

Global Link

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WELCOME TO NEW AND RETURNING MEMBERS

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AAFSW
4001 North Ninth Street
Suite 214
Arlington, VA 22203
Tel: 703-820-5420
Fax: 703-820-5421
office@aafsw.org
www.aafsw.org

Access To DOS Online Resources Where Do Family Members Stand Now?

If you are a Foreign Service family member, then you probably know the answer to this question: what is the single most important activity we engage in to support our partners' careers?

No, it's not packing, unpacking, or even entertaining kids on transcontinental flights. It's *research*.

For most Foreign Service spouses and partners, especially those with children, every bidding season involves hours and hours of research on schools, medical care, employment, housing, and more, all to ensure a successful assignment for the officer and his or her family.

The Department of State does offer some resources to help family members perform this task, though access is largely indirect at this point. Meanwhile, some improvements do seem to be in the works.

The first stop for most of us is the Overseas Briefing Center. The OBC's Open Net (or Intranet) site, accessible only to those with a Department of State login, offers quite a bit of information. The most important of these is a section called "Post Info To Go." For every overseas mission, this section includes post reports; "personal post insights" (questionnaires with responses from those living at individual posts); housing, medical and other handbooks; employment reports; Community Liaison Office information; and lists of contacts.

While the OBC gathers and organizes all this material, most of it does not actually originate with the OBC. For example, the official post reports have always been produced by Management sections at each post. Recently, the reports were migrated to the Diplopedia "wiki" platform. This means that posts are able to instantaneously access and update the reports, making them even more useful to bidders and their families. Other items offered in Post Info to Go are produced by the Family Liaison Office (FLO), Community Liaison Office Coordinators (CLOs), Health Units, and General Services Offices of our embassies and consulates overseas.

All these materials are reviewed by OBC, which works closely with overseas embassies and offices within the Department to ensure that information is correct and current. It is available to family members, but only indirectly. If the officer has regular access to the Intranet, he or she can email items to the spouse. Or, spouses can request materials via email from the OBC. Many people do take advantage of this service: the OBC issues over 500 packets of information per month (including post reports) to members of the Foreign Service community who are researching posts. FLO will also send information via email upon request, and of course family members can always email the CLO at any post and ask for the most updated information available.

Continued on page 4.



From the President's Desk

December is a time for making wish lists (which at my house this year seem to begin and end with “iPad”). So it seems like a good opportunity to offer my wish list for

AAFSW, in the hope that many of you agree with me and will help to make these wishes a reality in 2013!

I wish that ...

- all spouses and partners of employees joining the Foreign Service will immediately join AAFSW and turn to us for support, advocacy and community.
- we will implement our online marketplace in the coming year. Moving the current housing and car ads on Livelines to a user-friendly, searchable “Craigslist for the Foreign Service” will provide a great service while inspiring everyone to join AAFSW in order to participate!
- our amazing network of talented, energetic and knowledgeable volunteers will continue to expand!
- the terrific idea of offering neighborhood sponsors in the DC area will take off -- please add yourself to the list in the Database area of Livelines!
- we will be able to revitalize the system of AAFSW post reps abroad, to inform people about AAFSW and collect their ideas and concerns.
- we will become even more effective in representing family members and raising their visibility in the foreign affairs agency community.
- the 2013 Art&BookFair will be as successful as this year's, under the outstanding leadership of Judy Felt!
- our current activities will continue and expand, including our Foreign Born Spouse Group; monthly programs and activities; liaison with AFSA, FSYF and FLO; evacuee and crisis support; our mentoring program; our new merit scholarship; support for entrepreneurial spouses/partners; our Happy Hours; Playgroup, and much more!
- the inspiring projects recognized with the Secretary of State Award for Outstanding Volunteerism Abroad (SOSA) will be well publicized within and outside our community, showing how both employees and family members engage in “citizen diplomacy” and make life better for others around the world.

My final wish is an easy one for you to fulfill if you will be in the DC area in December: Please come to the SOSA Award Ceremony on December 4! The event, including refreshments, is free to AAFSW members. You'll be awed by the historic Diplomatic Reception Rooms, inspired by the SOSA winners, and entertained by a musical program specially chosen for the occasion by our Board member and professional singer Debbi Miller. See the other article below for more information.

