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Recognizing Excellence
Employees honored at
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FOCUS ON
The NORTHERN
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Challenges and opportunities abound in
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Costa Rica’s EARTH University, founded in 1990 as a partnership among the Costa Rican government, USAID and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, aims to educate community leaders and entrepreneurs from around the world in sustainable and healthy tropical agricultural practices. With 1,800 alumni from more than 30 countries, the university has received support from the U.S. Embassy in San José and USAID’s American Schools and Hospitals Abroad (ASHA) program, providing regular visits by embassy officers and more than $8 million in funding for campus infrastructure projects, and Tropical Forest Conservation Act funding for research on clean energy solutions.

In September, Deputy Chief of Mission Robin Matthewman attended the dedication of a new USAID-funded admissions and international academic relations building at the university. During a visit to the university’s classrooms, labs and experimental farm sites, she met students engaged in experiential learning and research focused on innovative approaches to improving agriculture in their home countries. She remarked, “With farmers around the world facing challenges from climate change and with Central America facing drought now due to the El Nino effect, the work done by EARTH is more important than ever.”

“We learned that the university’s impact has a ripple effect throughout the 420 students’ home communities in Latin America, Africa, Asia and beyond,” said Matthewman. She also visited the working banana farm that sells its organic bananas to Whole Foods.
Veteran Diplomat Promotes Book

Speaking at the Ralph Bunche library in November about his latest book “American Ambassadors: The Past, Present and Future of America’s Diplomats,” former FSO and two-time Ambassador Dennis Jett delved into the unique ways ambassadors are selected, saying approximately 30 percent of appointments were the result of political or economic influence on the White House.

Now an academic at Penn State and writing with student audiences in mind, Jett called this selection method modern-day patronage but noted that the percentage split between careerists and political appointees has not changed significantly since the 1950s, nor has there been a bias in terms of which group performs better.

Jett cited several of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) inspection reports of diplomatic posts to prove his point. He also lauded the fact that since 2009 OIG reports are publicly accessible, providing a measure of transparency and accountability to how chiefs of mission do their job. He noted that several political appointees resigned or were forced out as a result of their poor performance.

In an increasingly globalized and complex world, Jett said the role of America’s envoys overseas is increasingly important, and it remains a truism that assignments at the most sensitive posts are by and large reserved for more experienced career officers. Responding to a question, Jett said that even if political ambassadors met minimal professional standards, such as for language ability, in order to receive their appointments, this will only succeed at the margins if the “corrupting influence of money” remains ingrained in the political process.
Local Guards Save Man’s Life

While waiting his turn at the U.S. Consulate General in Krakow’s consular section on Oct. 21, a Polish citizen began exhibiting signs of cardiac distress. Responding, members of the local guard force (LGF) Artur Chorazy, Miroslaw “Mirek” Lezanski, Mariusz Janikowski and Patrycja Wagner assessed his vital signs, called for an ambulance and got medical professionals in the immediate area to provide CPR.

They then used the consulate’s Automatic Electronic Defibrillator (AED) to resuscitate the man and advised American officers of the situation. Routine access to the consulate was suspended, and the street in front of the consulate was cleared of pedestrians and vehicles to make ready for the ambulance that took the victim to a hospital.

The LGF team then reopened the consulate just 15 minutes after the incident began.

Fortuitously, the regional security office had just two weeks earlier worked with the post management team and Embassy Warsaw’s Medical Unit to train the LGF team to respond as it did. As local guard Chorazy explained, “I just followed my training, and we saved him.”

During a special town hall meeting held a few days after the incident, the entire consulate staff gathered to honor the LGF team for its response, with DCM John Law sharing a letter of appreciation from the rescued man. The letter said the victim and his family “would like to cordially thank you for the professional attitude and fast actions to resuscitate me, thereby saving my life.”

Mirek Lezanski, a guard receptionist since 2001 and the LGF team leader during the incident, said that the LGF members said little to one another during the situation. “We all just used our training,” he continued. “I don’t know how many times we checked that AED over the years to ensure it was working, but I’m glad we did. When we needed it most, we were ready.”
Embassy Uses Film to Fight Slavery

In October, the public affairs section (PAS) of the U.S. Embassy in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (DR), concluded a week of public awareness activities focusing on fighting trafficking in persons (TIP) by hosting the DR premiere of the American film “8 Days.” The film, which is used to train law enforcement in the United States and Europe, focuses on the victims of TIP, mainly women and girls, telling the story of one victim.

More than 300 people attended the premiere, sponsored by the Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs in cooperation with the Dominican National Film Commission. Just prior, a reception for attendees addressed the theme “TIP is modern slavery, TIP is everyone’s problem.” The event gained wide and positive press coverage.

Standing beside the nation’s attorney general, Francisco Domínguez Brito, Ambassador James Brewster said, “We applaud the government of the Dominican Republic for making significant strides in the battle against human trafficking, but there is still work to be done.” Brito said that, from 2013 to today, the DR has convicted four times as many traffickers compared with 2003 to 2012, but that more work needs to be done.

The well-reviewed movie was screened as the culmination of an Embassy Santo Domingo outreach held Oct. 19–22. On Oct. 21, PAS brought the “8 Days” film crew to meet with an NGO fighting the exploitation of minors in Boca Chica, an area infamous for sex tourism. The film crew shared TIP strategies on prevention, prosecution and treatment.

The same day, Ambassador Brewster introduced the film crew at the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo for a presentation to approximately 100 law, social work and film students. PAS also conducted media outreach to promote the film, arranging interviews for its director and lead actress with the DR’s largest daily newspaper, a leading youth-oriented TV talk show and popular morning drive-time radio shows.
Panel Criticizes Cultural Heritage Sale

On Nov. 10, the Native American Foreign Affairs Council (NAFAC) observed Native American History Month by hosting a panel discussion on the overseas sales of objects that are sacred to the Hopi, Apache and Navajo peoples, tribal government responses and the role of the Department of State and other stakeholders.

U.S. law bans the domestic sale of sacred objects, but Native American cultural heritage is threatened by sales abroad.

The panel included Deputy Assistant Secretary for Educational and Cultural Affairs Mark Taplin, who recalled that, DCM at the U.S. Embassy in Paris, sacred Navajo and Hopi masks were to be sold at auction. The embassy attempted to delay the sale and used public diplomacy to urge the objects’ repatriation. When he was the Annenberg Foundation did step in to buy and return to the Hopi tribe 24 sacred masks, this was only a one-time solution. (The Department is developing a plan with far-ranging applicability for the recovery and repatriation of sacred objects.)

Panelist Terry Snowball of the National Museum of the American Indian assisted the Annenberg Foundation in repatriating the masks, asserting, “You can’t separate the culture from the people.”

Panelist Jared King of the Navajo Nation, who assisted the tribe in repatriating seven sacred Navajo masks said, “We are happy to have them home where they belong.”

Panelist Linda Lum, a foreign affairs officer with the Bureau of International Organizations, discussed the 2014 U.N. World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, and panelist David Downes from the Department of the Interior discussed U.S. domestic efforts on the protection of Native American cultural property.

More information on NAFAC is available from Sharri R. Clark at clarksr@state.gov or nativeamericans@state.gov.
Olympian Turned Diplomat Dies

Track star and five-time Olympic medalist Mal Whitfield, 91, died Nov. 19 at a hospice in Washington, D.C., surrounded by family. After Olympic stardom—he won gold in the 800-meter races in London 1948 and Helsinki 1952—he embarked on a three-decade career as sports envoy and cultural officer for what was then USIA.

A veteran of the famed Tuskegee Airmen, Whitfield was the first African-American to receive the Sullivan Award, in 1954, for the top U.S. amateur athlete. Retiring from competitive sports, he journeyed to Africa under the Department’s auspices to serve as coach, mentor and goodwill ambassador at a time when African athletes were scarcely recognized on the world scene. He went on to help develop Liberia and Nigeria’s track teams and in 1963 joined USIA and continued to share his training expertise with young athletes and coaches from more than 130 countries.

By promoting physical education in Africa, Europe and Asia, Whitfield inspired generations of aspiring athletes and set an example for fellow American diplomats in the practice of people-to-people diplomacy, building rapport and grassroots inclusion for youth and other underserved segments of society.

Ultimately, Whitfield paved the path for the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs’ Sports Diplomacy Envoys, who’ve included Jackie Joyner-Kersee, Tony Sanneh, Cal Ripken, Jr., Sam Perkins and Lorrie Fair.

After his government career, Whitfield continued promoting sports and international exchanges through a foundation in his name. In 1993, reflecting on the gratitude and goodwill he had generated, especially among African nations, he said, “I left there rich with knowledge. I received so much more than I gave. They were my teachers.”
The New Year is a time for resolutions and setting priorities. This is no less true for organizations than it is for individuals. In 2016, the Bureau of Human Resources (HR) will focus on empowering employees and building upon efforts begun in 2015 such as Foreign Service performance management reform and expanded work-life wellness programs. To advance our goal of building a diverse, capable workforce equipped to take on today and tomorrow’s challenges, we must take on some of the more vexing issues the Department faces. These include Civil Service reform, revamping Foreign Service bidding and assignments and targeted hiring initiatives to address deficits in certain career specialties.

Civil Service Reform: The contributions of the Department’s Civil Service personnel are undisputed. They provide subject matter expertise and continuity, often serving as the Department’s institutional memory. But the larger federal Civil Service system, devised for an industrial-era workforce, is too rigid to meet the demands and dynamism of the modern knowledge economy and a global environment replete with non-traditional threats. Though the Department’s Civil Service cohort is a small fraction of the federal Civil Service workforce, HR is developing options to offer employees more opportunities for mobility and professional development while giving the Department greater flexibility to tap into their talents across the span of their careers.

FS Bidding and Assignments Revamp: HR is undertaking a systematic review of our bidding and assignments processes to increase transparency and efficiency. This includes a multiyear project to modernize FSBid so that it offers more reliable and real-time information, rethinking the Career Development Program and improving the bidding and assignments cycles. Our goal is to help employees better navigate the system and enable managers to make better decisions so we can all devote more time to advancing the Department’s objectives and spend less time on internal processes.

Targeted Hiring in Specialty Areas: We need to replenish and strengthen the scientific and technical capacity of the Civil Service and Foreign Service in everything from nuclear physics to construction engineering. The salary schedules and position tiers for key Foreign Service specialists, for example, are ill-suited to compete in today’s talent market. While the private sector can hire in weeks, our processes can take years. To remain competitive, we need to be creative. This may entail, among other things, re-thinking recruitment and retention incentives for some specialist professions.

Change is hard but necessary, and in some cases urgent. We cannot shy away from the challenge. Success depends upon clear goals, resolve and smart resource allocation; it requires fresh thinking and shedding legacy policies or programs that no longer serve our mission. This is what we will do to press forward a reform agenda to empower Department employees and further Department goals. We welcome your thoughts and input.
An Ear to the People

As of January 2016, the Office of the Ombudsman (S/O) is very excited to begin quarterly contributions to State Magazine. Diversity Notes is a cherished column, and in that spirit we look forward to continuing, in our new column Conflict Matters, the dynamic and thought-provoking themes that Office of Civil Rights (S/OCR) Director John Robinson’s Diversity Notes has brought to you each month. Here at S/O we recognize the importance of diversity, and in our work, we treat all voices with respect.

Ombudsman is a Swedish term meaning “ear to the people.” The Office of the Ombudsman provides conflict resolution services to Department of State employees, supervisors and management on an informal and voluntary basis, and assists in identifying options for addressing workplace issues and conflicts. Our office expanded in 2012, and since then we have been working to empower individuals and engage the wider community in strategic and constructive conflict management.

S/O provides a variety of informal services such as mediation, conflict coaching and facilitated conversations. We also provide information to individuals who are looking to improve their conflict management skills. These resources include one-pagers and presentations on a variety of conflict-related topics, as well as the Guide for Resolving or Reporting Workplace Issues. Most of these are available on our website.

S/O is not the only Department office dealing with workplace conflict. For example, S/OCR offers processes to address a specific slice of the conflict pie, and the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) process uses Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and other tools to address issues of discrimination and harassment.

Our office operates under four principles set by the International Ombudsman Association: neutrality, confidentiality, informality and independence.

- We do not pick sides in a conflict, give advice to parties, make determinations or act as advocates for individuals.
- We are a strictly confidential resource, meaning we will not generally share specific information unless there is an imminent risk of harm.
- We are informal and do not participate in any of the formal complaint processes here at the Department.
- Finally, we operate independently and are structured to report directly to the secretary rather than any particular office or bureau.

Why might you care about conflict resolution? Managing conflict generates the power to build positive interactions, which can create the catalyst for new ideas and creative solutions to challenges. At the same time, the consequences of unmanaged workplace conflict can be enormous. Destructive conflict can lead to unproductive activity, delayed decision making and increased absenteeism and turnover, not to mention misdirected anger and hostility. Most conflict stems from poor interpersonal communication, and by addressing this at the earliest opportunity, many potential conflicts can be avoided. Research suggests that managers spend between 25 percent and 40 percent of their time dealing with workplace conflict. Resolving conflicts, then, offers myriad benefits to individuals, offices and the mission.

Successfully navigating a conflict is really all about how you address it. Conflict is inevitable, and everyone should be aware of the Department’s resources to help address conflict. In this vein we hope that you will consider us as an avenue to share your voice and use our services and resources to assist you in managing workplace conflict. We are extremely grateful to S/OCR for sharing its monthly column with us, and we look forward, in the coming issues of this magazine, to offering our thoughts, tips and skills for managing conflict.
Those who've got to get a cable out late in the day and are receiving error messages from the State Messaging and Archive Retrieval Toolset (SMART) application will receive assistance from the SMART Technical Support Unit (TSU), which supports 57,000 users around the world.

