

Europe and Eurasia (EUR) Highlights

The Secretary of State Award for Outstanding Volunteerism Abroad (SOSA)



For members of the Foreign Service, a European tour conjures up romantic visions of museums and castles, kingdoms existing or now long gone, walks along a scenic river, travels to Roman ruins, and lessons in ancient history. But today's Europe looked very different in 1990 when the SOSA program first solicited nominations for volunteer recognition. Just one year before SOSA launched, the fall of communism overthrew Soviet Union domination in Eastern-bloc European countries. The Berlin wall fell, reuniting East and West Germany. In the wake of these events, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Albania, Yugoslavia and Romania struggled to reform their political governance.



In 1991, fourteen nations declared their independence from the Soviet Union: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. In the next five years, however, parts of Europe were wrenched apart by armed and political conflict, resulting in the emergence of Slovenia, Croatia, Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia and Montenegro.

For many of these countries, the transition to capitalism, with its inherent economic restructuring, was difficult at best, impacting the movement of peoples and challenging many "new" Europeans to survive amidst great hardships and change. The fall of communism had brought a new set of challenges and opportunities for Americans serving in the European region.



During SOSA's first years, award nominations often highlighted volunteer efforts to overcome the lack of social services available for many – most notably children and the homeless – and to address enormous humanitarian challenges. As one SOSA nomination from the Czech Republic described, *"one of the sad legacies of communism (here and throughout the ex-Soviet bloc) is the absence of a tradition of individual volunteerism. Once someone drops off the government radar screen – as the homeless do here – they find themselves at the mercy of the streets."*



In the last 20 years, American volunteers have confronted a wide variety of challenges, depending on their country of assignment. The diversity of the European experience translates into such volunteers successes as: a de-mining campaign following a four year war for independence in Croatia; a "Computers to Classroom" project in Macedonia; the organization of a soup kitchen in Bulgaria; a quilting project to bring about cultural understanding in Luxembourg; assisting young women caught in the terrifying cycle of human trafficking in Albania; and leading fund raising efforts that in turn benefit local charities. More recently, instability – both political and economic – in regions outside of Europe has caused refugees to stream into Europe looking for a safe haven and a better life. Assisting the thousands of refugees and asylum seekers from Iraq, Iran, and Somalia became one volunteer's main objective during her time in Turkey.

The region of Europe and Eurasia has had 129 SOSA nominations from 39 of its 51 countries. The projects adopted by nominees are a reflection of the needs to be filled. Nothing illustrates this better than the awe-inspiring profiles and success stories on the following pages. The individuals mentioned are examples of "the American way" – they rose to meet the need, provided leadership, and gave their talents and know-how to contribute to the communities around them.



Lynne Germain Montgomery (winner 2000) In War-torn Croatia, Healing Takes Center Stage

When Lynne Germain Montgomery arrived in Croatia in 1998, the four-year war for independence, which ended in 1995, had left the country in disarray. Landmines in war-torn areas prevented citizens from returning to the lives they had known, psychological wounds ran deep, and Croatia's social infrastructure needed rebuilding, particularly in the health sector. As the spouse of the U.S. Ambassador to Croatia, Lynne was in a unique position to garner support for expanded community help. Her volunteer successes were no less than extraordinary as she reached out to the people of Croatia, initiated programs, raised monies, and collaborated with local business leaders and government entities.

Upon her arrival, she visited war-torn areas of the country to understand the challenges facing the Croatian people. She saw hundreds of thousands of people driven from their homes during the war struggling to get back to the basics of daily life. Resettlement was slow. While de-mining efforts had rid most houses of landmines, the surrounding fields remained dangerous, preventing farmers from planting and bringing their children home. Lynne immediately went to work, forming alliances with key Croatian organizations to garner support for de-mining programs.

Lynne convinced the Croatian Mining Center (CROMAC), the organization principally responsible for de-mining, to join her in a fundraising effort to expand the de-mining efforts. She approached the American Chamber of Commerce in Croatia and engaged its members in an "adopt a minefield" campaign. She humanized the de-mining effort by bringing business community members to meet the citizens whose fields would be de-mined as a result of their contribution. Working with CROMAC and the AmCham, Lynne secured commitments, with matching funds from the Slovenian Trust Fund, of approximately \$100,000. *"The emotional response was overwhelming. Businessmen helped farmers plant their first seeds in the de-mined fields,"* said Charles English, former DCM in Zagreb. Further raising awareness, Lynne hosted several delegations from the U.S. to Croatia, raising additional monies, and personally taking visitors to Vukovar and Zadar to meet with school children, widows whose husbands were killed by landmines when trying to grow food for their families, and local politicians trying to rebuild their communities.

To further heal wounds after the war, Lynne pursued her idea of "healing through the arts." She began a drama club for American and Croatian children and collaborated with Croatian actors and actresses to produce two Shakespearean plays, performed in cities throughout Croatia. The performances raised more than \$20,000, which was donated to support further charitable endeavors. The first beneficiaries were groups working to exhume and identify the thousands of war victims buried in mass graves. Closure for families was essential to the healing process. However, those actually recovering the bodies also needed psychological support. Lynne recruited and raised more funds for a team of psychiatric counselors to provide their services to the exhumation teams.