I have more wishes, but I'll stop now -- if you have wishes of your own for AAFSW and our community, please let me know at president@aafsw.org

Happy holidays and may your wishes, and ours, come true!

Patricia Linderman
AAFSW President
president@aafsm.org

The 2012 SOSA Awards Ceremony

This year, AAFSW received 34 nominations for the Secretary of State's Award for Outstanding Volunteerism Abroad (SOSA) from posts in all of the six geographic regions. AAFSW thanks those posts and individuals who took the time to nominate these volunteers. All the nominees' remarkable activities have had a profound impact on Mission and host-country communities overseas.

Please visit <http://www.aafsw.org/awards-scholarships/sosa/> for more information and photos of the winning projects.

The annual AAFSW Awards Program will take place on **Tuesday, December 4, 2012**. The ceremony itself will begin promptly at 10:00 a.m. and refreshments will not be served until completion of the program at 11:30. From 11:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon members and guests can mingle and enjoy the opportunity to personally chat with the 2012 award winners. The program is free to all AAFSW members and Department of State employees. Outside guests will be asked to pay \$15. Reservations **must to be made no later than November 29, 2012**. Please use the reservation form in the November issue of *Global Link* to reserve your seat, or reserve and pay online at www.aafsw.org.

Lara L Center
AAFSW SOSA Award Coordinator
sosa@aafsm.org

Art&BookFair 2012: Wrapping It All Up

As we were setting up the Art & BookFair (A&BF) this year, a man stopped in the middle of the Exhibit Hall, raised his arms and proclaimed: "This is my favorite time of year! It's time for BookFair!" His happiness was evident, and we saw this same joy on the faces of many of the State Department customers that wait for this event every year.

The weekend crowds were just as enthusiastic. I saw two customers, who had waited an hour in line for us to open, literally *running* from C Street entrance to the Exhibit Hall, just to be the first customers to see what we have. One ran to the Art Corner and the other went into the Collectors' Corner. Other customers quickly joined them. It is gratifying to see the eagerness on their faces. They still think we are one of the best of the annual Fairs!

The enthusiasm is still there, after all these years. It is there in spite of the arrival of electronic books, the Internet and all the other alternatives to the printed page and to local sales. When we see excited faces ready to buy our donated items, all the hard work seems worth it.

And it is a lot of hard work. The volunteers have been faithful, efficient and knowledgeable all year long and they really stepped up to the plate for this year's A&BF. We all worked hard but also had some good fun, ate some snacks, chatted with customers, checked the books and Art Corner items and caught up with old acquaintances and friends.

This year we grossed around \$67,500, a bit more than we made last year. Cash is still trickling in, so we won't know the final total for a few weeks. One person emailed the office to inform us that he had been undercharged on his credit card. He is sending a check for the difference. Now that is a good customer! We were so well supported by the Department of State (DOS) again this year that our expenses will be largely

for security and for publicity. We should also net a little more than we did last year, more than enough to fund AAFSW's many missions.

We are starting to consider the options for next year, and we welcome any input from AAFSW members. We always need volunteers as veteran volunteers retire and others leave for postings overseas. We need to promote donations, especially art items, collectibles, stamps, coins and rare books. We pick up donations; we price, sort and shelve the books and art donations; we box them up and store them for next year's A&BF. We figure out new ways to publicize the A&BF, how to get the word out to our target audience. We have several teams that come in and work together; this is a good way to regularly chat,

perhaps have lunch with friends! During these times together one realizes that no one really lives our life, our memories, our experiences quite like other Foreign Service family members. It is so wonderful to reconnect with those who 'understand' as we talk about our various posts, colleagues and problems.

If you think you might like to join us, please call the office 703-820-5420 or the BookRoom 202-223-5796, or email [office@](mailto:office@aafsw.org)

aafsw.org. You can come in for a few months, look around and see what kinds of things that volunteers do. If you want to join us, we can get you a DOS badge which will get you into the building. For those who come in weekly, we can help you with parking.