All Department of State international, inter- and intra-agency business communications are transmitted through SMART, which is also the lifeline for Department employees around the world during times of crisis.

SMART application-related support requests go to the Beltsville Messaging Center (BMC) and other locations in the Washington, D.C., area. SMART TSU has 29 support staff providing telephone and on-site assistance to Washington area users and telephone/email assistance to the Bureau of Information Response Management's (IRM) support personnel assigned overseas. TSU also manages domestic user profiles to ensure that users receive the messages they need while protecting messages containing Personally Identifiable Information (PII) and highly sensitive information.

In 2014, SMART TSU processed more than 19,000 incidents and service requests, including creating more than 3,300 new SMART accounts and transferring more than 3,690 accounts. SMART TSU's vision, as established by then-BMC Division Chief John Cabral, was, "To be known as the premium customer support organization within DOS—second to none!"

SMART TSU got its start when IRM replaced a mainframe-based computer system to gain improved system functionality and efficiency. This caused a change of mission for the Telecommunications Center Technical Controllers who had maintained the earlier messaging but whose skills—like the mainframe—were no longer relevant. The mainframes and communication centers had been replaced by servers, PCs, email, cloud technologies and products like MS Exchange, Outlook, Office and SharePoint, all technologies most staffers at the BMC knew very little about.

IRM, however, retained and retrained the current staff, especially after the Department decided to develop the SMART application in-house. Ron Prince, a SMART TSU domestic engineer, said the transition from being a BMC information technology specialist to being a Tier-2 SMART help desk technician was "filled with uncertainty," and BMC operators were worried they'd lose their jobs. "Our chief, John Cabral, laid our fears of losing jobs to rest, assuring all of his BMC technicians that there would be positions available for each of us with SMART," he continued.

"Because SMART was a new messaging system, all of the BMC IT specialists were required to take SMART training courses that provided us with the knowledge of SMART functionality." IRM sent BMC staff to FSI for training on the newer technologies, and the BMC staff gained the jobs of providing Tier-2 telephone and on site support to their SMART users. Contractors were brought in to monitor the legacy system during its phase-out, allowing TSU's engineers to complete the training they needed for certification. Glen Johnson, then director of the Messaging Systems Office and now the Department's deputy chief information officer, said the transition happened because he envisioned SMART TSU as a model for the rest of IRM. He added that he valued the staff and wanted to ensure they had every opportunity to successfully transition to their new duties.

Most recently, the TSU achieved the International Standards Organization's ISO/IEC 20000 (ISO 20K) certification, "the gold standard" for IT service providers. ISO 20K is based on the IT Infrastructure Library's (ITIL) best practices for excellence in IT service management, and its implementation at TSU fits with IRM's culture of continual improvement. ITIL helps individuals and organizations use IT to realize the benefits of business change and optimize customer experience. It focuses on the design, transition, delivery and improvement of services that meet service requirements and customer and service provider needs. Gaining the ISO 20K certification required SMART TSU to offer an integrated process as it implements, monitors and improves its service management system (SMS). Its adoption sets specific targets for IRM and helps kick-start the adoption of ITIL best practices throughout the Department.

ISO project lead Anita Henderson-Carlos helped guide TSU through each step of the process. Now, TSU is "the only government agency with ISO 20K certification," according to the British Standards Institution, the author of the ISO/IEC 20000 standard.

ISO 20K is supported by Branch Chiefs Henry Glover (domestic support) and Mark Abbey (overseas support). Glover said, "The IT service management and process improvement principles of ISO 20K align with the mission of our organization."

Under the ISO 20K standard, every incident is reviewed for timeliness and correctness, and a full-time quality assurance program ensures that every user comment is used in the improvement program. ISO 20K certification proved that TSU's efforts to become the Department's premier customer support organization had come to fruition and is a mark of excellence regarding TSU’s capability in delivering an internationally recognized IT service management solution.

TSU also helps bureaus clean up their SMART account profiles, including user deletions/additions, captions, tags, transfers and rule-writing modifications, to ensure correct delivery and improve the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the Department's record message traffic. To date, TSU’s SMART effort has led to the cleanup of 1,463 SMART user accounts across eight of the Department's 14 bureaus and offices. Each cleanup time frame has shortened over the past several months as procedures are documented and refined and efficiencies implemented.

SMART TSU teams have consistently scored highly on customer satisfaction surveys and are proud of their 24/7 service. They stand ready to serve you.
Embassy Mobilizes
Paris responds to terrorist attacks

By Philip Frayne, public affairs officer, U.S. Embassy in Paris
As the Nov. 13 terror attacks on Paris began, 80,000 fans in the Stade de France on the outskirts of Paris were watching a soccer match, and people filled the city’s bars, restaurants and concert halls to relax at the work week’s end. Then, at 9:20 p.m. local time, a sharp explosion sounded outside the stadium; after a second explosion, fans began to wonder what was happening.

The attacks were underway. For the next three hours, confusion and panic gripped the city. Horrific reports poured in: three suicide bombers at the stadium, gunmen with Kalashnikovs randomly spraying fire into restaurants and cafés in a popular neighborhood, a rock concert hall stormed, with many dead or wounded and hostages taken. In all, 130 people were murdered that night, including one American, and hundreds were injured.

Local French guards first alerted the embassy’s assistant regional security officer (ARSO) on duty just minutes after the stadium incidents, and as details of the attacks became clearer, several ARSOs rushed to the chancery. Shortly thereafter, the Marine Security Guard detachment was ordered to report to the embassy to take up internal defense positions in case the terrorists were headed that way.

Twenty minutes after receiving the initial report of an incident at the stadium and upon hearing breaking news of a shooting in the 10th arrondissement, Deputy Chief of Mission Uzra Zeya instructed the RSO to start the phone cascade to account for all employees of the three U.S. Missions in Paris, the bilateral mission and those for UNESCO and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. It took longer than expected to gain a full accounting of all 1,300 employees and family members late on a Friday night and into the next morning (many employees were either asleep or unaware of what had happened), but the docket was finally cleared early the next day.

American Citizen Services (ACS) chief Wendy Ryde consulted with the DCM, RSO and Overseas Citizens Services (OCS) in Washington to draft emergency messages to all U.S. citizens and embassy employees, advising them to shelter in place wherever they were and stay tuned to further developments. OCS helped get this message quickly onto the mission’s website and social media platforms. Overnight, the ambassador led outreach to the French government, offering condolences and maximum U.S. government support. At 9 a.m. the following morning, the DCM convened an Emergency Action Committee meeting to review events and decide on next steps.

In the early morning hours after the attacks, embassy operators were quickly overwhelmed by a high volume of calls, and ACS duty officer Bryan Schiller and second-tour officer Becky Marquez were enlisted to staff an overnight task force. At the same time, many calls were rerouted to Main State, where OCS hastily assembled a task force. Indeed, throughout the night of the attack and for the next 48 hours, consular officers in Paris and Washington responded to more than 5,000 inquiries and reports from these family members and acquaintances.

Some U.S. citizens among potential victims called to report they were safe. Sadly, eyewitnesses to the slaying of the lone American also called to report her death outside one of the targeted restaurants.

Ryde credits the training in crisis management that consular officers receive for making her team—including several first- and second-tour officers and local French employees who volunteered to help—ready and able to handle
Secretary of State Kerry steps back from the podium, having just thrown the switch to light the exterior of the mission's chancery in the colors of the French flag.

*State Department photo*
this emergency, just as they had after the Charlie Hebdo and kosher market attacks last January. Added Marquez: “The crisis simulation was essential preparation for managing most aspects of this real-life crisis.”

The consular team visited injured Americans and worked with the FBI’s Office for Victim Assistance on the arrangements for repatriation. That included rushing to prepare emergency passports for the traumatized American rock musicians from Eagles of Death Metal, the band playing in the Bataclan theater when the gunmen burst in.

The round-the-clock efforts by the post’s front office and other parts of the mission to deal with the aftermath of the attacks came in the middle of already intense preparations for the COP21 climate conference and associated presidential visit.

“I’m really proud of the way all sections of the mission came together to work day and night on our response,” said Ambassador Jane Hartley. “We had our security team making sure all personnel were safe, our law enforcement colleagues liaising with their French counterparts, our public affairs team managing the media, our consular team assisting American citizens and our political section reporting on the latest developments. In a very tense time, these officers and local French employees exemplified the best of American diplomacy.”

In the days following the attacks, the world showed its support for France, as buildings from Chicago to Sydney were lit in the blue, white and red tricolor of the French flag. Ambassador Hartley, supported by Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Rick Stengel, ensured the Paris chancery joined the list, and in less than a day, lights were installed and tested.

In a ceremony at the embassy three days later, Secretary of State Kerry turned on the lights and thanked those who’d responded to the attacks and who “continue to work around the clock to heal the injured, restore calm and provide relief.” He called the attacks “an assault not just on France but, coming on the heels of brutal attacks in Lebanon, Iraq and elsewhere… an assault on our collective sense of reason and purpose, an attack on civility itself.”
Challenges and opportunities abound in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.
Central America’s Northern Triangle countries have much to offer. El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras each feature their own distinct cultural highlights, unique sights, beautiful scenery and local culinary specialties, and each country provides an unparalleled professional opportunity to do interesting, challenging work at a pivotal moment in history.

In late 2014, President Obama launched the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America. Simply put, the strategy changes how we work in the region. It seeks to resolve the underlying conditions that drive undocumented migration to the United States by comprehensively promoting prosperity, good governance and security throughout Central America, but most especially in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The strategy uses a cross-cutting, multidisciplinary approach, known as place-based strategy, to address the core problems that are plaguing the region. The Northern Triangle countries are also investing heavily in their own recovery, putting $3 billion of their own resources into the Alliance for Prosperity, their own regional plan for improvement. Our strategy dovetails with the Alliance for Prosperity. The result is an unprecedented synergy between U.S. foreign assistance and host government investment in the region, with a shared goal of effecting lasting change.

On the security piece, the strategy recognizes that violence doesn’t exist in a vacuum. It therefore seeks to resolve the primary issues underlying the violence. For this reason, in Honduras, a country where the average person has only about seven years of education, the U.S. government is working with Honduran government and NGO partners to develop programs that educate at-risk youth and provide long-term, formal employment options as solid alternatives to gangs and criminal behavior. We are already seeing significant reductions in the number of homicides in target neighborhoods.

In El Salvador, where extortion is crushing businesses of all sizes, we are effectively addressing the impunity problem. We have partnered with the government to create an anti-extortion task force to eradicate this scourge. The task force’s work has resulted in more than 75 convictions, and more than 200 additional people are awaiting trial, with a 96 percent conviction rate since 2014 and not a single case dismissed before trial—unusual in El Salvador, where many cases are thrown out for purported lack of evidence and witnesses often recant out of fear of reprisal. It is just one example of the type of transformative opportunities we have witnessed while undertaking critical prosperity-enhancing work in the region.

We promote good governance and rule of law in Guatemala through support for the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (commonly known by its Spanish acronym, CICIG), as well as by creating 24-hour courts to deal with all forms of crime, especially domestic violence; a new asset seizure chamber that is capturing ill-gotten gains for law enforcement purposes; and a so-called “high impact” court with sufficient security so that the highest-profile criminal cases can be expeditiously tried. As you’ll read in the story about Guatemala, CICIG and the Public Ministry are leading the charge against impunity. More than 200 public officials have been charged with crimes, including the former president and vice president. Our investments are paying dividends: 73 percent of Guatemalans are familiar with the tribunal’s work, 95 percent of that group believe CICIG is doing a good job, and 88 percent of Guatemalans believe the Public Ministry is doing a good job.

These and many more opportunities to have a positive impact on the future of each of these countries await officers in WHA. We are just getting started on our work under the strategy. You can make a difference in this region. There is much work to be done. We hope you will consider joining us in 2016 and beyond.

Francisco Palmieri,
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Central America, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs
El Salvador
Partnering toward a better future
By Joseph Leavitt and Jennifer Bookbinder, vice consuls, U.S. Embassy in San Salvador
There is nothing simple about El Salvador. As embassy family member Rory Pickett recently wrote, “El Salvador is a beautiful country with hills, mountains, volcanoes and green as far as the eye can see. It is a place with the highest murder rate in the world, where people are still quick with a smile or a laugh. It is a place where people live in fear, but can hit Cold Stone Creamery for a treat and a little taste of normalcy. In short, El Salvador is complicated.”

Despite the complications, El Salvador gives embassy officers opportunities for challenging and meaningful work, while offering natural splendor and cultural richness. The two sides of El Salvador make for a rewarding assignment.

The recent influx of unaccompanied minors entering the United States from El Salvador spotlighted the nation’s rising violence and need for economic development. The U.S. Embassy in San Salvador works closely with the Salvadoran government to address these key challenges in various ways. The integrated U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America and our support for the Northern Triangle countries’ own Alliance for Prosperity are designed to bring even greater resources to increase security, strengthen economic growth and improve democratic governance in the region.

One initiative that has encompassed much of the U.S. government’s effort since 2011 is the bilateral Partnership for Growth (PFG), an innovative, whole-of-government approach to foreign assistance. As the only western hemisphere country among the four countries

DCM Michael Barkin learns about a USDA-supported organic vegetable project that is empowering small farmers in rural El Salvador.

Photo by Juan Carlos Quintero
selected for PFG involvement worldwide, El Salvador partners with the United States within a framework of 20 joint security and economic goals designed to remove critical obstacles to growth. By investing politically in the process and publishing a public “scorecard” every six months, both governments are held accountable for outcomes. Under PFG, the post developed strong internal mechanisms to coordinate interagency work on mission objectives and partnerships with host government counterparts. These relationships advance U.S. national interests under the overall strategy.