Lynne soon became all too familiar with the shortcomings of Croatia's health care infrastructure. With spousal and child abuse on the rise, Lynne worked closely with a local doctor from the Center for Sexuality and Physically Abused Children at Klačeva Hospital to set up a volunteer telephone hotline. The center organized a conference with local, regional, and U.S. specialists. In addition to working closely with the medical team, Lynne lent her name to the Center's effort and the media responded by publishing information about the hotline and Center activities, further reaching those in need of help.

At Zagreb's Rebro Hospital for terminally ill children, Lynne initiated an effort to transform a drab ward into an inviting, warm, and friendly space, creating a less intimidating environment for children. Lynne again went to the business community and asked for donations of paint, toys and new curtains and furniture. She recruited volunteers — Croatians and Americans working side by side — to paint the walls, hang colorful curtains, and hang new artwork. A new TV and VCR were added to the space. Through Lynne's leadership and fundraising, the Neurology unit purchased new medical equipment. In recognition, the hospital staff and the local media applauded her for reviving the "spirit of Volunteerism" in Croatia. Other hospitals soon asked for help and she continued on to complete other projects, including aiding an institution for the handicapped.

In nominating Lynne, her colleagues noted that Lynne *"is the embodiment of the word volunteer. Lynne's focus, energy, and commitment, coupled with her contagious enthusiasm, have been recognized throughout her tenure in Zagreb. Her tireless efforts have motivated members of the Croatian, American, and international communities to join together in support of many worthwhile charities."*

Amy Sebes (winner 2004)

We Are Not Prostitutes: Personal Empowerment and A Voice for Victims of Human Trafficking in Albania

Amy Sebes won her SOSA in 2004 for her dedication to and advocacy for Albanian women and girls who are victims of human trafficking. At that time, an estimated 6,000+ young Albanian women had fallen prey to illegal trafficking, most at the average age of seventeen and the youngest at just twelve. The stories of young Albanian women on the Association of Albanian Girls and Women (AAGW) website (www.aagw.org) are heartbreaking. The testimonies -- describing abuse, proposed marriages, and forced prostitution -- represent similar accounts from thousands of victims of illegal human trafficking. In Tirana, women can find their voice and the personal strength to leave a life of despair and slavery with the help of the Association of Albanian Girls and Women (AAGW), a non-profit humanitarian organization founded by Amy Sebes.

When Amy arrived in Tirana in September 2002, she began volunteering for a shelter operated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), where victims of human trafficking could receive assistance. She soon learned of the difficulties and challenges faced by the shelter's young occupants. While these women and girls had escaped from their abusive situations, they feared that the well-organized gangs who had enslaved them would find them once again. They struggled with the emotional scars of their experiences, and they faced enormous obstacles in reintegrating into society. Perhaps most painful of all, victims were often shunned by their own families, abandoned because of shame, leaving them no support networks or homes to return to.

Amy became determined to help victims of human trafficking rebuild their lives. Within the first six months of volunteering more than 40 hours per week at the shelter, Amy established the AAGW. Amy's vision was to create an organization where the victims themselves could actively participate in its development. In AAGW's daily operations, women took on managerial tasks and income-generating activities, which in turn helped all involved gain important leadership and business skills.

In nominating Amy, Ambassador James F. Jeffrey noted her "particular attention to (the handicraft) program by raising money for the purchase of necessary materials, identifying handicraft talent within the local and international community, and encouraging individuals to provide training free of charge to the girls ...and helping the girls develop a high quality, affordable, and marketable product line." Within three months, the initial investment for handicraft supplies was repaid and the women and girls were generating income and being paid for their work. Amy organized several bazaars to showcase and sell the handicrafts. To bring the crafts to a wider audience, Amy sought the help of a friend who constructed a website for AAGW. Through the website, supporters can purchase such items as knitted baby hats and sweater sets, gift cards, hand-made teddy bears and dolls, slipper socks, embroidered pillow cases, and Christmas items. This business model has allowed former victims to design, develop, and participate in the success of the organization.

Amy designed AAGW programs to include job training and job placement. Working independently and partnering with the IOM and local NGOs, AAGW provided vocational training and reached out to potential employers to place former trafficked women into new work opportunities.

Today, AAGW still exists with its primary aim to "help former victims of trafficking reintegrate into Albanian society," proving its long-term impact. Amy, in her efforts to prevent future human trafficking and educate young women as to its dangers, wrote an anti-trafficking educational curriculum currently being used in targeted middle and high schools in Albania. It can be viewed on the AAGW website.

Due to her fierce determination and devotion to her fellow human beings, Amy changed many women's lives, giving them the tool of personal empowerment. As the AAGW website states, "Victims of trafficking have been robbed of their human dignity. AAGW seeks to help them restore it. As members of their own association, these young women are the experts on trafficking; they know best how to determine their own needs and propose solutions for lasting change. AAGW gives them this opportunity." And as founder, Amy gave many women their lives back.

This is Our Message to The World

We are not prostitutes.

We deserve respect.

We believe we were victims but are victims no longer. We are better than before.

We believe in honest pay for honest work.

We believe in respecting oneself and each other.

We think that a person's work should be one's choice -- not enforced by threats, cruelty, or violence.