For all of you who volunteered for the A&BF and for any AAFSW activity this year, we thank you! We know that you are busy! I hope to see you all at the Volunteer Luncheon this summer!!



A&BF 2012 volunteers gather for a group portrait.

Judy Felt
Art & BookFair Chair
bookfair@aafsw.org

Online Resources, continued from page 1.

Family members are also allowed to access the Intranet by physically traveling to the OBC in Arlington, VA, or to an embassy or consulate to use a dedicated computer kiosk. Posts are strongly encouraged by FLO to make these kiosks available. While approximately 75 percent of posts have done so, they are not actually required by regulation to implement the policy and provide the kiosks. This has been a stumbling block to access in some cases.

A spouse or partner can always just use the employee's login to research posts at an Embassy or at home, right? Not so fast. According to the Foreign Affairs Manual (and confirmed by Diplomatic Security) this is strictly against the rules. Employees may not share their login with anyone, period. Such sharing is a security violation and could potentially result in disciplinary action and consequences to the employee's career.

Where kiosks exist, family members can technically receive their own logins in order to use them. But, because there is no separate section of the Intranet just for post research, and the family member will therefore obtain access to the entire Open Net with the login, he or she is required to both attend a security briefing and obtain "sponsorship" from an employee (who is then responsible for that user's actions). Furthermore, this level of access does not include the ability to research posts at home, because it does not include the fob computer key or the electronic "token" that employees can use for that purpose.

The staffs at both the Family Liaison Office (FLO) and OBC are well aware of the difficulties that family members face in obtaining post research information, and efforts are now underway to make more of it available online.

While the majority of FLO's standard publications are already publicly available, as of this writing, FLO is developing and testing a new password protected social networking website called eFLO. According to FLO, this will be an "online dashboard for navigating Foreign Service life," and include FLO's Family Member Employment Reports (FAMERs) and eventually, the Overseas Childcare Reports, which up to this point, have only been available on the Department's Intranet. "Our goal is for eFLO to link to key resources and offer Foreign Service family members and employees a place to exchange ideas with each other as well as subject matter experts," says FLO Director Leslie Teixeira.

Eligible Family Members would receive their own eFLO logins to access the site from any Internet-ready computer. They would then be able to participate in discussion groups and post questions to forums. "We will invite CLO coordinators to set up their own groups where they can post information of interest to their communities such as post newsletters, community information, welcome guides, etc., and members would be able to communicate with both the CLO and each other," says Teixeira.

Unfortunately, in the case of both FLO and OBC resources such as Post Info To Go, the fact that these materials are "owned" by so many different entities seems to be an obstacle to more general access to them for spouses and partners. Each post or Department office produces material independently and is subject to a different approval process. Security regulations present a hurdle to broader access in some cases. However, OBC is working on this as well. Sarah Genton, Division Director at the OBC, says that "The Overseas Briefing Center recently launched an effort to revise Post Info To Go and hopes to make information more directly available to family members in the future."

Please see page 6 for links to FLO and OBC resources that are currently available online.

*Kelly Bembry Midura
AAFSW Creative Director
newsletter@aafsm.org*

5 FAM 784 PROVIDING OPENNET PLUS AND INTERNET ACCESS TO ELIGIBLE FAMILY MEMBERS AT POSTS ABROAD.

This regulation outlines the policy for providing both Intranet kiosks and logins for family members at post.

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/85753.pdf>

Opinion: It's Reasonable To Expect EFM Access

It's close to midnight and I should be asleep, but I just received an email. It's the message I've been waiting to receive for months: a beacon of light, rays of hope shining in my direction: Yes, my husband just emailed me the bid list!

So, I perk up. I brew myself a cup of half-caff and slowly start perusing the offerings. I knock the posts I know won't work off the official list and start compiling my own list. No post is safe from me. At this point in our career as a Foreign Service family, I am ready to consider anything.