“The experience of Salvadoran communities with which we have worked under PFG shows us that there are many reasons to have hope. With patience, dedication, and a firm commitment, these communities can lead the way toward recovery.” - Ambassador Mari Carmen Aponte

While still facing significant obstacles to economic growth, persistent crime and violence, El Salvador made notable gains during the five-year PFG partnership. For example, through workforce development programs, El Salvador’s public sector works with private sector employers to identify in-demand work skills that support El Salvador’s export industries. Youth then receive training to fill these needs—such as Microsoft Office proficiency and vocational skills—via joint funding through USAID and the Salvadoran private sector. Similar programs link institutions of higher education with the private sector to ensure college curricula prepare students to land jobs upon graduation.

El Salvador is a regional leader of public-private sector alliances. One in particular, Soluciones, is the largest such coalition in Latin America. It consists of five Salvadoran charitable organizations that together have raised $21 million for crime prevention projects through the country’s private sector, for which the U.S. government has matched dollar for dollar, leveraging U.S. foreign assistance to expand funding for critical needs.

U.S. government-supported grassroots crime prevention programs aim to improve both neighborhoods and communities. The Adopt-
A woman carries a colorfully decorated palm frond during a religious festival.

*Photo by Robert Easton*
-School program, for example, funnels contributions from Salvadoran public-private partnerships and USAID to encourage investment in youth and education. As part of this program, embassy officers recently inaugurated a new 28-computer digital learning center at a small village school in the shadow of a picturesque jungle volcano. One of El Salvador’s primary mobile phone service providers donated $10 million toward the project, which the U.S. government matched. Smiling students in crisp school uniforms told the officers that the center’s computers were the first desktop computers that they had ever used.

Additionally, police outreach programs supported by the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) help young Salvadorans avoid gangs and forge positive connections with police officers. Police in at-risk areas organize summer camps and sports leagues that keep young people off the streets during school breaks. Schools welcome police officers for classroom talks and to simply spend time inside schools, getting to know students and building trust. One officer related that, after visiting a particular school only a handful of times, students enthusiastically high-fived him in the hallways as he passed. He said he could not believe the positive effects and relationships that even modest contact could build.

Local outreach centers also exemplify effective cooperation between Salvadoran civil society and the embassy. More than
Tazumal is an architectural complex within the larger area of the ancient Mesoamerican city of Chalchuapa, in western El Salvador. *Photo by Raúl Arias*
115 such centers—clean, safe spaces equipped with computers, board games, books and more—dot El Salvador’s most dangerous neighborhoods. Established and supported through alliances between private Salvadoran businesses, municipalities, community organizations and churches and USAID, the centers provide after-school and weekend refuge for young people who might otherwise be easy targets for gangs.

“I spend all day at the center because I feel safe here. There are always friends here to play with and talk to,” said Alexander, an 11-year-old from a gang-riddled neighborhood.

By providing alternatives to gang life and violence, the governments of El Salvador and the United States are steadily chipping away at crime. Residents recently indicated in surveys that they have perceived a drop in crime in their at-risk communities since the outset of PFG-driven crime prevention efforts. Although perceptions and reality are not necessarily synonymous, the survey results are good signs.

In the legal arena, the Department of Justice, through INL-funded crime prevention programs, helped set up and train task forces within the Salvadoran justice system, including one that addresses primarily extortion-related crimes. This new task force achieves a 96 percent conviction rate for cases it prosecutes. Extensive training of Salvadoran prosecutors, judges and law enforcement personnel led to this impressive conviction rate, in a country with an average conviction rate of only 3–5 percent. The well-trained task force also scored a significant success when it brought down a criminal structure with more than 250 gang members and seized $100,000 worth of weapons. Moreover, the task force’s work led to the first publicly documented confirmation that incarcerated gang leaders run crime on the streets, a revelation with important public policy ramifications.

Despite the challenging work environment, officers and their families enjoy the sights and sounds of home within easy driving distance of the embassy and official housing. El Salvador hosts
Wheelchair athletes stop for refreshments during a competition for physically disabled athletes, organized as part of an exchange through the SportsUnited division of the State Department’s Office of Educational and Cultural Affairs in Ayutuxtepeque.

Photo by Juan Quintero

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many familiar American franchises, and given that Miami is about a two-hour flight away, the two-way flow of people and trade is extensive. For its part, the embassy cafeteria features “local Thursdays” with pupusas (corn tortillas stuffed with beans and cheese), pastel de plátano (a sweet and savory banana lasagna), and tortilla soup, while the active Community Liaison Office (CLO) also brings local restaurants to the compound twice a month to serve lunch during a farmers market and craft fair. Kimberly Mike, the community liaison officer, said the CLO “brings events on the compound to make it easy” for the community to enjoy the benefits of El Salvador without worrying about the security situation.

Though security concerns are real, embassy families regularly get out of the city to experience the country, whether on their own or through CLO-organized trips to hike volcanoes and enjoy festivals. El Salvador’s compact size and good roads make day trips to the beach or camping in the mountains popular weekend activities.

Many officers with families choose to serve in El Salvador for its proximity to the United States and range of bilingual schools. The post currently has 125 children under 18, 90 of them school-aged. Several bilingual preschools also serve the littlest members of the embassy community. The CLO office regularly plans events for children of all ages, both on and off compound. A favorite trip is visiting an indigo farm to tie-dye clothing. When the security situation threatened to cancel one such trip, the CLO arranged for the farm to come to the embassy. Families need not venture far or spend long
in the country to learn that Salvadors genuinely love children. Many restaurants have play areas, and kids are welcome practically everywhere, making it easy for families with young children to get to know the country and its people.

Embassy officers know that their work is having a real and significant impact, but reading the newspapers and talking to local colleagues and friends also reminds them of the serious challenges Salvadors face every day. “Serving in El Salvador is not for everyone,” says Public Affairs Officer Mari Tolliver. “It can be tough sometimes. But our local employees and Salvadoran partners are amazing, and the embassy community pulls together. When you talk to Salvadors, especially young people, you realize there is so much reason for hope. That’s what keeps us going.”

The town of Santa Tecla and the San Salvador Volcano, also known as El Boqueron, can both be seen from atop of the Colony of Las Delicias in La Libertad.

Photo by Diego Brito
Capital: San Salvador
Government Type: Democratic constitutional republic
Area: 21,041 sq km
Population: 6,141,350
Ethnic groups: Mestizo 86.3%, white 12.7%, Amerindian 0.2% (includes Lenca, Kakawira, Nahua-Pipil), black 0.1%, other 0.6%
Net Migration: -8.28 (migrants per 1,000 population; country comparison: 209, out of 222)
Languages: Spanish (official), Nahua (among some Amerindians)
Religions: Roman Catholic (57.1%), Protestant (21.2%), Jehovah's Witnesses (1.9%), Mormon (0.7%), other (2.3%), none (16.8%)
Export partners: U.S., Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica
Import partners: U.S., Honduras, Guatemala, China, Mexico, Nicaragua, Costa Rica
Currency: U.S. dollar
Internet country code: .sv

* The CIA World Factbook
Guatemala

Perfect weather, changing political climate

Story by Erica Nelson, vice consul, U.S. Embassy Guatemala
Photos by Sebastian John
Just 35 kilometers from Guatemala City, the tourist destination of Antigua served as the capital for all of Central America during colonial times, but earthquakes and volcanic eruptions left Antigua in ruins, and in 1775 the capital moved to a nearby high-altitude valley. Though Fuego, Pacaya and Santiaguito—Guatemala’s three active volcanoes—still light up the night, the new capital has endured over the centuries, and in recent times seismic changes of a different sort are occurring.

In 2015, hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans from all walks of life joined together for months of unprecedented peaceful protests, finding new strength in participatory democracy. A sitting president and vice president resigned in the wake of a tax fraud scheme and were criminally charged along with dozens of others. Old guard political parties were ignored by voters during the presidential elections process, and a political newcomer was elected president.

“Guatemalans took to the streets in recent months because they decided that they deserve a government that works for them rather than against them,” said Ambassador Todd Robinson at the height of the protests in the summer of 2015. “They decided that they deserve public institutions that serve the whole population, not only those who are well connected.”

During this critical period, the U.S. Mission’s support for anti-corruption efforts and the U.N.-sponsored International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (commonly known by its Spanish acronym, CICIG) —which in partnership with the attorney general’s office uncovered several high-profile cases—created an unprecedented environment for bilateral cooperation. For example, officers from across the mission promoted further critical justice sector reform in Guatemala.

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colleagues from USAID and the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) helped design and equip specialty courts to address specific Guatemalan problems. One court handles only high-profile, sensitive cases to allow those prosecutions to proceed without violence or corruption. Another serves female victims of violence and exploitation 24/7. A third administers assets seized from criminals. Critical, scientific-based evidence is also now used in criminal cases, thanks to post’s assistance to the national forensic laboratory, which is gaining international certification in ballistics, genetics testing and toxicology.

“There’s incredible willingness for us to get in there and affect real change in institutions,” said INL Director Virginia Staab. Her section directly addresses many aspects of Guatemalan life: training police and reforming prisons, ensuring prosecutors in rural areas have Internet access, creating programs for high-risk youth and actively engaging with the country’s mayors. “When I travel around the country,” said Staab, “it’s moving and humbling to have people come up to me and say, ‘Thank you for what you are doing for Guatemala.’”

Guatemala is only about the size of Tennessee, but the mission includes 140 direct-hire Americans, working for a wide array of U.S. agencies, including the Department of Agriculture, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of the Treasury, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the largest USAID mission in Central America. A substantial military group also fosters cooperation and capacity building.
Partnering to strengthen indigenous communities

The mission takes a whole-of-government approach to implement policy goals under the president’s regionwide initiative known as the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America. Thus, the work of every office helps bring prosperity, good governance and security to Guatemala. The strategy places particular emphasis on partnering with local governments and civil society to increase prosperity throughout Central America; in Guatemala the mission focuses on increasing development and opportunities for the indigenous communities in the Western Highlands, the area with the greatest problems of poverty, malnutrition and a high rate of outbound migration.

USAID is helping these communities improve management of natural resources to mitigate the effects of climate change and empower indigenous civil society. Since many of the unaccompanied minors crossing the U.S. border with Mexico come from the mountainous Western Highlands region, USAID is working hard to address and resolve the underlying conditions that drive migration north. Among many other activities, USAID is helping to create indigenous language learning resources for children, as well as implementing integrated programs to significantly reduce childhood malnutrition—which stunts the cognitive and physical development of nearly half of Guatemala’s children under 5 years old.

Most Americans don’t know that about 80 percent of the snow peas they eat come from Guatemala. Other high-value export crops such as coffee and Brussels sprouts provide an important source of income for small-scale farmers, and USAID is helping them improve agricultural techniques to get more out of small plots of land.

Even after the country’s long civil war ended in 1996, the region remains underdeveloped and its residents undereducated. Despite these challenges, the indigenous communities of Guatemala continue to promote and preserve their traditions—24 languages are still actively spoken, each community weaves its own unique brand of cotton textiles, many perform ancient ceremonies and religious rituals.
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A street vendor sells breakfast in Santa Cruz del Quiché.
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A kite is raised during the Kite Festival in Sumpango.
Kites of different sizes are displayed during the Kite Festival in Sumpango.
Ecosystems to Explore

Vivid traditional dress and handicrafts, as well as Guatemala’s diverse cultures, make exploring the country a treat for travelers. One of Guatemala’s most famous tourist sites is Lake Atitlán. Surrounded by three volcanoes, the lake was described by the British writer Aldous Huxley as “too much of a good thing.” Atitlán is also a showcase of culture, where indigenous villages nestled in the mountains around the lake have their own distinct types of dress and decorative arts. A three-hour drive from the capital, it’s a favorite weekend destination for embassy staff.

“From a personal perspective, Guatemala has it all,” said former USAID Deputy Director of Planning and Support Michelle Dworkin. “It has 14 different ecosystems. I have climbed eight volcanoes. If you are an outdoor person, there is so much to do.”

Guatemala is known as the land of eternal spring. Sitting in the tropics, the beaches are hot and humid, yet the mountainous regions that are home to most of the country’s population enjoy mild and generally sunny weather throughout the year, with hotter temperatures in April–May and a cooler climate in November–January (never much below 55 degrees).

“You wake up every morning and think, ‘Wow, it’s a beautiful day,’” said Emily Yu, a first-tour officer in the consular section. “I’ve found great CrossFit gyms and yoga studios, and the people here are just extremely friendly.”
Smoke rises from Volcán de Fuego as seen from Antigua. Volcán de Fuego (Volcano of Fire) is an active stratovolcano in Guatemala, on the borders of Chimaltenango, Esquintla and Sacatepéquez departments.
In addition to an altitude adjustment to life at 5,000 feet above sea level, newcomers can also expect an eclectic mix of excellent bars and restaurants, neon-studded 10-kilometer night runs and stylish housing options. Local delicacies, such as pepian, a thick turkey stew, are as readily available as risotto, barbecue ribs and Cabernet Sauvignon. In addition, most American products are available here (albeit at higher prices) and many urban supermarkets are similar to those you would find in the United States. With its cosmopolitan nature, Guatemala City also requires the street smarts and common sense of any big city. It is a high-crime post with significant dangers, requiring situational awareness.

The embassy is preparing for a permanent move from its downtown location to a new embassy compound (NEC) site in a nearby suburb. The land was purchased in 2014 and the building complex is currently being designed. Construction on the NEC is expected to begin in the near future, with completion slated for 2019.
A passenger rides in tuk-tuk at the village of Santa Cruz, Lake Atitlán.
Artistic Outreach

Diplomacy means many things, and one of them is making a good first impression. In the past, the embassy’s outside waiting area for more than 3,000 consular visitors a week was in poor condition—a mural painted by students some years ago had begun to flake and decay. So, in April last year, during the annual consular leadership day, a 48-person team from the consular section tackled a gigantic mural-painting project. Everyone pulled out paint clothes, rolled up their sleeves and got to work on the 2,500-square-foot wall.