We think that one's work should bring fulfillment and dignity, not the opposite.

Trafficking is a total violation of human rights, a form of slavery, and completely unacceptable in the 21st century.

We thank the IOM (International Office of Migration), the Director of the Reintegration Center, the social workers, the nurses, the donors, and everyone else who has donated money, time, and effort to help us.

Stop Trafficking Now.

Mark Wilson (winner 2005)

Bringing Information Technology to Disadvantaged Communities in Macedonia

Before the year 2000, the situation for mental health patients in Southeastern Europe was grim. According to the World Health Organization, “War, economic collapse, political tumult and a host of inherited problems have led to severe deterioration in the help provided to mentally ill in southeast Europe.” In 2000, Macedonia’s government became part of a European regional reform effort and drafted a national mental health policy and mental health laws. The reforms established community mental health centers and community-based housing options for mentally ill patients. For the first time, institutionalized patients had the hope of reintegrating into a community and living in protected apartments within neighborhoods. However, the government of Macedonia had little in the way of funds for training programs to help mental health patients gain valuable skills to make the transition.



Above, residents at the Demir Kapija facility in Macedonia learn valuable skills through the use of computer labs set up by Mark Wilson. At left, Mark (in the navy blue shirt) poses with a group at Demir Kapija.

Mark Wilson, an Information Management Officer with the Department of State, saw an opportunity to use technology as a means for developing the skills of individuals with special needs, with the hope that someday they could transition to independent living arrangements. With a steadfast philosophy – “I have always believed that with the right resources everyone can achieve great things” – he began the “Computers to Classroom” project, which in the course of 8 months, donated over \$85,000 in computer equipment to mental health facilities and disadvantaged schools throughout Macedonia.

He began by soliciting donations of new and used Information Technology (IT) equipment. He gathered the computer equipment and if it was broken, he fixed it. If it was old, he refurbished it. If parts were missing, Mark purchased the necessary cables and hardware, using his own funds, to make it function properly. With boundless energy, he spent countless hours, after his days at the office and on weekends, putting together and networking computer systems.



With the help of a colleague at USAID, he selected suitable donor sites, including three mental health facilities, a high school, and a local municipality. At the critical care mental health facility in Demir Kapija, Mark delivered and set up enough hardware to fully equip two computer labs with Internet connectivity. Once the installation was complete, Mark watched the excitement unfold. For some, it was the first time in their lives they had typed on a keyboard. Demir Kapija’s director, Ljube Tegova, tearfully thanked Mark, stating, “these computers will give the hospital’s residents and faculty new methods of teaching, learning, discovering, and growing with limitless potential.” The labs now provide an educational space where residents with special needs can reach their full potential, and perhaps, with newly learned skills, return to their communities – a major goal of the critical care facility.

Mark also worked with Skopje’s NOVA High School, assisting students with IT knowledge. Under Mark’s tutelage, the students learned a new digital culture. Technical literacy is where it’s at for today’s youth, no matter where in the world one lives. Future jobs depend on it. He single-handedly connected students to their future, to the endless possibilities of the digital age.

Computers provide us with access to information, they teach us technical skills, and they feed our learning. And, in Macedonia, the simple act of typing on a keyboard can change a life. No one knows that better than Mark Wilson. Mark’s vision of integrating information technology into disadvantaged communities has made a long-lasting impact for those who continue to benefit from his gift of computers in the classroom.

Bridget Guerrero (winner - 2008)

Alone in a Strange Country: Aiding Refugees in Turkey

"Life is a matter of perspective. A person can try to do as much as he or she can in a short period of time at a post or decide not to act, thinking they don't have enough time to make a difference. The award recipients are all people who chose to act."



One of the most important goals of the ARSG is to promote social awareness of the plight of refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey and throughout the world.

"Through this work, more Turkish volunteers have gotten involved, people who will help sustain the program for years to come," says Bridget.

Bridget and her family became personally involved in a few special refugee cases. They assisted an Iraqi refugee in finalizing her documents. In another case, Bridget found a guitar for a refugee-orphaned teen living in a Turkish orphanage. He did not speak Turkish, so understood little around him. The guitar provided solace and a sense of hope.

Bridget Guerrero worked tirelessly during her time in Turkey to assist the thousands of refugees and asylum seekers who arrive in that country from Iraq, Iran, and Somalia. In their Global Report for 2007, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that refugees, combined with asylum seekers, numbered over 12,000 arriving through the country's eastern border, with a growing number coming from Africa. The main destination countries for these refugees are Australia, Canada, Finland and the United States.



At first, Bridget volunteered through the Meryem Ana Catholic Church, helping with a monthly distribution of clothing and money to numerous refugee families. Her interest in getting more involved took her to the UNHCR processing center, where she realized that destitute refugees, alone in a strange country, had to sit for long hours with no food, day after day, waiting for their paperwork and assistance. Moved by what she saw, Bridget organized a system to provide lunches once a week at the refugee center. A mother herself, her heart also went out to the many young refugees, many of them small children who waited long hours with no toys to play with. So, in addition to donations of clothing, Bridget looked for donations of toys.