Well, almost anything. We do need a good high school for Cait, our teenager, a good middle school program for Kelsey, our preteen, and hopefully some extracurricular sports for Nick, our preschooler. What is the housing like? Will we have a Diplomatic Post Office (DPO) at post or be stuck with diplomatic pouch mail? Clearly, I need to research all of my options. There's just one problem: it's midnight and I have no access to any official information since I am not an employee. I can't run into the office to pull up reports, nor can I utilize a "fob" to peruse Personal Post Insights (PPIs).

Eligible Family Members (EFMs) such as myself are still mired in the same backward technology that existed when our family joined the State Department 15 years ago. Despite advances such as the development of fobs, a device many employees use to generate passwords for intranet access from off-site computers, EFMs have not been granted access to such tools. While we tend to do most of the post research, we are still reliant upon non-State resources in order to retrieve bidding information when we need it the most.

The State Department used to have a section dedicated to post reports online, on the public Internet, however in 2005 these reports were deemed to be a cyber-security issue. Rather than come up with a way for everyone in the FS community to access the post reports, State put them behind the "iron curtain" of the Department intranet.

Many posts do allow EFMs to have intranet log-ons, however, that still requires us to physically get to the embassy and hope that a secure computer is available. We can email the Overseas Briefing Center and request that they forward packets of post reports and personal post insights, but of course, no one would do that for 10 different posts at 3 a.m. (Washington time) and expect to get a prompt reply.

If we are in the States, we can travel to the National Foreign Affairs Training Center (NFATC) during business hours to access Post Info To Go and other bidding tools. Middle of the night questions about schools and pets? Nope, sorry, out of luck unless you are an employee AND have a fob.

So, what can we do? How can research be completed when there is so much work to be done and so few actual resources that we can access 24/7? Thankfully, there are some resources, mostly produced by FS family members, that are readily available, anytime, anywhere.

Tales from a Small Planet

<http://www.talesmag.com/>

This expat spouse-created website has listings for hundreds of cities around the world. There is also a growing list of international school reports. And, the reports are not given the gloss-over by post as the official post reports often are. Talesmag was started by a group of FS spouses who felt the State post reports were often inadequate. Francesca Kelly, one of the founders, notes, "The official reports often discussed issues like the cuts of meat available at post (accompanied by grainy photos) instead of more crucial issues, such as morale."

Livelines

<http://www.aafsw.org/about/global-activities/livelines-discussion-group/>

Brought to you by AAFSW, Livelines is a Yahoo! Group with over 4,000 (FS only) members. It is one of the first places an EFM might look for information. Livelines members generally sign their emailed posts to the group with a list of cities they in which they have served. If you are looking for information on Reykjavik, you need only do an archive search on the city and you will likely find someone who has been there recently (or is currently there) and is willing to answer questions. Liveliners tend to be extraordinarily helpful with the sharing of post information, as many understand all too well the pain of bidding research with limited resources.

Continued on page 6.

Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/>)

There are FS groups on Facebook that allow bidders to connect across the continents. Ed Dyer, an FS spouse, created a group called Trailing Houses in order to keep in touch with his friends. Within weeks it expanded to close to 1,000 members and was being used for bidding and post research purposes.

The above resources notwithstanding, we EFMs want to access the intranet. We are tired of dragging ourselves into Embassies and fighting for a computer in the Community Liaison Office (CLO). In Washington, DC, many of us are working or caring for children full-time and simply cannot get to the OBC. Why not simply assign fobs to those EFMs who request them so that these resources can be accessed from home?

Impossible you say? No, not really. It could be done. Anyone who has used a fob can tell you that the technology exists for EFMs to utilize them. EFM access could be restricted and limited only to bidding tools. One has to wonder with the technological advances these days, how can it be reasonable that we do not have this access already?

It is *not* reasonable. It is ironic that the resources that I use the most because I have ready access to them were created by EFMs desperate for post information. With little to no funding or technological training, FS spouses have managed to come up with better online bidding tools than State offers. Working around the system with fobs doesn't solve the problem entirely, but it would serve as a stopgap until State comes up with a fully functional and reasonable solution to EFM intranet access outside of State

Jen Dinoia
AAFSW First Vice President
vicepresident1@aafsw.org

FLO/OBC Resources

Internet Links and Emails

Family Liaison Office Internet site:
<http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/>.

