

Recognize The Outstanding Volunteers In Your Community

AAFSW is seeking nominations for the 2008 SOSA awards (Secretary of State Awards for Outstanding Volunteerism Abroad).

Now is the time for those of you living overseas to look around in your communities and to recognize those employees, family members and members of household who are doing exceptional volunteer work within the Mission or directed towards the host country.

Each year, AAFSW solicits nominations from posts overseas for the prestigious SOSA Awards. SOSA recognizes volunteer efforts in the following areas:

- 1) remarkable service to the Mission community;
- 2) outstanding activities directed towards the host country; and
- 3) exceptional service in emergency situations.

Evaluation factors considered in the selection process include: scope and reach of activities, sustainability, ingenuity, and leadership.

Check out the AASW website at <http://www.aafsw.org/aafsw/awards/2007awards.htm> to read about the 2007 winners and the extraordinary projects they spearheaded.

One recipient is chosen from each regional bureau within the Department for their volunteer achievement. Winners will receive a cash award of \$3000, a certificate signed by the Secretary of State, and a pin commemorating the awards ceremony which will take place on December 9, 2008 in the Benjamin Franklin Room of the Harry S. Truman Building.

Nominations for the SOSA Awards should be sent to the AAFSW Office by e-mail (office@aafsw.org) or by fax to 703-820-5421. The announcement cable for SOSA will go out at the end of April and will include the specific requirements for nominations. Check with your CLO or Management Officer for a copy of the cable. Deadline for submission is September 12, 2008.

So many amazing volunteers work tirelessly to improve the quality of life for others. Now is the opportunity to recognize these people and acknowledge the difference they are making. Posts or individuals may submit as many nominations as they deem worthy. Take the time to write up an award nomination for the heroes in your community.

WELCOME TO NEW AND RETURNING MEMBERS

Janet D. Ball
Namiko Burleson
Jennifer R. Dorroh
Emily S. Fertik
Elizabeth A. Hubbard
Sharon A. Howe
Sarah A. Simons
Brandy Lynn Witthoft

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Hon. James A. Baker III
Charlotte Harrell
Hon. George P. Shultz

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AAFSW
5555 Columbia Pike
Suite 208
Arlington, VA 22204-3117
tel: 703-820-5420
fax: 703-820-5421
email: office@aafsw.org
Website: www.aafsw.org

May Program

U.S.-Mexican Relations as Viewed by Mexico

Ambassador Arturo Sarukhan represents one of the two most important countries bordering the United States – Mexico, our neighbor to the south.

Relations between the two countries seemed to be going moderately well until 9/11 struck. This turned the the attention of the U.S. to the Middle East, leaving relations with Mexico, Central and South America on the back burner.

However, illegal immigrants crossing the Rio Grande kept increasing, causing great concern in U.S. border states. This pressured the U.S. government to take stronger legal action as well as to increase border controls. A fence was planned, and has been partially constructed, to keep out illegal aliens who were presumably taking jobs from American citizens.

A new President of Mexico, Felipe Calderón, was elected in 2006. He had different views of the immigration problem and was more than willing to find solutions not through fence building but through diplomacy. To this end, and to start the process, he asked a career diplomat and close friend (who had worked on his presidential campaign) to be Mexico's Ambassador to the United States, Arturo Sarukhan.

I was privileged to hear the ambassador give an outstanding presentation at the Library of Congress a few months ago, in which he brought out important data regarding the immigration problem. Since this has implications for both the US and Mexico, I wanted to share his unique point of view.



Ambassador Sarukhan's background includes a B.A. from the University of Mexico, followed by an M.A. in US Foreign Policy from the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) of the John Hopkins University of Washington DC. He was also the recipient of both Fulbright and Ford Foundation Scholarships.

His career path has been so varied and outstanding that we can only mention a few titles: Director of Counter Narcotics and Law Enforcement Issues at the Mexican Embassy in the US and National Coordinator for Multi-Lateral Mechanisms against Illicit Drugs (NEM of the OAS). From 2003 until 2006 he served as the Consul General of Mexico in New York City.

Barbara Gordon, AAFSW Program Chair

MAY 20 PROGRAM: US-MEXICO RELATIONS AS VIEWED BY MEXICO

PLEASE REPLY NO LATER THAN TUESDAY, MAY 13, 2008.