Within a few months, Bridget had arranged for lunch to be served five days a week, with as many as 1,000 refugees receiving a free meal every month through a voucher system. To support the refugee lunch program, Bridget raised \$4,000 by organizing two Fun Runs through the streets of Ankara. A portion of the money also went to a Turkish NGO that provides affordable short-term accommodation and meals to extremely vulnerable refugee women and children upon their arrival in Ankara.

However, Bridget knew that one or two fund raising events would not be enough to sustain her food program or provide continued help. She needed to formalize her efforts and create a sustainable presence for assistance to the growing refugee community in Ankara. With that in mind, she formed the Ankara Refugee Support Group (ARSG), which now boasts more than 100 volunteers from the expatriate and Turkish communities. Bridget led ARSG in its work of soliciting food and other in-kind donations from Turkish businesses. The network continues to grow and stands as an example of sustainable long-term support. Local authorities have taken notice. Several Turkish mayors have invited ARSG to discuss fundraising and support opportunities. Members of ARSG also participate with other non-governmental organizations at a monthly round table hosted by UNHCR.

In addition to her devotion to the refugees in Ankara, Bridget organized a charity fundraising haircut-athon to buy necessities for children at a local orphanage. She gathered dozens of boxes of donated food, clothing and hygiene products and arranged to deliver them to a women's shelter in eastern Turkey. She served on the Board of the Ankara International Charities Committee (AICC) and helped plan and implement large-scale fundraising events, including an annual Charity Ball and a fashion show. The money that the AICC raised was donated to needy Turkish groups, including a local hospital that used the funds to purchase much-needed neonatal equipment.

Bridget's leadership brought volunteerism to new heights in Ankara. Her founding of ARSG and the mobilization of fellow volunteers, combined with her determination to help refugees and asylum seekers in Ankara, resulted in thousands of people receiving much needed assistance from a cadre of caring individuals who gave selflessly of themselves to others. Since her departure from Ankara, new volunteers have stepped forward, raising awareness and money as they continue Bridget's humanitarian vision through the ARSG.

Country Highlights

So much of our Country Team effort is aimed at relieving the terrible stress in a still-developing Romania, and working to create civil society remains a top priority. Carol has exemplified that caring American attitude in her volunteer activities here, and has been a terrific but unpaid asset for promoting American values.

-- Ambassador Michael Guest in his nomination of Carol Ayers

In **Bucharest, Romania (1992)**, **Allen Docal**, a former USIS American Library Director, hit a “public diplomacy” home run with the creation of the first Romanian Baseball Federation in Bucharest. At a time when many Eastern European countries were appealing for assistance from the United States, Allen used his organizational skills and vision and spirit to establish contacts and bring together both Romanian and American interests in forming a baseball federation and the first Little League team in his host country. Over \$75,000 was raised from American organizations to provide training clinics for Romanian baseball coaches and sports equipment for the teams.

Ten years later in **Romania (2002)**, **Carol Ayers**, the spouse of the Peace Corps director in Bucharest, won her SOSA at a time when some 60,000 children were living in Romania’s orphanages. These institutions remained under-funded and lacked any developmental instruction for the care of children at risk. Carol Ayers impacted that world as a driving force in the creation of a community-based collection of some 20 NGOs called the ProChild Romania Federation, all involved in child welfare issues to improve the living conditions of children. The ProChild Federation lobbied local government for improvements and created a listserv whereby member organizations could receive information from one another and coordinate resources.

Despite slow improvements, fourteen years after the end of communism, **Romania (2004)** remained one of Europe’s poorest countries. **Deborah Delare** arrived in Bucharest and immediately jumped into action to become the chairperson of the Charity Committee of the International Women’s Association (IWA). IWA raised an impressive \$110,000 in 2003, administering some 22 grants during that period to projects throughout the country, including clothing drives, social services for the elderly, the construction of a camp for children, re-roofing group homes for abandoned or orphaned children, and the purchase of special pumps and filters for one hospital’s bone marrow transplant unit. According to nominator Ambassador Michael E. Guest, “...these new IWA records would not have been reached with Deborah’s energy, direction, and mobilization skills...Debbie helped catapult IWA into position as one of the more effective private small grants organizations in Romania – a can do success story that we are now using as a model for Romanian groups.” To further coordinate country-wide efforts, Deborah organized regular coffees to bring together directors and organizers from a variety of NGOs, to share ideas for greater synergy among donor groups involved in Romania’s social needs.

In **Romania (2005)**, **Eleanor “Liz” Blair** received a SOSA nomination for her volunteer work on behalf of abandoned children languishing in orphanages throughout the country. Liz volunteered her own time and resources to teach caregivers, local administrators, and even parents the basics of childcare and nutrition. Her many endeavors spanned 15 years, including volunteering with the Free Romanian Foundation and the Health Care Leadership Foundation formed to reform Romania’s health system. She created I CAN (the International Children’s Advocacy Network) and traveled to many of Romania’s orphanages to continue much-needed work. Through I CAN, she started summer camps for children with disabilities. Her ongoing efforts were life-changing for many of Romania’s homeless children.