Working collaboratively on the design with a local graphic designer and architect who volunteered his time, the final product has colors and patterns reminiscent of those seen in traditional Guatemalan textiles. Some participants were skeptical about being able to complete such a daunting project in one day. However, with 22 gallons of paint, eight hours of work in the hot sun, teamwork and good communication, the mural was completed, honoring Guatemalan culture and providing a more pleasant waiting experience for consular clients.

Consular staff paint a wall facing the embassy with traditional Guatemalan motifs during Consular Leadership Day in Guatemala City.
**Guatemala**

**Capital:** Guatemala City

**Government Type:** Democratic constitutional republic

**Area:** 108,889 sq km

**Population:** 14,918,999

**Ethnic groups:** Mestizo and European 59.4%, K’iche 9.1%, Kaqchikel 8.4%, Mam 7.9%, Q’eqchi 6.3%, other Mayan 8.6%, indigenous non-Mayan and other 0.3%

**Net Migration:** -1.97 (migrants per 1,000 population; country comparison: 165, out of 222)

**Languages:** Spanish (official) 60%, Amerindian languages 40%

**Religions:** Roman Catholic, Protestant, indigenous Mayan beliefs

**Export partners:** U.S., El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico

**Import partners:** U.S., Mexico, China, El Salvador

**Currency:** Guatemalan quetzal

**Internet country code:** .gt

* The CIA World Factbook

**At a Glance**

Selected Volcano

- Santiaguito
- Antigua Guatemala
- Guatemala City
- Lake Atitlán
- Pacaya
- Fuego
- Santiaguito

**Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative.**

Lake Atitlán

Antigua Guatemala

Guatemala City

Guatemala

**Return**
Meet Nixon Pineda Mejia, a resident of one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in Tegucigalpa. Where he comes from, many are confronted with a painful choice: join a gang or risk being the victim of one. Some faced with this decision opt to make the dangerous journey to the United States as undocumented migrants, like thousands of minors from Central America did during the summer of 2014. Others, like Pineda, pursue a different path despite the difficult future that lies before them.

In 2010, Pineda was near the top of his class at a large public high school in the capital. In a different country where he could forge a path forward on his merit and wit, Pineda’s horizons might have been boundless, but his mother had cancer and his father worked as a day laborer, earning a wage that barely covered the costs of his wife’s treatment, let alone the expenses of raising the children. He had few good options. Fortunately, that was the inaugural year of Honduras’ first ACCESS program, an embassy-sponsored English language and leadership program for underserved youth. Pineda surpassed every criterion for selection and was chosen for the program’s first class. He thrived in the after-school classes and volunteered on weekends, and eventually earned a scholarship to a local university, where he is now studying marketing.

It is a success story, one that makes the U.S. Mission proud, but here is the part that makes everyone proudest: Pineda took what he learned in ACCESS and teamed up with Embassy staff celebrated 100,000 “likes” on their Facebook page by presenting 100 gift bags to members of the public who were waiting for their visa interviews in front of the Consular section.

Photo by Javier Ramirez
Costumed students participate in a festival celebrating culture, patriotism and the end of the year in Honduras.
other program alumni to start his own initiative, called “The Mentoring Choice,” to help kids from rural areas access better opportunities. Although the embassy helped craft the grant proposal, The Mentoring Choice is a homegrown initiative that was recently recognized by fellow Hondurans in a national innovation competition.

“Officially, ACCESS is a program focused on teaching English skills to talented but at-risk youth,” noted ACCESS program leader Carlos Mejia. “Our students are talented language learners and easily acquire English skills; this did not surprise me. What moved me was how deeply students like Nixon have internalized the American value of service and giving back to the community. The ACCESS program changed his life, and in turn, he has helped change the lives of hundreds of kids from rural areas of Honduras.”

Pineda and The Mentoring Choice are not the only ACCESS success stories. Most of the 662 prior and current program participants have remained in Honduras and are gainfully employed or pursuing higher education. The unemployment rate for program graduates is 0 percent. ACCESS graduates are getting jobs, scholarships and better opportunities as a result of their ACCESS participation—and using it to build brighter futures for both themselves and Honduras.

Ask any of the 67 FSOs or specialists at Embassy Tegucigalpa and they can relate stories like these, where efforts aimed at a promising few are taken to the next level for the benefit of many.

“We all know the narrative of Honduras as the most violent country in the world, but that is changing,” said Ambassador James Nealon. “Crimes that touch the lives of everyday Hondurans—crimes like extortion,
kidnapping—all those indicators are coming down. Hondurans are eager for capacity building, and our job is to assist the government as they answer that call with creativity and equal determination.”

Ambassador Nealon was confirmed during the height of what became known as the “unaccompanied minors crisis” during the summer of 2014. More than 18,000 unaccompanied Honduran children reached the U.S. border in fiscal year 2014, compared with approximately 6,700 in fiscal year 2013 and only about 5,400 during fiscal year 2015. “It is an incredibly dangerous journey for those children, and while we understand that the U.S. symbolically and economically continues to be that beacon of hope for so many, our goal is to help Hondurans work to realize their ‘Sueño Hondureño,’ their Honduran Dream,” the ambassador said. “We want those same children not to look to the United States for their future, but to see their future here.”

Working toward a better Honduras is an all-hands-on-deck effort at the embassy, made more dynamic by extraordinary interagency partnerships, USAID and the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement
Traffic jam on the road between Dulce Nombre and El Limón, Copán.

Photo by John Donaghy
Affairs (INL) recently began expanding efforts to reduce homicide rates and violent crime in some of the worst affected areas of Honduras, an approach they are calling the “place-based strategy,” with the help of a Department of Defense Civil Affairs unit. The program marries law enforcement training with prevention, and is being piloted in three police districts. Using a public health approach to violence prevention, it addresses key factors that may lead someone to become an offender or a victim of domestic abuse: drug and alcohol problems, unemployment and low educational achievement.

Andrea Lewis, the mission’s INL director, explains, “Homicide and violent crime in Honduras are plaguing the country at unacceptable levels, so it’s time that INL and USAID address these issues in an unprecedented way: implementing our violence prevention and crime reduction work together, in targeted areas. We are pulling together the Honduran national police, community organizations, at-risk youth, and members of the communities most affected by violence and crime to design a local solution, for Hondurans by Hondurans, and supported by the whole of the U.S. government.”

USAID and INL are also helping build better relations between citizens and police. Police are often seen as corrupt, or criminals themselves. Citizens fear reprisals by even speaking with police. Without trust, police lack the comprehensive information that communities hold, creating roadblocks to preventing or investigating crime. USAID and INL used street fairs, repainting houses, mobile medical clinics and other civic activities to help police interact in nonthreatening ways with the communities in which they work. Through these events and other targeted interactions, both sides are able to better address crimes in their neighborhoods.
The sun sets over the mountains in this panoramic shot of Tegucigalpa. Photo by Nan Palmero
“Neither INL nor USAID can fully achieve success on their own,” said USAID/Honduras Mission Director James Watson. “We have to work together and in support of Honduran counterparts. So we are partnering with Hondurans to make their cities, neighborhoods, and homes safer and to hold ourselves accountable for more than just joint planning and good projects. We want to see reductions in homicides to claim this as a success.”

While the work is important and rewarding, most embassy employees and their families cite the security situation as the greatest challenge to living in Honduras. This situation has put a greater emphasis on fostering a tight-knit mission community, a charge that the Community Liaison Office (CLO) takes very seriously. “Every day we do our best to go above and beyond to create a sense of normalcy in this security environment,” said Chanda Zirkelbach, who has been CLO director for four years. “That means that although it might be difficult to figure out a way for our kids to trick-or-treat, we get creative and make it happen. Beyond our official activities, I’ve noticed a style of socializing more reminiscent of old school Foreign Service at this post—people are getting together for potlucks and game nights, just generally finding fun ways to support each other—they’re nurturing lifelong friendships here.”

The ambassador ensures employees do not get mired in the daily challenges. Recently, he hosted the first annual Embassy Olympics. Post’s numerous agencies tested their might (and minds) in events ranging from relay races to testing math skills at Math Flash. The event climaxed with a final soccer showdown between members of the Facilities and Motor Pool teams. Despite a few possible yellow card violations, everyone remained friends and later bonded over the day’s festivities at a local taqueria.

The great Honduran political reformer and president of the short-lived Federal Republic of Central America in the 1830s, Francisco Morazán, famously said, “The greatness of a nation is not measured by the size of its territory but by the dignity and honor of its children.” By this measure, Hondurans are indeed dedicated to building a great nation, and the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa is right there with them.
At a Glance

Honduras

Capital: Tegucigalpa

Government Type: Democratic constitutional republic

Area: 112,090 sq km

Population: 8,746,673

Ethnic groups: Mestizo 90%, Amerindian 7%, black 2%, white 1%

Net Migration: -1.16 (migrants per 1,000 population; country comparison: 153, out of 222)

Languages: Spanish (official), Amerindian dialects

Religions: Roman Catholic 97%, Protestant 3%

Export partners: U.S., Germany, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Mexico

Import partners: U.S., Guatemala, China, Mexico, El Salvador

Currency: Honduran lempira

Internet country code: .hn

* The CIA World Factbook
BATTLING DISCRIMINATION

Post promotes Afro-Ecuadorians' culture

By Shiva Marvasti, political officer, U.S. Mission in Ecuador
n commemoration of the first year of the U.N.’s International Decade for People of African Descent, U.S. Mission Ecuador in 2015 organized a series of outreach programs and exchanges to raise awareness of the challenges faced by the Afro-Ecuadorian community.

The mission’s outreach is part of its program to increase social inclusion, support cultural exchanges and empower this important but underserved sector of Ecuador’s population. Afro-Ecuadorians constitute approximately 7 percent of Ecuador’s population and are concentrated in the coastal region of Esmeraldas and Guayas provinces and in the Chota Valley, in the north-central highlands, each area having a unique culture and rich history.

Since 2007, Ecuador’s increased social spending has improved access to potable water, housing, health and education for all citizens. Yet Afro-Ecuadorians continue to suffer disproportionately from poverty, underemployment and income inequality, and lack the quality educational opportunities and access to the justice system offered to whites and mestizos. Poverty among Afro-Ecuadorians fell from 51 percent to 43 percent from 2006 to 2009, but it still remains substantially above the national rate of 36 percent, in part due to the barriers facing Afro-Ecuadorians.

In October, political officers from the U.S. Embassy in Quito, in collaboration with staff of the U.S. Consulate General in Guayaquil, organized a multisectoral roundtable discussion with Afro-Ecuadorian leaders in Quito. The program brought together representatives from civil society, local governments and the national government to discuss Ecuador’s progress in advancing the U.N. themes of recognition, justice and development. Fifteen students from the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs’ regional College Horizons outreach program in Guayaquil participated via digital video conference (DVC), focusing on the media perpetuation of discrimination.

The panel discussion included José Chalá, executive president of Afro-Ecuadorian Development Corporation; John Anton, researcher at the Institute for Advanced National Studies; and Sonia España, director of the NGO Progressive Afro-Ecuadorian Women. The panel allowed the embassy team to learn and find areas of potential cooperation.

The panel moderator, Anton, noted that people of African descent the world over face many challenges, including unequal access to education and combating prejudice and discrimination. The panel discussed how institutional racism and prejudice affect the recognition of ancestral lands
and access to justice for African descendants in Ecuador. They emphasized the need to make Afro-Ecuadorians aware of their diversity, and to engage youth and their advocates, not just local civil society leaders.

Panelists said Ecuadorian law generally supports inclusive, rights-based practices, but discrimination persists, that government and civil society can play important roles in advancing Afro-Ecuadorian inclusion. Anton endorsed dialogue and links between different parts of the Afro-Ecuadorian community both within the nation and with other countries.

In other post activities during 2015 to engage with Afro-Ecuadorians, Ambassador Adam Namm visited the Chota Valley in July. There, he turned to his musicianship to perform traditional Afro-Ecuadorian music, met with local community leaders and watched a traditional dance. The visit was part of an embassy project to document and record the use of native musical instruments, including “la hoja,” or leaf blowing, a practice unique to the area.

In another activity, the U.S. Consulate General in Guayaquil in October organized a 10-day program with “One World Hip Hop,” a hip-hop dance and graffiti artist group from Los Angeles. The group led workshops and performances for low-income residents, and painted graffiti murals throughout Afro-Ecuadorian neighborhoods of Guayaquil, Ecuador’s largest city.

In January, the mission plans to hold an outreach event to increase the number of Afro-Ecuadorians in U.S. exchange programs. Consular and public affairs officers will visit Afro-Ecuadorian communities in the Chota Valley to give presentations on U.S. Embassy cultural and exchange programs, and to discuss opportunities for studying abroad and the process of obtaining student visas. As part of Black History Month in February, the political and public affairs sections will collaborate with U.S. Embassy Lima to promote dialogue between Afro-Latino youth in the two countries via DVC.

The mission’s engagement with those of African descent gained Afro-Latino participants for its International Visitor Leadership Program, Youth Ambassadors and College Horizons Program. More than 500 students have participated in College Horizons, which is held in primarily Afro-Ecuadorian and indigenous communities. The program provides English teaching, academic advising and mentoring for Afro-Latino and indigenous high school students. Nine programs are currently in session.

The mission finds these programs have had a great impact without requiring large resources and will continue to engage the Afro-Ecuadorians through public diplomacy programs and targeted social inclusion outreach efforts, such as discussions with Afro-Ecuadorian leaders. In doing so, it will help advance the goals of diversity and social inclusion. 