The event takes place on Tuesday, May 20 from 10:00 AM to 12 noon at the Department of State (C Street Entrance.) Please send this form and check made out to AAFSW for \$15 per person to:

AAFSW Reservations, 5555 Columbia Pike, Suite 208, Arlington, VA 22204-3117

Register online at www.aafsw.org.

MAY 20 PROGRAM

Name (as you wish it to appear on the name tag)

Date of Birth and Passport or Driver's License Number:

Telephone

Name of guest(s), D.O.B.'s and Passport or Driver's License Numbers:

AFSA Update: Retiree Health Benefits

By AFSA Retiree Vice President Bill Farrand.

Summary: This is not a call to action, but AFSA does want to make you aware of an issue that could put Foreign Service retiree health benefits at risk. As explained in detail below, a recent Office of Personnel Management proposal could reduce prescription drug benefits for Medicare-eligible retirees. AFSA is concerned that this OPM proposal to change FEHBP benefits could be a first step in creating a separate federal health benefits system for Medicare-eligible retirees. Because of a recent Supreme Court action removing any legal impediment to prevent employers from reducing or eliminating health benefits for these retirees, such an OPM change could lead to negative impacts on Foreign Service retirees. AFSA will keep monitoring this and will oppose any changes that would harm our retirees.

In a “call letter” sent March 11 to participating health plans, the Office of Personnel Management outlined its 2009 goals for the Federal Employee Health Benefit Program. The call letter signals the beginning of negotiations for 2009 between health plans and OPM, which administers the FEHBP.

OPM asked the health plans to submit proposals for a pilot program to enhance coordination between FEHBP and Medicare. It also asked the health plans to improve benefits for hard-of-hearing adults (professional services and hearing aids).

OPM explained that the pilot program would be a sub-option for Medicare-eligible enrollees within their existing plan options. Pilot programs would feature “Medicare wrap-around benefits” or “premium pass-through accounts”, so that a part of each retiree’s FEHBP premium could be used to pay for Medicare B, C, or D premiums. Participation in the pilot program would be voluntary. Enrollees who opt for Medicare D coverage would continue to pay the same premiums as they did for their high, standard, or basic FEHBP options.

FEHBP health plans are now the primary insurers for prescription drugs; FEHBP enrollees bear the cost of “co-pays” and deductibles. The OPM proposal would designate Medicare D (the federal prescription drug coverage program) as the primary insurer of those participating in the pilot programs, and health carriers would become secondary, paying only the deductibles and co-pays. According to one knowledgeable source, OPM expects the pilot program to enhance drug coverage for seniors while reducing the cost of prescription

drug coverage for health carriers. We note, however, that at least one carrier has decided not to participate in the pilot program on the grounds that it would result in offering retirees a limited list of approved prescription drugs and require prior authorization. It should be emphasized that FEHBP carriers now provide benefits that are at least equal to or better than Medicare D and many provide significantly superior benefits.

The proposal - which has not been subjected to public scrutiny or detailed explanation - raises a number of questions.

First, how will FEHBP carriers and Medicare D plans negotiate differences in formularies (the list of drugs a plan will pay for), prior authorizations, the “doughnut” and other restrictions, both in practice and administratively?

Second, what are the financial implications of coordinating benefits? Who will pay the increasing costs for primary prescription drug insurance coverage - Medicare D carriers, the federal government or, ultimately, we the enrollees?

The Medicare Modernization and Improvement Act of 2003 is a cautionary tale. It created Medicare Advantage Plans (or private commercial alternatives to traditional Medicare) that combined Parts A, B, and C within the traditional Medicare system. These private carriers now receive government subsidies of about \$1,000 per year per participant - a matter of growing controversy.

The Supreme Court has denied review of a lower court decision ruling that employers could reduce - or eliminate altogether - health benefits for Medicare-eligible retirees. Like NARFE (the National Association of Active and Retired Federal Employees), AFSA is wary of the OPM proposal because it could open the door to establishing a separate FEHBP plan - with lesser benefits and higher premiums costs - based either on age or Medicare eligibility.

Before any pilot project is implemented, the OPM proposal must be subjected to open explanation and public discussion of its effect on federal retiree health benefits. FEHBP is the gold standard for health benefits, including drug prescription coverage. Any OPM initiative that would reduce benefits for retirees only would be unacceptable to AFSA. We will keep you posted.