Use the following email addresses for information on any of the topics listed or FLO@state.gov for general questions.

Community Liaison Office Program
FLOAskCLO@state.gov

Education and Youth
FLOAskEducation@state.gov

Evacuation Support
FLOAskEvacuations@state.gov

Family Member Employment
FLOAskEmployment@state.gov

Family Member Training
FLOAskTraining@state.gov

Expeditious Naturalization
FLOAskNaturalization@state.gov

Support Services
FLOAskSupportServices@state.gov

Publications
FLOPublications@state.gov

Unaccompanied Tours Support:
FLOAskUT@state.gov

Overseas Briefing Center Internet site
<http://www.state.gov/m/fsi/tc/c6954.htm>.

To receive post information by email, contact
FSIOBCInfoCenter@state.gov with your request.

Classified Advertising

AAFSW now offers free classified advertisements to its members. The *Global Link* is sent by mail and electronically to our members and to Community Liaison Offices worldwide for a sizable total monthly readership.

Do you have a business or service that you would like to advertise to the Foreign Service community? Send a brief notice (100 words or less) to office@aafsw.org for approval with the subject line AD FOR GLOBAL LINK. If you have a business website, it can be hyperlinked in the electronic version of the newsletter, so please include your URL. Advertisements will run on a space-available basis for one month at a time and will rotate in order of receipt.

We also accept classified advertising for real estate rentals and sales, as well as sales of other items (cars etc.) on our website, www.aafsw.org. View or submit ads here: <http://www.aafsw.org/classified/classified.htm>.

Not a member of AAFSW? Join now! Apply online at our website: <http://www.aafsw.org/aafsw/membership.htm>.



AAFSW Member Documentary Project

Inspired by the quiet contributions of a Bangladeshi Muslim woman, AAFSW member Cathy Stevulak and her husband Leonard Hill decided upon retirement from the Foreign Service to make a documentary film that tells a remarkable story.

Surayia Rahman overcame social and economic hardships to free herself and hundreds of other destitute women by creating timeless works of art. "Threads: The Art and Life of Surayia Rahman" is a story of the ripple effect of creating opportunity and the power of innovation and cultural preservation.

Over decades, members of the Foreign Service community were involved with Surayia to help women create nakshi kantha embroidered wall hangings that have been gifted to dignitaries and are in museums and private collections around the world.

Surayia is now 80 years old. Cathy and Leonard are working against the clock to complete the rough cut by end of December. They invite members of the Foreign Service community to join them now by donating \$20 or more to help complete the film and then launch it in 2013!

To learn more about Surayia and the project, to contact Cathy and Leonard, or to make a donation, please visit <http://www.kanthathreads.com>.

New Neighborhood Sponsor Database

Are you currently in the DC area? Are you willing to help others who are transitioning to Washington? If so, please add your name and contact information to the new "Neighborhood Sponsors" list in the Database section of Livelines!

Let's get a good list of people who are willing to answer questions by e-mail and/or phone, and to help newcomers who have just arrived. And, while you're in the Livelines Database area, don't forget to use the new "EFM Businesses" database as well!

Art Exhibit

AAFSW Member and retired FS spouse Kathleen Stafford presents an exhibition of watercolors and collographs at the Alexandria Black History Museum entitled "African Encounters—from Coast to Coast." Kathleen's work is the product of 30 years of living and working in Africa and the Middle East. The exhibition continues until January 24, 2013

Gallery hours Tuesday-Saturday 10AM to 4PM

Location: 902 Wythe Street, Alexandria, Virginia

Telephone: 703-746-4356

Please visit <http://kathleenstafford.wordpress.com> for more information.

Welcome To Our New Assistant Treasurer

We are delighted to welcome Carmen Geis as AAFSW's new volunteer Assistant Treasurer.

Carmen began working for the US Government as a local employee in the US Consulate General in Guadalajara. She accompanied her Foreign Service officer husband working both professionally and as a volunteer during postings in Belgrade, Brussels, Buenos Aires, and Asuncion.