Ambassador Namm, at center in rear, poses with some of the people of Chota.

State Department Photo
The 2015 winners of the Secretary of State Awards for Outstanding Volunteerism Abroad (SOSA), one from each of the six geographic bureaus, pursued volunteer activities ranging from HIV awareness to the Hong Kong Little League. The awards were presented Nov. 10 by Deputy Secretary of State Heather Higginbottom.

Established in 1990 on the initiative of James and Susan Baker, the awards are supported by former secretaries of state, the Green Family Foundation and other donors, and administered by the Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide (AAFSW), a nonprofit volunteer organization for the Foreign Service community.

One winner, Ernesto Luna, created an English language program for the Slovak Diplomatic Police force while posted in Bratislava. The program lets officials improve their English skills, but as the officials lacked the needed resources, Luna volunteered to teach them. Using a grant from the Public Diplomacy Innovation Fund, Luna purchased electronic tablets, which allowed the students to study at home and during long shifts. He designed interactive online lessons and homework assignments for the students’ needs and professional interests.

Although police officers needed time to adjust to learning online, Luna said he knew the program was a success “when they started sending emails over the weekend asking for new exercises.”

At the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, a post characterized by travel restrictions and lock downs, Foreign Service spouse Karen Forsyth pursued what she called a “vision of service and connectivity among people.” Forsyth formalized and managed a household donation effort to benefit Syrian and Iraqi refugees as well as poor Lebanese families, convincing the General Services Office to install collection boxes on the compound. “My motto has been ‘small things can make a big difference,’” she noted. To boost morale and build community, she hosted pancake breakfasts and game afternoons, often including Lebanese staff, a tradition that has continued since her departure.

Another winner, DEA Special Agent Shannon Argetsinger, arrived in Hong Kong seeking a way for his 7-year-old son to play baseball. He soon found himself coaching and serving as president of the Hong Kong Little League (HKLL), overseeing 33 teams, a position he said “requires just as much passion as my paid job.” Argetsinger reformed the league’s 1973 charter, which excluded girls, and today both boys and girls compete as HKLL All-Stars in the Asia-Pacific Tournament.

“We were the only team to beat Taiwan,” he said, “and if you know baseball in Asia, you know what an achievement that is.” Argetsinger also successfully built bridges among cultures,
uniting members of the Japanese, Korean, Western and local Chinese communities in HKLL and his own team.

“Looking for an opportunity to give back to the embassy community,” the winner from the U.S. Embassy in Yaoundé, Department of State spouse Juliette Marsham-McClure, volunteered as interim manager of the American Employees Recreation Association. As a person who tends to “get 100 percent involved,” Marsham-McClure reorganized and revitalized the organization, overhauling its finances and management. She revamped the embassy cafeteria, including its menu and staff training, and led the organizing of the 2015 July fourth celebration.

In the community, Marsham-McClure noticed local women using expensive imported hair products, despite the availability of natural alternatives such as shea butter, and offered her knowledge of alternatives from African-American sources. Her free hair care classes and workshops now educate women about these affordable and high-quality local products.

In Turkmenistan, where private charitable and educational efforts are officially discouraged, Sunny Stimmler felt challenged as she sought to provide much-needed local assistance. The spouse of the public affairs officer at the U.S. Embassy in Ashgabat began cautiously, first strengthening the International Women’s Network with social activities and new fundraising efforts. More than $12,000 was raised for the group over three years at events such as a holiday bazaar that brought together expatriates and host-country participants to celebrate local and foreign cultures. The funds were used to donate mobility devices, exercise equipment and other supplies those with physical disabilities.

She also used her skills as a teacher and writer to lead weekly workshops and writing seminars. “I volunteer to serve others because I recognize that I live a life full of abundance and richness,” Stimmler said. “I try to share that abundance with others, because I believe that those of us who are privileged should do whatever we can to lessen the injustices and inequities that surround us.”
Carolynn Poulsen, spouse of the assistant regional security officer at the U.S. Embassy in Santiago, assisted a small NGO called International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS Chile. Poulsen worked on several fronts to address HIV issues in the country, including a campaign to establish universal access to female condoms. (A law has since been enacted by the Chilean Senate for their distribution in all public health centers.)

She also provided educational workshops on sexual and emotional health, worked with local and national media to combat fears and misinformation about HIV-positive individuals and improve knowledge about HIV transmission, and engaged the Ministry of Health and National Women’s Services on policy affecting women living with or vulnerable to HIV. “Reaching outside the expat comfort bubble, joining a multicultural team, and absorbing the vast amounts of knowledge and experience held by local counterparts is a unique and irreplaceable experience,” Poulsen said.

Also at the SOSA ceremony, Stephanie Arnold, human resources officer at the U.S. Embassy in Dublin, won the Champions of Eligible Family Member Career Enhancement Award for breaking through a 17-year impasse in the bilateral agreement on work permits and increasing the number of EFM positions at her post from four to 13. Sheila Switzer won the Eleanor Dodson Tragen Award for her support of Foreign Service family members, and the author received the Lesley Dorman Award for service to AAFSW.

Former Secretary of State James A. Baker, in an interview conducted for the SOSA award’s 25th anniversary, praised the Foreign Service community’s generous volunteerism, saying it “really tells a lot about America.” He said the community “needs to be aware, observant and willing to nominate people who have exhibited these forms of generosity and volunteerism.” For information about nominating volunteers in 2016, contact office@aafsw.org.

Shannon Argetsinger chats with the pitcher of the Hong Kong Little League team he coaches.  

Photo courtesy of Shannon Argetsinger
In 2014, Mission Mexico launched a missionwide initiative known as Documentate! ("Get Documented") to address the problem of the vast numbers of undocumented U.S. citizen minors living in Mexico, many of whom cannot go to school or get health services for lack of identity documents.

“These children represent the future, not just for Mexico but potentially for the United States, since, as U.S. citizens, they will one day travel freely across the border,” explained Hugo Rodriguez, acting minister-counselor for consular affairs at Mission Mexico. “Without identity documents they are a highly vulnerable population, at risk of becoming a lost generation.”

The Department of State estimates there are currently 600,000 U.S.-born citizen children in Mexico. The 14th Amendment grants U.S. citizenship to any U.S.-born person, regardless of the parents’ legal status. Among some migrant families, this creates a dynamic where the children are U.S. citizens, but the parents are not. When such a family leaves the United States, voluntarily or through removal, many U.S.-born children arrive in Mexico without identification or citizenship documents, or a clear legal status. This can make it difficult to obtain health care or attend public school.

The Mexican government has recently simplified the process for gaining the needed identity documents and removed or clarified many bureaucratic procedures. Nonetheless, community organizers like Carlos Mora, president of the Baja California State Council on Migrant Support, find the biggest challenge is getting out this information to the people who need it. “Undocumented people often live in clandestine communities,” observed Mora. “They have a fear of authority.”

Combating fear and misinformation among the wary migrant population is a top priority at Mission Mexico, which has called on its nine consulates and nine consular agencies to get these children documented.

The U.S. Consulate General in Monterrey, for instance, has been active on this score, holding high-level talks with Mexican counterparts, training migrant assistance agencies and even
writing an “Ask the Consul” column in the local newspaper. “These kids are the vehicles that unite our communities,” Monterrey Consul General Timothy Zuñiga-Brown said in a September media interview. “This initiative is an excellent opportunity to keep strengthening our bilateral relationship.”

Throughout the U.S. Mission, consular officials travel to far-flung areas to conduct community outreach. Other officers work with hundreds of migrant families from remote places who are bused in to apply for passports. From Guadalajara to Hermosillo to Mérida, posts and consular agencies are holding state-level conferences with Mexican authorities to find a solution and hosting public passport and information fairs.

Since spring 2015, the U.S. Consulate General in Nuevo Laredo has held four passport fairs in collaboration with the Instituto Tamaulipeco para los Migrantes (Tamaulipas Migrant Institute). Partnering with the local government has been crucial to the success of the program, which assists U.S. citizen migrant children whose parents might otherwise be reluctant to approach a U.S. official. Reaching deeply into the region’s migrant community, the institute assists these children with passport applications and arranges for special group appointments at the consulate. To date, more than 190 children have taken part in the consulate’s passport fairs—with more fairs to come.

In October, Consulate General Tijuana’s Documéntate passport fair drew more than 700 people. Consular officers adjudicated 193 passports and fielded thousands of questions about passports, birth certificates, social security and education, working alongside officials from 13 Mexican government agencies. The Mexican Civil Registry even issued Mexican birth certificates on-site.

Considering there is an estimated 50,000 U.S.-born children in Baja California, Tijuana’s passport fair may have only been a drop in the bucket. But it made all the difference to attendees, one of whom said it took her a lot of courage to walk through the consulate’s doors. “I was afraid,” she said, clasping her daughter’s hand. “I lived in the United States illegally. I didn’t know what would happen to us here, I was really scared.” She sniffs and quickly wipes a tear off her cheek. “I thought maybe you would take my daughter away.”

She left the consulate armed not only with information, but also with an appointment to submit her daughter’s U.S. passport application.

“We hope to have an event like this every year. From the huge turnout we had today, one might not be enough,” enthused Consul General Tijuana’s Will Ostick.
The Department of State showcased the centrality of the artisan sector as a major employer in the developing world, especially for women, in its Sept. 10 forum for the Alliance for Artisan Enterprise (AAE).

The forum was headlined by Secretary of State John Kerry and featured high-profile speakers and panels to address the challenges artisans face in developing their businesses and gaining access to markets.

“If you’re looking for innovative ways to help developing countries flourish, artisans are a terrific place to begin,” Secretary Kerry said.

The full-day event drew more than 300 stakeholders from the private sector, NGOs, governments and philanthropic and donor organizations. Some artisans attending had been nominated by U.S. Embassies and Consulates. They came from South Africa, Chile, Macedonia, Israel, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Bolivia, Fiji, India, Kosovo, Morocco and the West Bank, and exhibited their products and met key Department officials and private and public sector representatives.

“The event shed light on the vast challenges that artisans face when it comes to accessing larger markets, obtaining financing, and understanding market trends and international standards,” said Sara Fusha, an artisan nominated by the U.S. Embassy in Pristina who represented a digital boutique for artisanal goods in Kosovo. She said the event helps tell artisans’ stories and shows the impact handmade goods can have on communities and lives.

The event also launched an AAE global campaign asking consumers to buy artisans’ products. AAE is a partnership between the Department and more than 70 organizations to promote the artisan sector, a $34 billion industry that is often the second-largest form of income for individuals in developing countries.

“There is a global trend toward an increased demand for artisan goods, and consumers are more interested in buying products that positively impact the world,” said Serena Potter, Macy’s vice president of digital media strategy.

To build global awareness and support artisans, the Department and AAE launched an annual multimedia competition in which applicants submitted videos, photographs, stories and other media to show the importance and impact of the artisan sector. The winning video featured the work of a group that harnesses the artistic skills of the deaf in Kenya to preserve traditional crafts and provide marginalized communities with economic livelihoods.

For the next competition, the Department hopes to develop an international exchange program for the finalists. Those who wish to share stories and photos through social media can use the #chooseartisan hashtag and encourage their networks to join and/or support AAE.

More information is available from www.allianceforartisanenterprise.org, which has the finalists’ videos, and from the Secretary’s Office of Global Women’s Issues.
October marked the 70th anniversary of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), which annually celebrates the contributions of America’s workers with disabilities. The Department uses NDEAM to promote disability employment worldwide, and this year the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) went a step further, conducting an Employment #WithoutLimits social media campaign that featured disabled employees from around the world, all demonstrating that people with disabilities have a variety of careers.

“This approach—the #WithoutLimits campaign—was unique because it enabled us to move beyond the United States,” explained Special Advisor for International Disability Rights (SADR) Judith Heumann. She said the campaign brought in the voices of people from around the world, all demonstrating that people with disabilities have a variety of careers.

From pilots to pharmacists, the campaign’s more than 50 profiles covering every region of the world are as diverse as their disabilities. The campaign has since scored more than 1.4 million page views and even a retweet from the White House. In fact, the campaign garnered five times the normal rate of Facebook followers on SADR social media accounts than its average for the month of October. On Twitter, tweets about the campaign were shared, or “retweeted,” more than 7,000 times in October. By comparison, there were just 323 retweets during the celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the Americans With Disabilities Act in July.

Mentions of @IntDisability on the Web also soared to 10,878 in October. (There were just 483 mentions on Twitter in September for ADA25.)

In all, the campaign’s Web presence, measured in tweets and Facebook mentions, was up more than 2,000 percent over the prior month. In addition, the campaign’s total audience—its Facebook and Twitter reach—hit 1.4 million, an increase of nearly 3,000 percent compared with September. Engagement rates (clicks, likes, comments, shares) were also up, a full 1,363 percent, compared with the prior month.

The campaign’s success reflects a large global audience that’s eager to engage on disability rights. The World Health Organization and the World Bank estimate there are 1 billion people with disabilities globally, most of them in the developing world. But too often, in too many countries, people with disabilities are segregated into a few select sectors or types of jobs. The campaign, however, sought to debunk the myth that people with disabilities cannot do certain jobs. “Laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act make discrimination based on disability in such areas as education and employment illegal,” Heumann observed.

Beyond the pictures and stories that formed the heart of the campaign, its posts also included resources for...
promoting disability employment. Thanks to the increased traffic on the Web page, 200 times more individuals saw posts during the month of October than in previous months. This means thousands of people were able to access such features of the pages as its surveys for employers on the disability friendliness of their workplaces, guidance for preparing for a job interview and tips on how the nondisabled can be respectful of disabled co-workers.