Professional Fellowships for Foreign Service Family Members

AAFSW needs your help to try to solve one of the perpetual problems in the Foreign Service

Spousal employment in a world of dual career couples is a bigger problem than ever for our internationally mobile community.

Improving the options for family members is one key to keeping employees and families in the Foreign Service for a lifetime career.

Now you can make a difference! Support the Foreign Service by making a tax-deductible donation to the Family Member Employment Fellowship Fund, a cooperative effort between AAFSW and the Family Liaison Office to support family member employment.

What is the Professional Fellowship Fund?

For the past 3 years the Cox Foundation has funded a creative pilot program offering fellowships of up to \$2,000.00 to unemployed family members overseas at posts where there is little opportunity for employment either within the Mission or on the local economy. Those who have qualified for these fellowships are professionals who wish to continue their careers by continuing their education, by attending professional accreditation programs, by enrolling in employment enhancing courses, or entrepreneurs who wish to start their own portable businesses abroad. This morale enhancing and creative program grew from \$25,000.00 to \$1000.000. Unless you can help, because of tight budgets, this program will be discontinued at a critical time.

AAFSW is a 501 3c and your donation is tax deductible. Write your check to AAFSW, and note that it is designated for the Professional fellowships.

Foreign Service employees and family members thank you.

AAFSW
5555 Columbia Pike
Suite 208
Arlington, VA 22204-3117
office@aafsw.org
703 820-5420

Foreign-Born Spouses News and Events

The Foreign-Born Spouses Group enjoyed a Japanese tea ceremony in March, courtesy of Master of the Tea Ceremony, Yoko Shoji Moskowitz.

The FBS also hosted an Easter Egg hunt for Foreign Service children on Saturday, March 23 at the Oakwood Falls Church.

May Events

We cordially invite you to join us on Wednesday, May 14th for a private tour of the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, followed by a luncheon on the terrace of the Kennedy Center.

In addition, there will be a Hail and Farewell Luncheon honoring Foreign-Born Spouses leaving for their overseas assignments and welcoming new arrivals to Washington. This event will take place Tuesday May 20th, at 11:30 AM in Capitol Room at the Oakwood Falls Church. There will be a guest speaker from the Family Liaison Office who will provide valuable information to assist family members with a wealth of resources.

Please RSVP to Sheila Switzer 703-569-8867, sswitzer9@verizon.net or Carmen Geis 703-503-9117, carmengeis@gmail.com.

In Other News

One of our members, Elisa Freeman, recently established a Financial Aid Scholarship in the name of her husband Anthony Freeman. The scholarship will be awarded in perpetuity, starting this year.

Tony Freeman, who passed away last May, was the first Assistant Secretary of State for International Labor Affairs in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor at the State Department.

For more photos of the Foreign-Born Spouses Group and other AAFSW interest group events, visit the members-only section of www.aafsm.org.



The Foreign-Born Spouses group enjoyed an authentic Japanese tea ceremony presented by Yoko Shoji Moskowitz pictured here with Sheila Switzer, Keiko Ota Dieterich, Namiko Burleson, Eiko Fjeld, and Kimiko Richardson.



Foreign Service kids had a great time hunting Easter Eggs at a party sponsored by the Foreign-Born Spouses at the Oakwood Falls Church.

Life After the Foreign Service: “LAFS”

Important opportunity for “retiring” spouses!

Is your spouse going to be hanging up the Foreign Service shingle and looking for new employment or retiring? The National Foreign Affairs Training Center’s Transition Center offers the Retirement Seminar and the Job Search Program to give assistance on this important life-changing transition.

Maybe your spouse is already signed up for one of the upcoming Job Search sessions that start on the following dates:

- * August 4, 2008
- * October 6, 2008

Did you know that you could attend much of the content in these workshops as well? There is extremely helpful job and career change information that is immensely useful to you both. Additionally, AAFSW sponsors a special session for spouses on Wednesday of the first week that deals with the issues you and your retiring partner undergo and highlights which sessions of the program you don’t want to miss.

You are welcome to join your spouse for the opening session of the Job Search Program, then you will be directed to your special session at the appropriate time. Make sure your spouse knows that you are invited – you may not hear anything about this from the Transition Center’s announcement cable, and neither of you may realize this! It’s worth it to make your plans accordingly so you can attend as well.