In **Luxembourg (1992)** **Le Rowell** chose to weave relationships through quilting. Luxembourg was not known for volunteerism in its communities. She energized friends and colleagues, and brought together diverse groups through the production of a massive quilt of state flowers. The quilt opened doors for other cultural and art programs, and an exhibition of American quilts in an old Luxembourg castle. Mrs. Chingiz Aitmatov, spouse of the famous writer whose novels and plays gave a voice to the people of the Republic of Kyrgyz, invited Le to the country’s capital, Bishkek, to share traditional quilting methods and explore what their people offered in similar crafts. Such opportunities, born from volunteerism, further opened doors between the U.S. and foreign countries.

SOSA winner **Lara L. Center** also entered the cultural life of **Luxembourg (2009)** through her volunteer service with the National Military History Museum. The museum focuses on the Battle of the Ardennes and highlights the role the U.S. military played in liberating the country 65 years ago. Using her M.A. in Museum Studies, Laura developed innovative ways to reach museum audiences and expand the outreach program to the younger generation by creating a mobile museum service that travels to classrooms. She served as a mentor to university interns, exposing them to the American community and providing a unique insight into Luxembourg-American cooperation. Her innovative outreach strategy upgraded the museum web page and created a new component called the "Treasure Trove," highlighting new items in the museum collection. Her dedication to the museum honors the "Greatest Generation," and continues the memory of their valiant service with the youth of today.

In **Brussels, Belgium (1995)**, **Nancy Tokola** served as an effective bridge builder between the American and Belgian medical communities. While studying at the Free University of Brussels medical center for a two-year post-graduate Master's Degree in medical and pharmaceutical research, Nancy occasionally manned an English-speaking crisis intervention center hotline, managing difficult calls from all nationalities. For ACT Together, an HIV/AIDS organization, she compiled an adult education syllabus on HIV infection prevention and compassion towards the disease's victims. She took time to make 200 red ribbons for World AIDS Day. With the American Red Cross, she volunteered time as a certified instructor for HIV/AIDS prevention. Nancy reached out to the communities around her to give of her medical skills and knowledge. Nancy was again nominated while living in **The Hague, The Netherlands (2003)** for her work with the Red Cross and other activities.

In **Paris, France (1995)**, **Melanie Billings-Yun** was nominated for her involvement with Women in Continuing Education (WICE), a non-profit Anglophone association run by volunteers that provides cultural, educational and social activities to the international community. Under her leadership, the institute expanded its offerings from 200 courses to 300. When elected President of WICE in 1995, she brought other Embassy volunteers into the organization, including five as directors or officers.

In **Marseille, France (2002)**, **Odile Brock** used her business and administrative skills to bring the finances of "La Fontaine," a center for disadvantaged women in a busy downtown neighborhood, in line with official guidelines for charitable organizations receiving government funding. This allowed the center to re-qualify for funding. Filling in for a colleague on leave, Odile soon became the center's acting director. Fully bilingual in English and French, she was instrumental in helping immigrant women, many who did not speak French, obtain unemployment or refugee benefits, housing, job counseling, and other services. In nominating Odile, Martha Melzow stated, "*Her discreet, caring efforts on behalf of the poor have resulted in heightened good will and respect for the United States and its people.*"

Before the fall of the Soviet Union, the U.S. military presence in **Germany** was massive. The end of the Cold War brought a downsizing of U.S. military operations in Germany and by 1995, according to State Department documents, "*the U.S. military had closed 88 percent of its bases and smaller facilities in Germany entirely and significantly scaled back its presence at remaining locations.*" In **Berlin (1995)**, **Connie Joy** helped Americans living in Berlin adjust to life in the city after the departure of U.S. military troops. No longer could Americans living in Berlin rely solely on military services. Recognizing the void, she compiled a Berlin information book that served as a resource guide for every native English speaker living in Berlin. Connie motivated others to become involved in the project. Before Connie left Berlin, the book was in its 3rd edition.

Some three years later, in **Bonn (1998)**, **Michael Hoff** was working to help relocate the U.S. Embassy to Berlin. In the midst of his work at the Embassy, he learned that the Department of Defense was closing its primary and secondary school two years before planned. With just months before the end of the school year, Michael led an effort to identify and hire three individuals who would form the basis for the new Bonn International School. He was unanimously elected President of the new Board of Trustees and continued on the task of organizing for and building the new facility, drafting teacher and administrator contracts, overseeing budgets, and more. Today, Bonn's International School is home to almost 600 students.

"The goodwill she has generated has gone a long way in helping project a highly favorable and positive Consulate image to the community-at-large in the Frankfurt area."

-- Beth Alois, from the nomination of Inge Gill

In **Frankfurt (2001)**, **Inge Gill** received a SOSA nomination for her dedication of time and energy working with Frankfurt's Community Outreach Group (COG). Her many activities included work with the Bahnhof Mission, where 250 hot meals were provided monthly to 250 homeless persons. Her "tender care" was also demonstrated repeatedly by her leadership in organizing a group of volunteers to care for several dozen graves of American children at the Kinderfeld graves.

In **Athens, Greece (1996)**, SOSA winner **Major Alexander H. Von Plinsky, III**, worked tirelessly to establish an Employees Welfare and Services Association (EWSA) commissary after the closure of the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA). Alex offered his administrative, logistical, and organizational skills and became the leader of the effort, coordinating across interagency boundaries. He overcame numerous bureaucratic and regulatory obstacles and arranged for a no-cost transfer of equipment from the DeCA commissary to the EWSA facility. Upon becoming President of the Board of EWSA, Alex brought new energy and vitality to the organization and helped transform it from a money-loser to a self-sufficient operation.