The Employment #WithoutLimits campaign also reached new viewer demographics. As a result, SADR’s primary Facebook audience shifted to a younger audience (from an average of 25–34 years old, to an average of 18–24 years old) and one that’s more geographically diverse. The U.S. Embassies in Caracas, Manila, Brasília, Prague and Mexico City all supported contributions to the campaign. In such languages as Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Dari and Japanese, campaign viewers offered comments encouraging disabled workers and supporting disability rights. One Facebook user from Afghanistan termed it an excellent campaign that highlighted the importance of employment and self-reliance among those with disabilities, and showed how they can contribute more and play effective and productive roles.

“My daughter, 19 and blind since birth, will soon be starting college. She too intends to be a teacher. The sky is the limit!” replied another Facebook user to a post from a blind teacher in Mexico.

A tweet from a person in Harare, Zimbabwe, thanked @IntDisability “for sharing awesome stories of people with disabilities around the globe achieving their greatness!” One of the participants featured in the campaign, Ernest E.
Garrett III, called it a powerful effort “to remind business and industry that people with disabilities are a great source of untapped talent. It is time to start knocking—without ceasing—on the doors of hiring managers and telling them that if they want their company to achieve its bottom line, then hire us!”

American diplomatic posts were also involved in the campaign. For example, U.S. Ambassador to Albania Donald Lu teamed with USAID to host a screening for business leaders of a film in which people with disabilities and employers spoke about their concerns about bringing such people into the workplace and the benefits of doing so. The U.S. Consulate General in Guangzhou hosted a diversity job fair that attracted more than 300 applicants and 20 companies, and the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, has been meeting with the business community employing those with disabilities.

Disability employment is not confined to the month of October. To make its objective a continuing one, an easy first step for those at post is to reach out to local organizations representing those with disabilities, to start a conversation about the situation in the host nation or to urge governments to publicly recognize businesses that promote disability employment—or to lead by example. Posts can also invite a speaker to talk about disability-friendly hiring practices with business leaders or do a local campaign highlighting the contributions of disabled employees. More information and resources to promote disability rights is at HumanRights.gov and available from the office of the Special Advisor for International Disability Rights.
This year’s Department-wide awards ceremony, held Nov. 5 in the Benjamin Franklin Room, was an emotion-filled event presided over by Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources Heather Higginbottom and Director General Arnold A. Chacon. The event honored 47 employees for exceptional performances in carrying out their duties, at home and abroad.

An enthusiastic audience of 250 colleagues, family members and guests congratulated the awardees and applauded the surprise arrival of Secretary John Kerry who explained that he had just returned unexpectedly from overseas. He then praised the awardees and Department employees for their service, saying the highest standards of accomplishment embodied by the honorees do not come without costs and even personal sacrifice.

The awards themselves covered a range of skills from financial management to political reporting and recognized specific categories of employees, such as eligible family members, general services officers and office management specialists. They all reflected the dedication, resourcefulness and team spirit of awardees who carried out their work in extraordinary fashion and often under exceptional circumstances.

Deputy Secretary Higginbottom told the gathering that, while the challenges of diplomacy may shift from year to year, as do personnel from one assignment to another, “The work of talented, devoted and inspired employees makes a difference in the lives of people everywhere.” Like a family, as daunting as the challenges are, “We take care of each other.” Without this commitment to one another, the Department’s effectiveness is diminished, she said. All our employees, whether Foreign Service, Civil Service or Foreign Service Nationals, daily “demonstrate exceptional devotion to duty and work to promote peace and security across the globe.”
Excellence in Labor Diplomacy

Joseph J. Narus
For exceptional work in advancing labor rights in Vietnam and excellence in labor diplomacy.

James A. Baker, III – C. Howard Wilkins, Jr. for Outstanding Deputy Chief of Mission

Thomas E. Williams
In recognition of his extraordinary performance as Deputy Chief of Mission in Pakistan and with appreciation for his efforts to transform the U.S. mission, making it a more secure, efficient, and organized operation advancing some of the most vital foreign policy objectives of the United States.

Robert C. Bannerman DS Employee of the Year Award

Brian Bachman
In recognition of his extraordinary performance at U.S. Embassy in Sana’a in the face of continuous terrorist threats targeting the embassy, as well as the highest standards of leadership in the security operations and the closure and evacuation of post.
Chief Financial Officer’s Award for Distinction in Public Finance

William B. Davisson (Domestic)

In recognition of his outstanding accomplishments to transform the Department of State’s financial management program and advance the president’s management agenda.

Chief Financial Officer’s Award for Distinction in Public Finance

Huma Desjardins (Overseas)

For exemplary performance in support of U.S. Mission Thailand’s strategic goals, contributing to improvement of financial processes and ensuring compliance with federal and local laws while maintaining the highest ethical standards.

Warren Christopher Award for Outstanding Achievement in Civilian Security

Heather E. Kalmbach

In recognition of sustained leadership in advancing U.S. government policy toward the ongoing humanitarian and refugee crisis afflicting Syria and the neighboring states of Jordan and Lebanon.
2015 Bureau Award Winners Citations

Charles E. Cobb, Jr. Award for Initiative and Success in Trade Development

Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne (Retired)

For his outstanding contributions toward innovative and successful trade development and export promotion as ambassador to Mexico, through expanding our engagement to capture new possibilities and creating bilateral frameworks that mobilize ambitions on both sides of the border.

Sue M. Cobb Award for Exemplary Diplomatic Service

Ambassador John B. Emerson (Accepted by Robin Quinville)

For outstanding contributions to U.S.-Germany relations through his tireless work to restore and rebuild trust and confidence in the aftermath of unauthorized disclosures of sensitive programs, and innovative promotion of enhanced trade and prosperity through the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

Contracting Officer Representative (COR) of the Year Award

Charron Melonie Parker-Hill

In recognition of the exemplary and tireless application of subject matter expertise and counsel in the acquisition and contract management support of Vanguard 2.3.3, IRM’s performance-based IT support contract.
Cordell Hull Award for Economic Achievement by Senior Officers

Laura M. Stone

For leading the effort that has resulted in the largest U.S. commercial sale to Vietnam in history.

Ryan C. Crocker Award for Outstanding Leadership in Expeditionary Diplomacy

Joseph S. Pennington

For ensuring the security of U.S. personnel in Erbil during and after the August 2014 ISIL attack against the Iraqi Kurdistan region, and for coordinating the U.S. partnership with the Kurdistan regional government to counter the advance by ISIL and deliver emergency humanitarian assistance to hundreds of thousands of displaced Iraqis.

Director General of the Foreign Service and Director of Human Resources Award for Excellence in Human Resource Management

Cristina Stokes

In recognition of her superior leadership in managing the Human Resources Office and unsurpassed dedication in supporting the employees of Embassy Uganda and the United States government.
Director General of the Foreign Service and Director of Human Resources Award for Excellence in Human Resource Management

**Michael Devega (FSN)**

In recognition of his superior leadership in managing the Human Resources Office and unsurpassed dedication in supporting the employees of Embassy Panama.

Director General’s Award For Impact & Originality in Reporting

**Zia Ahmed**

For an outstanding body of reporting that provided Washington leadership unparalleled insight and nuance into Pakistan’s leadership, government and people.

Mary L. Dubose Civil Service Secretary of the Year Award

**Monica K. Sanchez**

For outstanding contributions to the Foreign Service Institute School of Language Studies, improving the quality of FSI’s work for staff and students and helping make the School of Language Studies a happier place.
2015 Bureau Award Winners Citations

Foreign Service Office Management Specialist of the Year Award

**Teresa A. Bills**

In recognition of her dedication, commitment and contribution to Embassy Port Moresby.

James Clement Dunn Award for Excellence

**Sumera Ashruf**

For outstanding leadership of the Bureaus of European and Eurasian Affairs and International Organization Affairs’ Joint Executive Office post management officer teams.

Equal Employment Opportunity of the Year Award

**Vella G. Mbenna** (Retired)

For creating a robust EEO program at U.S. Embassy in Tunis that helped ensure all employees were treated with fairness and transparency in a manner that advances the Department of State’s anti-discrimination/harassment policies.
Foreign Service Construction Engineer of the Year Award

Leslie Taggart

For sustained distinguished service and exemplary performance, superior leadership, attention to detail, innovative practices and proactive security management of U.S. Mission Pakistan projects. This made her construction management program a flagship operation for OBO.

FSN of the Year, SCA Bureau and department-wide

Tojiddin Burkhonov

In recognition of sustained exceptional performance and substantial contributions to U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe.

FSN of the Year, AF Bureau

Ibrahim Litny

In recognition of significant contributions to the efforts of the United States to positively influence the Malian peace process.
FSN of the Year, EAP Bureau

May Hnin Phyu

For outstanding liaison work during the 2014 ASEAN year, exceptional creativity in supporting USG agencies starting up operations in Burma, and for overall excellence in supporting the goals of U.S. Mission Burma.

FSN of the Year, EUR Bureau

Gigi Creosteanu

For sustained superior performance in preventing visa fraud in Romania through the effective use of advanced interviewing techniques and the integration of new technology.

FSN of the Year, NEA Bureau

Mars Abdelkader

In recognition of sustained outstanding performance and inestimable contributions to the U.S. Department of State in support of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives in Morocco.
FSN of the Year, WHA Bureau

Gabriel Lathrop

For significant achievements in assisting and protecting U.S. citizens in Chile that reflect the highest standards of performance in the Foreign Service.

FSN Financial Management Award

Murat Yetkin (FSN)

In recognition of outstanding efforts in integrating Syria/START-related agencies into the ICASS budget process and stellar performance as an integral member of the Financial Management Center at U.S. Mission Turkey.

David E. Foy Memorial Award for Excellence in Facility Management

Andrew Deubel

For exemplary leadership, resourcefulness and resolve while serving as the facility manager at one of the Department's most austere and dangerous operating environments, the U.S. Consulate General in Peshawar. His strong management skills helped make post a safer and more secure place to live and work.
Robert C. Frasure Memorial Award
Geoffrey R. Pyatt
For limiting conflict, saving lives, promoting peace and preserving Ukrainian independence and territorial integrity in the face of Russian armed aggression in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.

General Services Officer of the Year Award
Edward C. Burleson
For extraordinary perseverance and excellent performance as general services officer at U.S. Embassy in Kabul, one of the most difficult operating environments for the Department overseas.

Leamon R. Hunt Award for Management Excellence
Alma M. Johnson
For outstanding leadership in overhauling Embassy Maputo’s Management and ICASS platforms in order to provide high-quality services to all agencies and employees at post.
2015 Bureau Award Winners Citations

Linguist of the Year Award

Roland D. McKay

For sustained and outstanding efforts in advancing core U.S. foreign policy objectives in Syria, Yemen, and Turkey using advanced Arabic and Turkish language skills.

Frank E. Loy Award for Environmental Diplomacy

Samuel D. Kotis

For outstanding efforts to advance recognition of air pollution as a health and climate concern with the government of India and as an issue for U.S. embassies worldwide.

Thomas Morrison Information Management Award

Lysa Giuliano

For outstanding vision, leadership, and creative contributions involving Information Resource Management in support of mission, bureau, and Department objectives, across agencies while under unusually difficult, demanding and dangerous circumstances at U.S. Mission Afghanistan.
2015 Bureau Award Winners Citations

Edward R. Murrow Award for Excellence in Public Diplomacy

Stephanie Syptak-Ramnath

For sustained excellence in public diplomacy – both policy development and program implementation – powered by insight, dedication and vision in gaining influential audiences, engaging committed partners and advancing U.S. foreign policy priorities to strengthen U.S. – Mexican relations.

Post Occupational and Safety Health Officer of the Year Award (POSHO)

Thomas P. Nave

For exemplary service, commitment and dedication as U.S. Embassy Santo Domingo’s POSHO protecting employees, family members and visitors throughout the mission.

Haydee Martinez Memorial Award for the Post Occupational and Safety and Health Officer (POSHO) Assistant of the Year

Fayyaz Ahmed

For continued diligence and creativity in identifying and resolving multiple challenges to the health and safety of U.S. Mission Pakistan personnel during a period of unprecedented growth and transformation.
Arnold L. Raphel Memorial Award

Jennifer Z. Galt

In recognition of outstanding efforts in mentoring and developing the next generation of Foreign Service officers and in serving as an exemplary role model for entry-level and mid-level officers.

L. Nicholas Ruwe Eligible Family of the Year Award

Laura S. Cramer

For outstanding work strengthening interagency linkages at the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta and bilateral cooperation in support of shared maritime sector objectives.

Mary A. Ryan Award for Outstanding Public Service

Karin M. Lang

In recognition of her extraordinary dedication to the customers and teams of U.S. Mission Mexico’s American Citizen Services operations. Her tireless efforts to protect and serve U.S. citizens while increasing efficiency and empowering employees made Consular Mission Mexico a worldwide model of excellence and innovation.
2015 Bureau Award Winners Citations

Herbert Salzman Award for Excellence in International Performance

Brett C. Hamsik

For creativity, vision and dedication in advancing U.S. efforts to building stronger economic relationships through shared prosperity initiatives focused on small business development and entrepreneurship in the Western Hemisphere.

Luther I. Replogle Award for Management Improvement

Alexander Karagiannis

For committed efforts to enhance the Foreign Service by improving the personnel evaluation system.

Rockwell Anthony Schnabel Award for Advancing U.S.-E.U. Relations

Wendela C. Moore

For unparalleled contributions across the full range of transatlantic cooperation over a 25 year period, shaping the vision and foundation of U.S.-E.U. engagement, and advancing U.S. strategic goals in Europe in economic, political and emerging digital spheres.
2015 Bureau Award Winners Citations

Sean Smith Technology Innovation in the Use of Technology Award

Adam C. Kotkin

For sustained innovation in identifying and implementing new uses for existing Web and database platforms at U.S. Mission Turkey to increase the efficiency of consular operations and improve correspondence capabilities to better serve Turkish and Iranian visa applicants.