Your participation as a spouse is FREE – just please let us know that you will be attending by calling AAFSW at 703-820-5420 or sending an email to office@aafsw.org. You need not be a member of AAFSW to enjoy the benefits of this important session. You only need a photo ID to get into the Foreign Service Institute in Arlington. If you know someone else who is retiring – please pass on this important information!

Training Center Courses May 2008

The George P. Shultz National Foreign Affairs Training Center offers training for all foreign affairs employees and Eligible Family Members (EFMs). Classes are held at the Shultz NFATC FSI at 4000 Arlington Blvd in Arlington, VA and fill quickly. You can check the FSI course catalog on the Department’s OpenNet (<http://fsi.state.gov>) for space availability.

For tuition-based courses, non-State employees/family members must submit an SF 182 (with fiscal data) through their Training Officer to the Office of the Registrar at FSI. State Department employees and eligible family members enroll through the employee’s CDO. The FSI Registrar must receive written notice of cancellation five workdays before the course begins.

For non-tuition courses all employees/family members - regardless of agency - can register through TC at 703-302-7268 or email FSITCTraining@state.gov. The deadline for all TC registrations is by 11:30 am the day before the class. Be advised, some classes may be full by this date.

In consideration of others, please arrange your own childcare when attending FSI TC classes for adults. Programs appropriate for children (MQ210 and MQ230) are indicated in the FSI catalog or on TC advertisements.

- 5/3 Explaining America 9-4
- 5/6 Advanced Security Overseas Seminar 9-4
- 5/7 Safe Overseas Home 6-8:30
- 5/10 Communicating Across Cultures 9-4 5/12-5/13 Security Overseas Seminar 9-4
- 5/17 Protocol 9-4
- 5/21 Legal Considerations in the FS 6-8.30
- 5/29 Special Needs Forum 9-4
- 5/31 Going Overseas for Singles and Couples 9-12
- 5/31 Going Overseas for Families 9-12
- 5/31 Going Overseas Logistics for Adults 1-3:30
- 5/31 Going Overseas Logistics for Kids 1-3:30

THANKS TO AAFSW

By Kim Furnish

A few years ago a funny event occurred in my life - my dear, reliable attorney husband decided to join the Foreign Service. Exams were taken, medical and security forms were completed until our eyes bled. Then one day an email reading "move to Washington DC" appeared in his inbox. Life changed immediately.

A "For Sale" sign appeared in our front yard and a team of six men swooped through and packed all of our things - mostly for storage. We flew to National Airport with only hotel reservations and suitcases filled with dark suits (husband) and toys (children). Our nomadic life had officially begun. Soon we were presented with a bid list and from our room at the Embassy Suites we debated Moscow over Bujumbura. Are the schools good in Frankfurt? Where the heck is Ljubljana? (It's in a beautiful European country called Slovenia by the way).

I attended a series of classes for spouses at FSI and in between keeping two pre-schoolers occupied in the toy room I got to hear a presentation from Terri Williams, who represented something called AAFSW. 'How nice,' I thought, 'Something for the wives and, um, husbands'.

Soon I discovered that it was more than nice, it was a necessity. The AAFSW website offered information and help geared specifically to my needs. Want a rental home in Arlington? Check out the classifieds. Read reviews of temporary housing in the area. Learn about support networks, playgroups, schools, you name it. Soon, I joined their Yahoo Group Livelines, which provides internet networking for the Foreign Service Community. The Group is only enhanced by the presence of spouses who work in many of the specific departments at State where I had so many questions (thank you Mettel!).

Then I learned some of the history of the organization; most importantly that AAFSW had been pivotal in the establishment of the Family Liaison Office. Without FLO, I knew even as a fledgling, life as a Foreign Service spouse would be tough indeed. I also learned that in the 1980's AAFSW went to bat for legislation for divorced Foreign Service spouses who had given up their own careers (and pensions) to live a mobile lifestyle. I was impressed by AAFSW's accomplishments.

Once we moved overseas my connection with AAFSW remained strong as a source of support and as a social outlet. I learned the importance of having people "there" who know exactly what you are going through. AAFSW also became a source of income, they hired me to handle their media needs and I was lucky enough to work with two fabulous AAFSW Presidents, Judy Felt and Faye Barnes.

Today, things are changing even more for this nomadic family. After two great years serving as AAFSW's Media Director I will be headed to FSI for training to become an Foreign Service Officer. So, the tandem adventure begins. But, luckily I will still have AAFSW there to guide me along the way.