In **Sofia, Bulgaria (1997)**, SOSA winner **Lynn McCartney** reached out to Bulgarians during an exceptionally difficult winter to alleviate suffering and despair through her role in organizing a soup kitchen in Sofia twice a week. Lynn led the U.S. contribution to the multi-national effort that fed some 200 old-age pensioners – elderly who had no family to support them and therefore, no money to live on, because inflation had reduced their pensions. She was described as "the heart and soul of the enterprise" as she solicited contributions and organized volunteers for shopping and cooking.

Greg Grenier arrived in **Moscow, Russia (2000)** in February 1998, and just two weeks later began helping needy Russians by dedicating his weekends to the Center for Humanitarian Aid (CHA). He focused his initial efforts on the center's soup kitchen, where homeless Russians who lacked proper permits to live in Moscow came to receive a daily ration. Located outside, behind an Orthodox church, the center served over 250 meals per day (porridge, bread and hot tea), even in freezing weather, to all comers for as long as the food lasted. Greg was soon soliciting clothing, and shoes and boots from Embassy colleagues. He convinced several construction workers who were building a new Embassy compound to help build a feeding shelter on the church grounds. Soon Greg was delivering surplus food and clothing to the soup kitchen, and eventually arranged for the donation of box cars to house donations and a classroom for homeless children.

A few years later, **Maxine Brinsfield (2004)** arrived in **Moscow** and decided to seek out a worthy charity to which she could volunteer her free time and energy. Through a local church, she learned of a refugee camp on the outskirts of Moscow. Upon her first visit, she found some 300 refugees, almost half of them children – from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, China, Ethiopia, and several other African countries – living in squalid conditions. With U.N. refugee status, inhabitants of the camp were receiving a small stipend, but it was not sufficient to support an improved quality of life. Maxine conducted a clothing drive to deliver winter clothing, including coats and shoes. She alerted friends and family in the U.S. to send winter clothing items, and solicited donations from Embassy colleagues. Once that clothing had been delivered, she focused on spring and summer clothing. She moved on to outfit the refugee camp's school with school supplies, and through her book donation drive, collected over 1,600 books for what she named "The Freedom Library." During home leave, she convinced local community organizations in her hometown to donate even more reading materials totaling over 2,000 books.

Bonnie Miller, a mental health professional, established herself as a leading advocate of children's welfare in post-war **Bosnia (2001)**. She conducted seminars throughout the country in support of strengthening children's rights. With frequent appearances in the media, she brought attention to the issues of child maltreatment, drug abuse and domestic violence. She trained the staffs of local orphanages, mental health centers, and agencies that helped victims of war trauma. Bonnie counseled trafficked teenagers and young women who had been forced into prostitution, but also sought public support through the International Organization for Migration for arrests of those responsible for keeping these women captive. Her volunteer involvement in several institutions and NGOs led to the development of multi-cultural peace-building projects. She founded Youth for Peace, a program to teach future teen leaders communication and conflict resolution

skills. Her summer peace camp program served over 120 teens from all over Bosnia and was the recipient of \$25,000 from President Bill Clinton's Dayton Peace Prize. For her volunteer accomplishments, Bonnie was nominated two years in a row while in Bosnia. In 2003, she moved to **Athens, Greece** and once again was nominated for her work with victims of human trafficking, with parents and children with learning disabilities, and in establishing a volunteer service network in the Embassy community.

In **The Hague, The Netherlands (2001)** Anja Lundberg won her SOSA for establishing a much needed half-day pre-school in The Hague, attended by children 9 months to 3 ½ years. She assembled a group of international and local Dutch parents who supported her efforts to find a location, devise a curriculum, hire teachers, solicit donations of toys and equipment, and interest families in the new program. Known as Parents Day Out (PDO), the pre-school opened its doors to 18 children in January 2001.

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, **Ruth Roberts**, while living in **London, England (2002)** used her motivational talents to gather people together and coordinate the initial staffing of volunteers for the Grosvenor Square Condolence Tent and Memorial, combining Embassy volunteers with those from local American organizations. For weeks following that tragic day, she coordinated the volunteer effort to reply to "mountains of condolence mail," writing many responses herself. During this period, she also spent many hours answering calls and talking, often in person, to bereaved and shocked American and British citizens. Many volunteered long hours for a variety of tasks, but according to her nomination "*no one volunteered so consistently on so many levels and had an impact on so many people as has Ruth Roberts.*"

In **Prague, The Czech Republic (2003)**, **Anne Bridgman** established a local pre-school and authored the booklet *Prague for Kids*, working within Prague's English-speaking community to disseminate information and options for living with kids in the Czech Republic. She was a driving force behind the formation of the Green Tree Learning Center, the Embassy community association's preschool. Her lead role as the chairperson of the Parents Advisory Committee (PAC) assured that the preschool met community needs and stayed affordable for Embassy families. Her publication, *Prague for Kids*, met an essential need for expatriates. Living in the Czech Republic is complicated by the difficulty of its language. This English-language resource book proved invaluable for English-speaking parents looking for things to do with children. All proceeds from its sale went to charity. In nominating Anne for a SOSA, Amy Hyatt noted her "*qualities that make a difference,*" including providing much-needed guidance to harried parents.