Secretary’s Award for Excellence in International Security Affairs

Gregory M. Kausner

For his skillful, creative and tireless efforts to advance national security interests through the oversight of U.S. arms transfers worldwide and the management of U.S. security assistance.

Special Agent Daniel E. O’Connor Memorial Award

Byron W. Bacik

For sustained distinguished service and exemplary performance, superior leadership, preemptive intervention, innovative practices and proactive security management of the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta project. This made his construction security program a flagship operation for OBO.
2015 Bureau Award Winners Citations

Swanee Hunt Award for Advancing Women’s Role in Policy Formulation

Susan M. May

In recognition of her extraordinary achievements and creative programming to advance economic and political empowerment for women in Papua New Guinea.

Barbara M. Watson Award for Consular Excellence

Jewell E. Evans

For outstanding leadership and innovation in balancing both people and processes while facing unprecedented consular workload demands, and for achieving both top efficiency and high morale in one of the world’s busiest consular operations at the U.S. Consulate General in Shanghai.
This year’s FSNs of the Year, each from one of the six geographic bureaus, came accompanied by family or friends to Washington in November full of pride and excitement to receive their awards and consult with bureau peers. Several even met their bureaus’ assistant secretaries, a high-level tribute to the value of their efforts on behalf of the United States.

For most, it was neither their first visit to headquarters nor their first time in the limelight. Collectively, their 90-plus years of work for the Department have given them insights and connections back home that their embassies’ American colleagues find invaluable. The awardees also share an uncommon dedication to their work and, as the following brief sketches of their accomplishments demonstrate, to the persistent pursuit of better bilateral ties.

Secretary of State Kerry noted in his remarks at the award ceremony that the FSNs are particularly admirable for bearing the burdens of U.S. interests and values in their own countries. They strive to present America at its best, seeking a mutuality of interests and being goodwill U.S. ambassadors to their own countries. And for doing all this, sometimes against formidable odds, the Secretary referred admiringly to this year’s standout employees as “the best of the best.”
In recognition for his sustained exceptional performance and substantial contributions to U.S. diplomacy in Tajikistan.

Tojiddin's 13 years with the U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe have been spent entirely in the service of the RSO. He considers himself fortunate to have held increasingly responsible positions within the unit and proud to be part of this highly effective team. Trained as a lawyer, he worked in the state prosecutor's office, gaining keen investigative skills, an in-depth understanding of laws and police work, and an uncanny ability to sniff out malfeasance. Because of his background and position, Tojiddin sets an example to his embassy colleagues, and his country, in his adherence to discipline.

One of the cases cited for the award occurred last year as he protected a group of USAID inspectors visiting a remote project site. Not far from the capital along their carefully planned route, Tojiddin became aware that local thugs were following the embassy vehicle and conducting surveillance of the team's movements. A successful series of countermeasures and contacts with law enforcement warded off the unwanted intrusion. His stature within the Tajik justice system as a former colleague, and respected fellow professional, has helped the embassy establish excellent security ties regarding international organized crime, a key mission priority.

Tojiddin knows that being at the forefront of a fraud detection operation or taking an active role in security coverage for embassy events puts his safety at risk. Working on high-profile cases, such as the uncovering of a widespread racket that bilked the embassy of more than $150,000 annually over several years, he has encountered reprisals and threats. “Tojiddin continued his work despite these attempts to intimidate him,” the RSO stated, “clearly showing his commitment and loyalty to the embassy.” He thrives on the support of his unit, his supervisors Michael Mancini and Trey Howerton, and his colleagues from the entire RSO team, all of whom deserve to be part of the award, he insisted. “Because of them, I have the opportunity to do my best.”
For sustained superior performance in preventing visa fraud at the U.S. Embassy in Bucharest through the effective use of advanced interviewing techniques and the integration of new technology.

Gigi first worked as a security guard and then, since 2006, as a special assistant in the consular section. He's covered fraudulent or criminal activity among his countrymen applying for U.S. visas, yet he sees his investigative work in a highly positive light. “The image Romania projects around the world may sometimes be that of a nation of petty thieves. The truth is, good and bad people exist in every society and we are no exception,” Gigi said. One individual’s evil intent, multiplied through the Internet and international banking networks, can affect many people’s lives. “By deterring even a single person from committing a crime, the balance shifts in favor of the good.”

Last year, New York law enforcement arrested and charged a Romanian whom Gigi had identified as having stolen between $1 million and $2 million from ATM customers. By the latest count, some 90 ATM skimmers—some of whom had already brazenly perpetrated swindles in Europe and America as part of organized crime syndicates—have had their visas denied or revoked thanks to leads and information he developed.

His supervisors say his work has “resulted in the opening of criminal investigations in the U.S. and Romania, and multiple arrests,” and they praise Gigi for his innovative use of computer programs and databases to assist his unit’s tracking of fraudsters. For Gigi, it’s just part of his job and good teamwork: He credits his consular section colleagues for his success.

When not mining data, Gigi is a family man whose young daughter is his pride and joy. He knows that preventing visa fraud and other crimes will help ensure her safe travel to the United States one day, and that of thousands of fellow Romanian citizens.
Mars Abdelkader
NEA Customs expediter (retired),
U.S. Consulate General Casablanca, Morocco

In recognition of his sustained outstanding performance and his inestimable contributions to the U.S. Department of State in support of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives in Morocco.

Indispensability and reliance characterize Mars, who during his 35-year career with the U.S. government was the mission's go-to employee. As Consulate Casablanca's driver, and later the embassy's chief expediter, his duties on paper may have seemed routine, but the services he provided, from navigating through bureaucratic mazes at airports and customs offices to ensuring U.S. officials received VIP treatment, were anything but. Quite literally, Mars kept excellent U.S.-Morocco relations on track and always on time. According to post officials, he was the Grand Central of logistical efficiency and proved it once again last year when, for the Global Entrepreneurship Summit in Marrakech, he coordinated the movements of more than 125 members of the U.S. delegation to event sites in a chaotic city having no U.S. consular presence. In pulling it off, Mars relied on a network of local contacts that always respected him as a trustworthy man of honor. The face of America to hundreds of Morocco's front-line officials, Mars never lost sight of mission objectives.

In an episode Mars likes to recount from many years ago, he was driving an ambassador and his wife on a 300-km. trip to catch a trans-Atlantic flight with a stopover in Europe. They were rushed, but Mars had everything under control, until his VIP passengers realized they didn't have their passports. There was no turning back, so Mars first ensured the couple made it all the way through airport controls and boarded the flight, with his usual wink-and-nod flair. In the meantime, he summoned his network in Marrakech, where the chief of mission had spent the night. He helped them locate the passports and even arranged for a private plane to have the documents flown to Casablanca. The ambassador's flight was delayed by the control tower so that Mars could relay the passports from one plane to the other.

Now in retirement in his hillside home on the outskirts of Casablanca, he doesn't hesitate to say, “Tell them [at the embassy] they can always count on me for anything.”
Ibrahim Litny
AF Political specialist, U.S. Embassy Bamako, Mali

In recognition of his significant contributions to the efforts of the United States to positively influence the Malian peace process.

Ibrahim was born to Tuareg nomads in northern Mali and would have followed in the ancestral footsteps of his clan, destined to be a herder or farmer among the oases of the Sahara, had the 1960s tribal rebellions and droughts of the 1970s not forced his family to leave their native lands. After studying abroad and completing a master’s degree in Paris, Ibrahim became a spokesman for the expatriate Tuareg community, helping his people forge a peace agreement to end decades of conflict. Eager to return to Mali and focus his energies on the troubled northern region, he joined USAID and then the pol/econ section of the embassy.

Ibrahim has been a member of the U.S. mission for 17 years, and is now the resident expert on the conflicted region, with the Department depending on his analyses of unfolding events there. The outbreak of strife in Mali in 2012 found Ibrahim thrust in the thick of efforts to achieve peace again, using his Tuareg roots and knowledge of the north’s political dynamics to give the embassy a privileged role in the mediation process. “Thanks to hours of patient dialogue and many cups of tea,” his supervisor wrote, “Ibrahim not only maintained the embassy’s reputation as one of the most active and best informed [people] in Mali, but also surely influenced the recent decision of the rebel movements to sign the peace accord.” Ibrahim is all-too modest about his accomplishments. With his retirement due shortly after the award ceremony, he will no doubt continue to push ahead on the difficult path to lasting peace.
For significant achievements in assisting and protecting U.S. citizens in Chile that reflect the highest standards of performance in the Foreign Service.

“Helping people” is what Gabriel was steeped in even before joining the embassy staff in 2002. Trained as a lawyer, he shunned a lucrative career in international banking or business and instead went to work in the Chilean public defense attorney’s office in 1997. A year later, he was hired by the local police force, where he became a police cadet instructor. Among his most challenging cases was seeking justice for victims of the military dictatorship under General Pinochet in the 1970s and 1980s.

He became interested in working for the U.S. mission thanks to a government-sponsored trip to the United States. “Frankly, seeing and breathing America’s diversity and dynamism, and witnessing how your society faces the challenges of different groups’ rights, guarding against discrimination, was an awakening for me,” he said. Returning home, he knew his life would change. He applied to an opening at the embassy and before long was handling ACS cases with the same resolve and compassion he displayed as a public defender. Not only did Gabriel bring to his new consular tasks an intimate knowledge of Chile’s legal framework and history, but he also provided caseload management expertise just when it was needed most.

Over the past 18 months, special citizen service needs, including repatriations, jumped 60 percent—partly due to natural disasters. Delivering better services to imprisoned Americans has been a key objective for the ACS team, and Gabriel responded by inviting his Chilean judicial counterparts to a seminar at the embassy to promote a better understanding of the rights and responsibilities Chile’s laws offer people behind bars.

Meanwhile, he has continued to help resolve Pinochet-era cases, including those involving three missing Americans, keeping abreast of promising developments and maintaining close contact with families and lawyers on the U.S. side.
May Hnin “Jackie” Phyu
EAP Management assistant,
U.S. Embassy Rangoon, Burma

For outstanding liaison work during the 2014 ASEAN year, exceptional creativity in supporting USG agencies starting up operations in Burma, and for overall excellence in supporting the goals of the U.S. Mission to Burma.

Embassy Rangoon describes Jackie as their “miracle worker.” For a country emerging from more than 50 years of military rule, and witnessing its own share of miracles almost daily, that’s quite a statement. She’s appreciated for diligence and meticulousness, keeping up with the embassy’s transformation from small post to an expanding U.S. mission. To address the hurdles to establishing a Peace Corps’ presence in Burma, she served as a mediator and negotiator between various government ministries, succeeding with what could have been an insurmountable task.

In her 10 years at the embassy, first in customs and shipping section and now in management, Jackie has cultivated contacts in the Burmese government who can deliver on visa requests, credentials and logistical support for visiting U.S. delegations. This has become a specialty, as she demonstrated at last year’s Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) conference, hosted by Burma for the first time, with more than 700 U.S. personnel on the ground. “I can be very persistent,” she admitted. “For many of my interlocutors in the Burmese government, the American way of expecting answers and promises to every detail is sometimes overwhelming. I take the position that I can help them, not to demand. They hold the keys, but I like to show that I may be able to light the way.”

Jackie attributes her confidence to the first VIP visit she helped coordinate, that of former Secretary of State Clinton’s trip to Burma, in 2012. Since then, she has learned the ropes exceedingly well and takes pride in the strides her country has made in opening up to the West.
Most of us drive every day. We depend on our cars and take for granted almost everything about them. We may know our vehicle’s make and model, but few of us know what brand or size of tires goes with it, let alone their recommended load range or pressure. However, just four square feet of tire are in touch with the ground and are responsible for your car’s ability to brake, corner and otherwise maneuver safely.

A recent SHEM visit to a U.S. diplomatic post revealed that many of its nonarmored Chevrolet Suburbans and other SUVs had the wrong replacement tires. While passenger car tires will often fit the rims of different classes of vehicle, they are not designed to handle the weight of a much heavier SUV.

It’s essential to consider a vehicle’s tire size and load range when ordering or replacing its tires. The owner’s manual or a sticker on the inside of the driver’s door will indicate the size and load range of the tires that were factory-mounted to the vehicle.

At this post, passenger car tires were mounted on the SUVs and then inflated to the pressure recommended on the door sticker (55 to 75psi). However, those tires are normally designed with a maximum pressure between 35 and 44psi. Overinflating a tire on a vehicle that is too heavy for the tire puts the tire at risk for failure, which at highway speed can cause rollovers and serious injuries or death.

When replacing tires, follow the vehicle manufacturer’s recommendation. Ensure that the tire’s load range is adhered to, not just the tire size. Remember, a tire may fit, but it may be dangerous if it is not designed to handle the weight of your vehicle.

To keep the tires on one’s personal vehicle safe, you need to follow a regular maintenance schedule, slow down when driving over potholes or objects in the road and avoid striking, rubbing or running over curbs. You should also follow this tire safety checklist:

- Buy a tire pressure gauge and know how to use it.
- Check tire pressure at least once a month, including the spare, because underinflated tires heat up, especially at highway speeds, which can cause tire failure.
- If your vehicle has tire pressure sensors, be mindful of the low-pressure indicator on the dashboard. A tire can be at 25 percent or more below the recommended pressure and still not be visibly low to the naked eye. Also, batteries in tire pressure systems do fail, so check the tire pressure manually at least monthly.
- Inspect tires for uneven tread wear, cracks, foreign objects or other signs of wear or trauma. This can prevent a blowout or flat.
- Ensure that your tires have adequate tread depth for braking and to keep control on wet roads. Using a penny, if the tread is not at least as deep as the top of Abraham Lincoln’s head when held upside down then the tires should be replaced.
- Some tires have wear indicators—small rubber links between the treads. When the remaining tread is even with the wear indicator, replace the tire.
- Make sure your tire valves have valve caps.
- Check tire pressure before going on a long trip.
- Do not overload your vehicle. Check the tire information placard or owner’s manual for the vehicle’s maximum load.
- If towing a trailer, remember that some of the trailer’s weight is transferred to the towing vehicle.