Help Wanted

2008-2009 Wings of AWAL Illustrator

The Foreign Service Youth Foundation's Wings of AWAL, a quarterly print and electronic internationally distributed newsletter by and for Foreign Service high schoolers, is looking for a Foreign Service high school student to design its covers for 2008-9 school year.

Candidate should be reliable, enthusiastic and creative and able to meet deadlines.

Start August 2008--pay is \$25 per edition/4 editions per year.

Please send your inquiries or your cover letter with sample of your artwork to fsyf@fsyf.org

Great Experience for college applications!!

Contact AAFSW

OFFICERS

Honorary President
Diana Negroponte

President
Faye Barnes
president@aafsw.org

Presidents Emeritae
Judy Felt
Terri L. Williams
Mette Beecroft
emerita@aafsw.org

1st Vice-President
Elaine Neumann
Tel: 703-920-5773
vicepresident1@aafsw.org

2nd Vice-President
Katy Koch
Tel: 703-350-6604
vicepresident2@aafsw.org

Secretary
Barbara Ratigan
Tel: 703-536-2015
secretary@aafsw.org

Treasurer
Lucy Whitley
Tel: 703-536-2183
treasurer@aafsw.org

Assistant Treasurer
Vacant

Membership
Katarina Hamilton
membership@aafsw.org

Programs
Barbara Gordon
Tel: 202-338-0176
programs@aafsw.org

Public Relations
Lesley Dorman
Tel: 202-484-3497
publicrelations@aafsw.org

Forum
Judy Felt
Tel: 703-370-1414

ADMINISTRATION & SERVICES

AAFSSW Office
Margaret Teich
5555 Columbia Pike,
#208
Arlington, VA
22204-3117
Tel: 703-820-5420
Fax: 703-820-5421
office@aafsw.org

Housing Desk
Employee
Services Center
Main State, Room 1252
Tel/Fax: 202-647-3573
housing@aafsw.org

Marguerite Fry
Tel: 202-333-0611

Lesley Dorman
Tel: 202-484-3497

Kay Youngflesh
Tel: 703-683-0890

Book Room
Main State
Room B-816
Robin Jones
Tel: 202-223-5796
bookroom@aafsw.org

Media Director
Kim Furnish
editor@aafsw.org

Media Production Manager
Kelly Midura
kelly@aafsw.org

Website Advertising
Jeff Porter
Tel: 1-443-618-9046
advertising@aafsw.org

Livelines Moderator
Bert Curtis
livelines@aafsw.org

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

AFSA Liaison
Patty Ryan
Tel: 202-966-7696
Fax: 202-362-1716

Ann La Porta
Tel: 202-248-4246
afsarep@aafsw.org

Archivist
Vacant

Art Corner
Dianne Bodeen
Marion Precht
artcorner@aafsw.org

BookFair
Mette Beecroft
Tel: 301-320-7698
Fax: 301-320-0963
bookfair@aafsw.org

CLO Association
Vacant
clogroup@aafsw.org

Foreign-Born Spouses
Sheila Switzer
Tel: 703-569-8867
sswitzer9@verizon.net

Carmen Geis
Tel: 703-503-9117
fbs@aafsw.org

French Group
Christel McDonald
Tel: 703-525-9755
frenchgroup@aafsw.org

Legislative Liaison
Chris Zarr
Tel: 301-229-7218
congressrep@aafsw.org

Loans/Adult Education
Joan Pryce
Tel: 703-739-0770
edloans@aafsw.org

Medical Evacuee Support
Judy Smith
Tel: 202-882-3021
medevac@aafsw.org

Oral History
Jewell Fenzi
Tel: 202-387-4024
oralhistory@aafsw.org

Playgroup
Jen Hoyer
playgroup@aafsw.org

Post Representatives
Vacant

Scholarships
Carolyn Connell
Tel: 703-241-2422
scholarship@aafsw.org

Senior Living
Marguerite Anderson
Tel: 301-652-5433
seniorliving@aafsw.org

SOSA
Cathy Salvaterra
sosa@aafsw.org

State Liaison
Mette Beecroft
Tel: 301-320-7698
Fax: 301-320-0963
staterep@aafsw.org

Women in Transition
Nancy Longmyer
Tel: 703-532-4694
divorce@aafsw.org

5555 Columbia Pike
Suite 208
Arlington, VA
22204-3117



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