As a master fundraiser, **Angie Vernal Young** led an effort to assist the Slovene International Ladies Association (SILA) with their annual bazaar. During her time in **Ljubljana, Slovenia (2004)**, she trained volunteers from the American Embassy community and created a telephone committee that contacted American companies to donate funds or products to the American Table at the bazaar. On a yearly basis, she developed themes for the table and selected U.S. products to feature. With her involvement, the bazaar overall nearly doubled its earnings and donated over \$130,000 to charity organizations, with the American Table donating a hefty chunk of the proceeds. Angie was a driving force in the bazaar's growth over several years. What began as a small event at a local hotel grew into a major fund-generating production at Ljubljana's convention center. Nominator Dean Haas noted that Angie was the "*soul of the American Embassy community*" and made demonstrable contributions in Slovenia.

In **Vilnius, Lithuania (2004)**, the collapse of a state-run social welfare system left orphanages bereft of funding and direction, clinics ill-equipped to manage the rising tide of drug abuse and HIV/AIDS, and no infrastructure to confront new social problems like trafficking in persons. **Charlotte Davnie's** selfless devotion to improving the quality of life for the poor and disadvantaged during Lithuania's transition to democracy "*spread extraordinary good will for the United States, energized Lithuanians to establish their own system of charity and good*

"As one Bosnian publication wrote, Bonnie has become the "First Lady of Bosnia" through her caring and non-stop help of others."

-- from the nomination of Bonnie Miller

works, and changed the lives of scores of Lithuanians who dream that their new democracy will bring them a better life," according to nominator Ambassador Stephen Mull. Her good works extended to infants with developmental disorders, orphans, victims of trafficking in person rings, and the homeless. She partnered with the local chapter of Sisters of Charity (Mother Teresa's Order), a sheltered workshop for disabled adults, and the International Women's Association, and built connections between the American, international and Lithuanian communities.

In **Kiev, Ukraine (2007)**, **Carma Ryan** served as Charity Coordinator for the International Women's Club of Kiev (IWCK), with responsibility for the oversight, management, and distribution of some \$130,000 to 11 grant recipients. As a result, 30 children with autism received recreational therapy and 9 preschoolers with Downs Syndrome received inclusive schooling for the school year. She also oversaw the organization's food delivery program to 53 homebound recipients. Carma chaired the annual IWCK bazaar, which raised the funds. Her efforts to improve the bazaar raised additional monies to provide funding for several local NGOs, a senior citizen's center, an orphanage, and others.

Using her extensive knowledge of computer networking and database management, **Katherine Falterman** managed information for a non-profit animal shelter that cared for cats in one of the oldest temples in **Rome, Italy (2007)**. The Torre Argentina Cat Shelter benefited from Katherine's dedication to their Adoption at a Distance Program, assuring that international donations were tracked and answered. Among other volunteer tasks, Katherine also became the resident expert in caring for newborn kittens and often brought tiny kittens to her home until they were strong enough to return to the shelter.

Dennis Nice's volunteer efforts spanned a three-year assignment in **Zagreb, Croatia (2007)**. As two-term Chairman of the School Board of the American International School of Zagreb (AISZ), he was a catalyst for the identification of a much-needed new school facility. Drawing on his engineering experience and strong leadership skills, Dennis formed a multi-cultural team of architects, engineers, investors, and lawyers to tackle the challenge of creating a viable school plan, selecting a site location, and planning for construction. When appointed Chairman of the School Board, he led a successful search for a new school director, established a financial aid policy, increased classes to accommodate waiting lists, increased the number of international teachers, and paid off a facilities improvement loan two years in advance, thereby saving AISZ thousands of dollars. Dennis's efforts not only impacted the Embassy community but the entire international community as well.

SOSA Award Winners and Nominees

Winners are noted with an asterisk (*)

ALBANIA

2004 Amy Sebes (Tirana) *

ARMENIA

2009 Zachary Burstein (Yerevan)

AUSTRIA

2005 Shirley Connuck (Vienna)
2004 Marguerite M. Davis (Strasbourg)
1994 Tom Davis (Vienna)
1992 Ron Smith (Vienna)

AZERBAIJAN

2005 Leslie Harnish (Baku)

BELGIUM

1995 Nancy Tokola (Brussels)
1995 John W. O'Rourke (Brussels)

BOSNIA

2002 Bonnie Miller (Sarajevo)
2001 Bonnie Miller (Sarajevo)
1999 Anne Kauzlarich (Sarajevo)

BULGARIA

2005 Debra McFarland (Sofia)
2002 Cathy McElhannon (Sofia)
1997 Merlyn McCartney (Sofia) *
1995 Georgeanne Rollman (Sofia)

CROATIA

2007 Dennis Nice (Zagreb) *
2000 Lynne G. Montgomery (Zagreb) *

CYPRUS

2003 Ann Chenevey (Nicosia)

CZECH REPUBLIC

2005 Cleo Appleton (Prague)
2003 Anne C. Bridgman (Prague) *
2002 Sheri M. Bochantin (Prague)
1993 Mattras (Prague - winner)