During postings to Washington she worked for an elementary school, the Departments of State and Defense, and for an international organization. Now retired, she continues to volunteer for AAFSW and her neighborhood association.

Email Carmen at treasurer2@aafsw.org.

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This holiday shopping season, please remember to click through the Amazon links on our website, www.aafsw.org. AAFSW nets several hundred dollars every year through our affiliation with Amazon.com. It's a quick and easy way to help, and we really do appreciate it!

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President

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703-635-3827

president@aafsw.org

1st Vice-President

Jennifer Dinoia

925-549-1198

vicepresident1@aafsw.org

2nd Vice-President

Alicia Wilkinson

703-356-9233

vicepresident2@aafsw.org

Board Secretary

Margaret Teich

703-250-5099

secretary@aafsw.org

Membership

Debbi Miller

703-470-6160

membership@aafsw.org

Programs

Sheila Switzer

703-569-8867

programs@aafsw.org

Public Relations

Lesley Dorman

202-484-3497

publicrelations@aafsw.org

Treasurer

Lucy Whitley

703-536-2183

treasurer@aafsw.org

Assistant Treasurer

Carmen Geis

703-503-9117

treasurer2@aafsw.org

Forum

Ann La Porta

202-248-4246

Judy Felt

703-370-1414

forum@aafsw.org

Art & BookFair

Judy Felt

703-370-1414

bookfair@aafsw.org

Housing

Lesley Dorman

202-484-3497

housing@aafsw.org

SOSA

Lara L. Center

sosa@aafsw.org

President Emerita

Faye Barnes

540-972-3754

emerita@aafsw.org

STAFF/SERVICES

AAFSW Office

Barbara Reiox
4001 North Ninth Street
Suite 214

Arlington, VA, 22203

703-820-5420

Fax: 703-820-5421

office@aafsw.org

Book Room

Main State

Room B-816

Brian Neumann

202-223-5796

bookroom@aafsw.org

Housing Desk

Employee Services Center

Main State, Room 1252

202-647-3573

202-647-3086

housing@aafsw.org

Creative Director

Kelly Bembry Midura

703-651-2078

newsletter@aafsw.org

Webmaster

Sean P. McKee

webmaster@aafsw.org

OTHER CONTACTS

AFSA Liaison

Patty Ryan

202-966-7696

Ann La Porta

202-248-4246

afsarep@aafsw.org

Archivist

Vacant

archives@aafsw.org

CLO Alumni Association

Donna Ayerst

703-759-1124

clogroup@aafsw.org

Evacuee Support

Ann La Porta

202-248-4246

evacuee@aafsw.org

Foreign-Born Spouses Group

Ana Luisa Gallardo

fbspouses@aafsw.org

FBS State Liaison

Sheila Switzer

703-569-8867

programs@aafsw.org

Facebook Moderator

Kelly Bembry Midura

703-651-2078

facebook@aafsw.org

French Group

Christel McDonald

Tel: 703-525-9755

frenchchair@aafsw.org

FSYF Liaison

Donna Scharpf

202-558-2060

fsyf@aafsw.org

Legislative Liaison

Vacant

congressrep@aafsw.org

Livelines Moderator

Jennifer Dinoia

925-549-1198

livelines@aafsw.org

Mentoring Program

Debbi Miller

703-470-6160

mentor@aafsw.org

Oral History

Faye Barnes

540-972-3754

oralhistory@aafsw.org

Playgroup

Katerina Meade

playgroup@aafsw.org

Scholarships

Anne Cekuta

scholarship@aafsw.org

Senior Living

Vacant

301-652-5433

seniorliving@aafsw.org

Skills Bank

Aleksandar Blagojevski-Trazoff

skillsbank@aafsw.org

State Liaison

Mette Beecroft

301-320-7698

staterep@aafsw.org

Women in Transition

Nancy Longmyer

703-532-4694

divorce@aafsw.org

AAFSW
4001 North Ninth St.
Suite 214
Arlington, VA
22203



December 2012

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