Following these tips and knowing your tires can help ensure that you and your passengers stay safe. Additional information on tire safety is at www.nhtsa.gov/Vehicle-Safety/Tires or on the SHEM SharePoint site at http://obo.m.state.sbu/ops/shem/Pages/VehicleSafety.aspx. The SHEM site has links to tire safety and sudden-tire-failure information.
Peter William Bodde
U.S. Ambassador to Libya

Peter William Bodde (SFS) of Maryland is the new U.S. Ambassador to Libya. Most recently, he served as ambassador to Nepal, a position he has held since 2012. Previously, he was assistant chief of mission for assistance transition at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, ambassador to Malawi, DCM in Islamabad, consul general in Frankfurt, director of the Department’s Office of Management Policy and DCM in Kathmandu. He also served at posts in India, Denmark, Bulgaria and Guyana.
David Hale (SFS) of New Jersey is the new U.S. Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Most recently, he served as ambassador to Lebanon; before that, he was the special envoy for Middle East peace, deputy assistant secretary in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs and ambassador to Jordan. He also was director of the Office of Israel and Palestinian Affairs and executive assistant to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. His other postings include USUN, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.
Elisabeth I. Millard (SFS) of Virginia is the new U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Tajikistan. Most recently, she served as deputy and acting executive secretary of the Department of State. Previously, she was DCM in Astana, principal officer at the consulate general in Casablanca, special assistant to the president and senior director for South and Central Asian Affairs on the National Security Council staff, and DCM in Kathmandu. Her other overseas assignments include postings in India, the Czech Republic and Denmark. She also worked for Delphi International, USAID in India and Continental Illinois National Bank and Trust Company in Bahrain.
H. Dean Pittman
U.S. Ambassador to Mozambique

H. Dean Pittman (SFS) of the District of Columbia is the new U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Mozambique. Most recently, he was senior advisor in the Bureau of International Organization Affairs (IO). Prior to that, he was principal deputy assistant secretary and acting assistant secretary in IO, senior diplomacy advisor to the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, member of the Office of Policy Planning, consul general in Belfast, special assistant to the deputy secretary and director for Balkan Affairs on the National Security Council staff. His other overseas posts were Sarajevo and Maputo.
Lisa J. Peterson
U.S. Ambassador to Swaziland

Lisa J. Peterson (SFS) of Virginia is the new U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Swaziland. Most recently, she served as director of the Office of Multilateral and Global Affairs in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. Previously, she was DCM in Yaounde, Cameroon. In Washington, she also served as deputy director of the Office of Central African Affairs. Her overseas posts include Abuja, Nairobi, Lusaka, Kinshasa, Durban and Bangui. Before joining the Foreign Service she worked at the University of Rochester.
Marc Jonathan Sievers (SFS) of Maryland is the new U.S. Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman. Most recently, he was visiting diplomatic fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Prior to this, he served as DCM and chargé d’affaires ad interim in Cairo. He has also been DCM in Algiers. His other overseas assignments include posts in Iraq, Israel, Egypt, Hong Kong, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Earlier in his career, he was deputy director of the Office of Syria, Jordan and Lebanon in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs.
A guest chiropractor brief employees on office ergonomics during a “Wellness Talk” at the U.S. Consulate General in Shanghai. The talks are part the consulate’s work-life wellness program, a one-year-old effort that offers activities such as lunchtime yoga and guided relaxation, and assisted in introducing flexible work schedules in the consular section.

*Photo courtesy of Shanghai Consular Work-Life Wellness Committee*
In October, the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad and the local performance venue Kuch Khaas commemorated Daniel Pearl World Music Days with an evening of poetry, music and dance at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts. At the event, which sought to promote peace and understanding, Lahore-based choreographer Nighat Chaodhry and composer Faheem Mazhar melded contemporary and traditional Pakistani music and dance to show how unity and harmony can develop out of conflict.  

*Photo by Rabat Yasmeen*
In Brief

Roth Endowment Presents Awards

Gathered for a group photo are the winners of three 2015 Lois Roth Endowment awards for excellence in cultural diplomacy, presented by the endowment in partnership with the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) on Oct. 23. From left are Dr. Skyler Arndt-Briggs, the endowment’s chair; Deputy Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Gonzalo Gallegos (accepting for Yolonda Kerney); Dick Arndt, the endowment’s founder; Monica Alcalde, winner of the Gill Jacob-Guillarmod Award; and Lorie Nierenberg, winner of the Ilchman-Richardson Award. Photo by Anne V. Barbaro
In Brief

DACOR Offers Aid at Hotchkiss, Yale

The headquarters of the DACOR Bacon House Foundation, shown, has announced that Dreyfus tuition-only awards to FSOs’ children and grandchildren will be made again in 2016. The Hotchkiss School will select one student for a minimum $5,000 scholarship; applicants should contact the school’s director of financial aid. Recipients of a $2,000 to $8,000 scholarship to Yale University are chosen by the DACOR Bacon House Foundation. For more information, email clskodon@dacorbacon.org.  

Photo courtesy of DACOR Bacon House Foundation
In Brief

Department Honors 2015’s Retirees

On Nov. 20, Secretary of State John Kerry honored more than 300 Department of State retirees and their guests during the Department’s annual Retirement Ceremony in the Dean Acheson Auditorium. Director General Arnold A. Chacon served as master of ceremonies. Video of the event is available on BNET.

Photo by Robert M. Stewart

Retirements
In brief

A guest chiropractor brief employees on office ergonomics during a “Wellness Talk” at the U.S. Consulate General in Shanghai. The talks are part of the consulate’s work-life wellness program, a one-year-old effort that offers activities such as lunchtime yoga and guided relaxation, and assisted in introducing flexible work schedules in the consular section.

Retirements

Civil Service
Barnes, Margaret Roberta
Bevins, Randall James
Bistany, Barbara L.
Bulloch, Joseph
Cockrell, Christopher S.
Crawford, Anita Evelyn
Cribbs, Catherine A.
Cupp, John H.
Evans, Thomas D.
Ferber, Ivan J.
Galloway, Gary Reginald
Gold, William H.
Green, Alice J.
Hart, Erich O.
Hubbard, Katherine M.
Loken, Kathleen S.
Lowe, Thomas J.
Madden, Sheila S.

Foreign Service
Anania, Jay N.
Bowers, Gregory J.
Brennan, John Brian
Brenn, Michael G.
Collins, Scott F.
Flanagan, Ellen M.
Handler, Phuong B.
Ignacio, Rustico R.
Lawrence, Vickie R.
Lovelock, Wilfred M.
Martin, Bryan G.
McDermott, J. Edgar
Neely, Timothy D.
Reber, Patricia
Robinson III, Edward L.
Ryan, Timothy G.
Thomas, Marsha L.
Vinson, Miller I.

Makell, Sheron L.
Martin, Yolonda Ribot
McConnell, Kathryn A.
McDonald, Deborah B.
Minghella, Kelly L.
Moores, Susan E.
Pearson, Zania M.
Price, Harold Herbert
Reddy, Mary T.
Schweizer, Linda S.
Shuster, Gail E.
Theodore, Barbara Graves
Thompson, William R.
Wagner, Kelly N.
Warner, Rachel
Woodford, Andrew

Retirements

Ethics Answers

TAP
Image to Read Story

State Magazine  JANUARY 2016

| In Brief |
**Q:** An organization of international journalists has invited me to attend its annual dinner. I understand there will be a lot of people there who work in the area of foreign affairs, but the fee for attendance, which is waived for me, is $250. Whom should I contact to get permission to accept free attendance at this event?

**A:** Free attendance at this event is considered a gift from an outside source, so the question is whether it is prohibited because the donor is a prohibited source or is offering you the free ticket because of your position. These standards are frequently met, and when they are, you can only accept the ticket if one of the exceptions to the gift prohibition applies. In this case, one exception that might apply is what is called the “widely attended gathering” exception. This exception may permit an employee to accept free admission to an event that’s expected to have a large number of attendees with a diversity of views on topics of mutual interest. If this is the case, you may accept the ticket provided certain conditions are met and the appropriate senior official or management official approves (see 11 FAM 613.1-1). Additional restrictions apply if you are a presidential appointee who has signed a pledge to not accept a gift from a registered lobbyist, and the donor is a registered lobbying organization.

*Ethics Answers presents hypothetical ethical scenarios Department employees might face. For help with real ethics questions, email* ethicsattorneymailbox@state.gov.
Lying in State: Jonas Sloatish, Specially Hip Staff Assistant

Good morning, Ambassador! I'm Jonas, and I'll be your staff assistant today. For your Chilaxation, can I get you started with some wryly knowing references to current geopolitics? How about that coup in South Fabrezia - amazeballs, am I right?

Just my latest talking points, please.

Excellent choice - these points are on artisanal A-4 paper with hand-set margins and a slightly rustic Times New Roman font.

Okay, well what about what these points actually say?

LOL! My bad - yes, these are points for your meeting with the foreign minister and they're one hundred percent local substance!

What does that even mean?

These points haven't even gone ten feet from this desk to preserve freshness, so nobody has seen them - not political, not econ, not consular...

Jonas, this isn't going to work out.

I'm picking up what you're putting down! You're looking for a more ironic font, like Courier New - am I right?

ACCELER 2015
In Memoriam

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. For specific questions on submitting an obituary, please contact Michael Habu at habumg@state.gov or (202) 663-2230.

Tap Image to enlarge
Neil C. Fine, 100, a retired FSO, died Sept. 17 of natural causes at his home in Peoria, Ariz. He served in the Navy during World War II and joined USAID (then known as the Point Four Program) in 1954. He specialized in agriculture and livestock and was posted in Iraq, El Salvador, Suriname, Costa Rica, Panama and Ecuador. He retired in 1974 to Prescott, Ariz., where he was active in church leadership and benevolence.
In Memoriam

Robert L. Funseth

Robert L. Funseth, 89, a retired FSO, died Sept. 25 at the Virginia Hospital Center in Arlington, Va. He served with the U.S. Pacific Fleet during World War II and then became a newspaper reporter and editor. In 1953, he embarked on a 40-year Foreign Service career, first with USIA and then with the Department. His overseas assignments included Tabriz (Iran), Beirut and Bordeaux. In Washington, he was spokesperson for then-Secretary Henry Kissinger; he also worked on multilateral affairs and refugee programs, helping in the release and resettlement of thousands of political prisoners from Vietnam after the war.
Robert G. “Bob” Richmond

Robert G. “Bob” Richmond, 80, a retired FSO, died Oct. 27 at Windy Hill Village, an assisted living facility in Kingwood, W.Va. He served in the Army and taught school in Vermont prior to joining the Department in 1958. He served in Germany, Australia, Sweden, Vietnam and Haiti. For a brief time, he worked on loan to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. His final assignment was in the Department’s anti-drug bureau, supervising drug crop spraying overseas. He retired in 1986 and moved to Kingwood. After living all over the world, he was happiest in this small town.
In Memoriam

Stuart C. Parker

Stuart C. Parker, 62, a retired FSO, died suddenly Oct. 26 of a heart attack in Durham, N.H. He joined the Department in 1981 and served in Moscow and Sofia before returning to Washington. He then worked for Voice of America and Radio Free Europe in Munich. After retiring from the government in 1995, he became an academic adviser at various universities, including Rutgers, MIT and University of New Hampshire. He was an avid choral singer in a number of groups in the Washington area, as well as in New Hampshire. He enjoyed collecting U.S. and foreign coins.
In Memoriam

Vince Romero

Vince Romero, 50, an FSO, died unexpectedly Nov. 14 in Bridgetown, Barbados, where he was management officer at the embassy. A native of Portland, Ore., he joined the Marines when he was 19. He began working for the Department in 2001. His overseas postings included Togo, Bangladesh, India, Afghanistan and Nepal, where he put his management skills to good use during and after the earthquake of 2014. He is deeply missed by his colleagues in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs and throughout the Department.
In Memoriam

William Randall Salisbury

William Randall Salisbury, 75, a retired FSO, died Nov. 14 in Woodbridge, Conn. He joined the Department in 1967 and worked on the Law of the Sea Treaty and the banning of chemical and biological weapons. A European specialist, he served in Frankfurt; Nassau, where he helped establish the new embassy after Bahamian independence; Helsinki; New Delhi; and The Hague. As chairman of the Secretary’s Open Forum Panel, he was instrumental in having the Department remove Foreign Service wives from evaluation in officers’ efficiency reports. Always a scholar, he pursued his interest in classical literature and history until his death.
Christopher Donald Ward

Christopher Donald Ward, 60, a retired FSO, died of cardiac arrest in his home in Washington, D.C. He joined USIA in 1985 and served in Costa Rica (twice), Japan, Peru and South Africa before retiring in 2009. Since 2010, he had been a permanent substitute teacher at Kenmore Middle School in Arlington, Va.
Thomas Joseph Zuraw

Thomas Joseph Zuraw, 64, a retired communications officer died, peacefully July 26 at his residence in Santiago, Chile. He served in the U.S. Navy before joining the Department in 1976. His postings included Bogotá, Munich, Brussels, Phnom Penh, Addis Ababa, Kuwait, Belize and Athens. After retiring in 2003 he moved to Chile. He had a great love for Formula One racing and took great pride in his model boat building hobby.
A panorama of Strasbourg, France, taken from the “Barrage Vauban” roof, looking North.

Photo by Francois Schnell