FINLAND

1994 Madelyn Elaine Curtin (Helsinki)

FRANCE

2002 Odile Brock (Marseille)
1995 Melanie Billings-Yun (Paris)

GERMANY

2007 Michael Gilmore (Frankfurt)
2003 Barbara and Jim Brown (Berlin)
2002 Barbara Brown (Berlin)
2001 Inge Gill (Frankfurt)
2000 Robin Ratermanis (Frankfurt)
1999 Grace Sharples Cooke (Berlin)
1999 Jan K. Skoog (Frankfurt)
1998 Michael Hoff (Bonn)
1997 Valerie Wilbrecht (Bonn)
1997 Michael Gilmore (Frankfurt)
1996 Michael Gilmore (Frankfurt)
1995 Roscoe Lindsey (Bonn)
1995 Connie Joy (Berlin)
1994 Cheryl Tlan (Berlin)
1992 Janet Keyes (Bonn)
1992 Noreen Cull (Frankfurt)

GREECE

2007 Vicki Sliwa (Athens)
2006 Thomas Yazdgerdi (Athens) *
2003 Bonnie Miller (Athens)
2001 Elizabeth Baylies (Athens)
2000 Karen T. Soiles (Athens)
1997 James Tuson (Athens)
1996 Alexander Von Plinsky III (Athens) *
1995 Sandra Gust (Athens)
1994 Anne Williams (Athens)
1992 Estelle Sotirnos (Athens)
1992 Casper Pelczynski (Athens)

HUNGARY

2003 Lisa O'Sattin (Budapest)
1994 Kathleen and David Cowles (Budapest) *

IRELAND

2005 Alan Elrod/Sarah Erdman/Jack Swope/Michael Scanlon (Dublin)

ITALY

2008 Michael J. Ma (Florence)
2008 Flor Atanacio Acosta (Rome)
2007 Katherine L. Falterman (Rome)
2007 Hugo Rodriguez (Rome)
2001 Deborah B. Callahan (Rome)
1995 Carolyn P. Grosso (Rome)

LATVIA

2003 Johanna Braden (Riga)
2001 Sgt. Shane Mathers (Riga)
1999 Johanna Braden (Riga) *

LITHUANIA

2004 Charlotte Davnie (Vilnius)
1999 Coleen White-Harvey (Vilnius)

LUXEMBOURG

2009 Lara L. Center (Luxembourg) *
2008 Lara L. Center (Luxembourg)
1992 Le Rowell (Luxembourg) *

MACEDONIA

2008 Timothy Donnay and Samuel Gould (Skopje)
2007 Rianna-Mia Martinez (Skopje)
2005 Mark Wilson (Skopje) *

MALTA

1995 Lilith Anderson (Valletta)

MOLDOVA

2008 Kyra A. Buchko (Chisinau)

NORWAY

2005 Ivy Gordon (Oslo)

POLAND

2005 Laurie Louis de Villa (Warsaw)
2003 Stacy Mansager (Warsaw)
1994 Gerald Anderson (Warsaw)

PORTUGAL

2007 Alison Ramirez (Lisbon)
2005 Mari O'Connor (Lisbon)
1997 Ana Luz (Lisbon)
1996 Donna Miller Blackburn (Lisbon)
1994 Lawrence B. Salmon (Azores)

ROMANIA

2009 Christian M. Howey (Bucharest)
2005 Liz Blair (Bucharest)
2004 Deborah T. Delare (Bucharest)
2002 Carol Ayers (Bucharest) *
2000 Carolyn R. Johnson (Bucharest)
1999 Sarah Einik (Bucharest)
1993 Toni Markle (Bucharest)
1992 Allen Docal (Bucharest)

RUSSIA

2004 Maxine Brinsfield (Moscow)
2000 Greg Grenier (Moscow)
1998 Mario A. Gonzalez (St. Petersburg)
1997 John Pereiri (Moscow)
1996 Robert Howd (St. Petersburg)
1996 Liz Perry (Moscow)
1995 Lisa Matthews (Moscow) *

SLOVENIA

2004 Angelena Vernal Young (Ljubljana)

SPAIN

1991 Sheila Switzer (Madrid) *

SWEDEN

2008 Daniele A. Schoenauer (Stockholm)
1994 Barbara Levin (Stockholm)

THE NETHERLANDS

2003 Robert McDaniel (The Hague)
2003 Nancy Tokola (The Hague)
2001 Anja Lundberg (The Hague) *
1997 Julie Murphy (The Hague)
1994 Gay Fantozzi (The Hague)
1992 David and Wanda Grosche (The Hague)

TURKEY

2008 Bridget L. Guerrero (Ankara) *
1999 Jan Kilner (Ankara)
1997 Thomas Carter (Istanbul)
1996 Dorothy Clunan (Ankara)
1995 Michael Bjork and Neil Townsend (Ankara)

UKRAINE

2007 Carma Ryan (Kiev)
1998 Miriam Kaiser (Kiev)

UNITED KINGDOM

2002 Ruth Roberts (London)

YUGOSLAVIA

1998 Keith Houk (Belgrade)

End
