. On retirement, she relocated to Phoenix to care for her parents. She enjoyed classical music, crossword puzzles, golf, reading, Scrabble and a local travel club.

Return

In Memoriam

Cecilia Silva LeBlanc



Cecilia Silva LeBlanc, 66, of Albuquerque, N.M., died on July 26. A retired FSO, LeBlanc and her husband worked for the military and Foreign Service for more than 40 years. Her Department postings as an office management specialist included Tokyo, Washington, Wellington and Warsaw. She loved to travel and meet new people. She retired to Albuquerque in 2013 and happily spent the last years of her life celebrating life surrounded by her family.

Return

In Memoriam

Ulrich Alexander Straus

Ulrich Alexander Straus, 90, of Northport, Mich., died on Aug. 25. Straus served in Tokyo as a political officer, Berlin as a political and labor officer, and Washington, D.C., as deputy director of the Office of Japanese Affairs. In Rome in 1973, he studied at the NATO Defense College and then served in Bern, the Bureau of African Affairs and as director of the Office of Philippine Affairs. He later was consul general in Okinawa. In retirement, Straus was an adjunct professor at several universities and the Foreign Service Institute, and was active in the International Affairs Forum in Traverse City, Mich., and provided commentary for a radio program on Interlochen (Mich.) Public Radio.

Return

Wellness Improves Productivity, Safety

by Rachel Boehm, Wellness Communications Specialist, MED Wellness.

There is an office in the Bureau of Medical Services that champions exercise and physical activity, healthy nutrition, sleep- and stress-management education, and healthy living opportunities for all employees, at every location. MED Health and Wellness, or MED Wellness for short, nurtures an evidence-based process to establish a Department culture supportive of preventive healthcare.

MED Wellness exists because State Department employees log hours of work, lots of hours. All of that extra time at the office undoubtedly means more work is accomplished, right? Wrong.

In fact, studies show that increasing working hours doesn't correlate with improved work outcomes and higher productivity, especially when the employee is unwell. We often hear of the toll even minor interruptions to sleep, diet and exercise can take on a person's cognitive abilities. For example, testing has proven that most people will lose five to eight IQ points after just one bad night's sleep.

Stress also affects job safety, as well as the health, engagement and retention of employees. Highly fatigued workers are 70 percent more likely to be involved in accidents: Those who report disturbed sleep are nearly twice as likely to die in a work-related accident. Studies conducted by the Queens School of Business and Gallup polls showed that disengaged workers had 37 percent higher absenteeism, 49 percent more accidents, and 60 percent more errors and defects in their work. Job stress is estimated to cost U.S. industry more than $300 billion a year in absenteeism, turnover, diminished productivity and medical, legal and insurance costs.

Poor eating habits also negatively affect employee health and productivity. A study published in the Population Health Management journal showed that unhealthy eating was linked to a 66 percent increased risk for reduced productivity.

The same study showed that irregular/rare exercise was linked with a 50 percent increased risk for reduced productivity. Lack of exercise or lack of physical activity can also diminish a person's ability to perform daily activities, which in turn can affect job performance.

Taken together, an "unwell" workforce, one that is overly stressed, physically inactive, sleep deprived and inadequately nourished, is poorly positioned to fully carry out American diplomacy. That's where MED Wellness comes in. | *Cont.* |

We are working with posts and annexes overseas and domestically to identify and address location-specific wellness needs. The number of locations we work with is growing, as managers and employees start to realize the many benefits of integrating wellness best practices into the workplace.

For example, the return on investment of worksite wellness programs averaged across 15 studies shows a savings of $3.37 in medical costs and $2.73 in absentee days for every $1 spent on the program. Research has shown that employees who spend 2.5 hours per week being physically active were more satisfied with the quantity and quality of their work, reported increased work ability, and took less sick leave than employees who did not engage in physical activity.

While the majority of these studies are focused on the private sector, preliminary findings from our two-year-old Bogota pilot program are promising. The Bogota pilot is a joint effort by MED and HR's Work/Life Division to create and support a Work Life Wellness Coordinator at the embassy. The coordinator leads a committee and, working with MED Wellness, implements an evidence-based process to improve various work-life and wellness issues specific to that location.

We assessed the pilot program's effectiveness using a wellness survey designed by the Office of Personnel and Management called WellCheck. In the first six months, the Bogota Work Life Wellness Committee reported a 16 percent increase in the overall WellCheck score. Additionally, Embassy Bogota's front office has reported heightened morale across the embassy.

Through our upcoming wellness coordinator training series, MED Wellness aims to replicate these successes across regions. The demands on Department employees will likely continue to rise as the world grows increasingly complex and technology blends the lines between work and life. MED Wellness believes that the physical and mental health of our employees must match in strength the demands placed upon them. Our aim is to work with partners across the globe to provide every employee at every location with the information and resources they need to live and work well, year after year, post after post.

End State

Vibrant paint scemes create a kaliedescopic array of homes in this aerial view of Comfort Town in Kiev, Ukraine. *Photo by Marco Verch*