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GLOBAL EMPLOYMENT CONNECTIONS

WINTER 2008

“Your Link to Global Workplace Information”

Global Employment Advisor Conference 2007

Over the last year, the Family Liaison Office (FLO) has been actively expanding its Global Employment Initiative/Strategic Networking Assistance Program (GEI/SNAP). The program has opened seven new field offices at post in Kuwait, Bogotá, Brasilia and São Paulo, Paris, Yerevan, Manila, and a regional Baltic office based in Helsinki serving Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius. FLO has also extended regional pilots to Copenhagen, Sarajevo, and Guatemala and Tegucigalpa. In addition, FLO’s two year pilots in Belgrade, Lima, Rome, and The Hague have all successfully transferred to ICASS funding!

FLO hosted the 2007 Professional Skills Development Training Conference for Global Employment Advisors (GEAs) during the week of September 17-21, 2007. The conference was held in the newly renovated George C. Marshall Conference Center and East Auditorium in the Department of State. A total of 22 GEAs from GEI/SNAP field offices overseas, representing 37 posts in 32 countries, attended the training.

The five-day intensive training included sessions on the

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Deputy Secretary Negroponte with FLO Director Ann Greenberg, GEI/SNAP Coordinator Aida Sacks, & GEA training participants

Finding a Niche in the Mexican Market

Since accepting the role of Global Employment Advisor (GEA) in Mexico City in 2005, Maria French has been actively exploring the English language instruction market at the professional level in Mexico to provide consulting opportunities for family members in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Maria believes this type of employment is a great “portable career” opportunity for family members who do not speak the local language but who want to work independently, earn a re-

spectable income, and have flexibility to handle family needs.

Many of the family members who seek employment through GEI/SNAP Mexico are interested in teaching EFL as consultants, but often lack the formalized training or experience needed to pursue this career option. With this in mind, Maria took the initiative to facilitate ongo-

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A Celebration of Latin American Culture

By Frale Oyen

Victor Rojas is having the time of his life. When he and his wife, Susan Bridenstine, Cultural Affairs Officer with the U.S. Embassy Yerevan, arrived in Armenia in early September, he never dreamed he would find a job that would allow him to combine his love of music with his love of food – Latino food.

He believed he would be lucky if he found a job in the Embassy. However, within days of the couple's arrival



LATIN AMERICAN FESTIVAL — Victor Rojas performs Peruvian music at The Club, 40 Tumanyan St.

at Post, Victor, who is originally from Venezuela, met with Global Employment Advisor (GEA) Aneta Arakelyan of the Global Employment Initiative/Strategic Networking Assistance Program (GEI/SNAP). She urged him to contact Ashot Parsyan, director of Centro Hispano, an organization established to promote the Spanish culture.

It wasn't long before Victor, 31, began conducting Spanish conversation classes at Centro Hispano. A few weeks later he and Ashot began coordinating the Festival of Latin American Cuisine and Music, which was held at The Club in November and early December. The festival gave Victor, who plays bass guitar, the opportunity to do what he loves best – performing and cooking.

He and Ashot found and familiarized themselves with recipes from different parts of Latin America and then taught the chef at The Club how to prepare each dish. The desserts were made by Ashot and Victor, who performed throughout the evening.

"I never expected anything like this," said Victor. "I didn't expect to meet Spanish speakers, didn't expect to meet people who would be interested in learning about Latin American culture."

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Discovering Your Opportunities

When Dr. Sandra Wang-Harris and her husband discovered they would be moving to Panama in the summer of 2007, finding a job was not a top priority for Sandra. However, as a doctor of optometry and an accomplished working health professional in the United States, Sandra knew it would not be long before she needed to expand her life outside the home.

After contacting FLO, Sandra was introduced to the Global Employment Advisor (GEA) in Panama, Ariatna Bustamante. Ariatna did not waste any time and as early as six months prior to Sandra's arrival at post, began soliciting information about her experience, interests, and possible working conditions. Sandra noted that "conversing by email, I told [Ariatna] I knew very little Spanish, however, this did not seem to daunt her as she quickly pursued possible ventures for me."

Soon after Sandra's arrival at post, Ariatna arranged several interviews, accompanying Sandra to her potential employers and acting as a translator when necessary. "This was a completely new experience for me... in my ten years of professional experience, I have never had a

personal job hunter that solicited a job, attended my interviews, and negotiated salaries!" In the following weeks, Sandra and Ariatna succeeded in identifying two opportunities that suited Sandra's medical background and interest in the public health field.

Beginning in January 2008, Sandra will be working at the Peace Corps office in Panama to assist with eye exams for the organization's volunteers. In addition, Sandra will start at the Caja de Seguro Social/ Hospital de Especialidades Pediátricas in March 2008 in their newly formed pediatric HIV program. At the Caja de Seguro, Sandra will be developing a proposal for the pediatric HIV program, seeing patients in conjunction with a Panamanian public health officer, and receiving instructions from a preceptor who is the Director of the National Epidemiology Programs in Panama. This opportunity with the Caja de Seguro will allow Sandra to fulfill a public health role in the Panamanian community as well as allow her to complete her thesis and the practical experience required for her Master's degree in Public Health.





From Scientist to Photographer - Trying Something New

Ethan James, Freelance Photographer - San Salvador

At this moment, I am a fulltime photographer for a local daily newspaper, *El Mundo*, in San Salvador. My wife and I came to El Salvador after she was posted to work with the Embassy. My previous work experience had been as a researcher in the field of molecular microbiology and immunology. After my last job as a research professor at the University of Chicago, I was looking to do something different. Science has a great way of making you feel dumb all the time; sitting in windowless room for 11 hours a day examining radioactive tumor cells and feeling stupid was getting a little old. Luckily, my wife, the smart one, was accepted into the Foreign Service and this provided an avenue for change.

Despite having limited Spanish speaking ability, I was looking forward to finding work on the local economy. The most viable options for me were to teach science or to find a research position. Gail Emrick, the Global Employment Advisor (GEA), has done a tremendous job helping me work on a career development and networking plan. She got me a great interview with the Ministry of Health for a volunteer position. At the same time, I have always taken photos and enjoyed photography. I thought if I am not going to make any money, I might as well not make money doing something I like. I have worked as a music and events photographer, but not on the scale of something like a newspaper. Gail used her contacts to set up an interview with the photo editor of a local newspaper. I made a small portfolio, we went to

the interview, and the editor told me to start the next day!

A typical day for me does not exist. Every day is different. I take hundreds of pictures in a variety of environments. The most enjoyable aspect is that I have seen, or think I have seen, nearly every facet of El Salvadoran life; the good and the bad. Of course, every time I think I have seen it all, I see someone driving a horse around in a Volkswagen microbus, a tattoo faced gang member who loves Jesus, or someone making a hangover remedy



with iguana eggs. My favorite thing about El Salvador, however, is the kindness and generosity of the people here, particularly to a gringo who's waving a camera in their face.

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Using Your Experience to Create a Portable Career

R. Todd Holden - V.P. of Investments, Westminster Financial Companies, Founder of CrossBorder Benefits, LLC - Ottawa

When Todd accompanied his wife to Ottawa, he had twelve years of experience in financial services. Every move has resulted in consternation with respect to Todd's career. "Was he going to be able to take his clients with him?" and "Would he need to find a new employer?" were two questions he faced with every relocation.

In Canada, Todd completed the Canadian Securities Course and earned his Ontario life insurance license so he could pursue his trade in Ottawa. After a brief foray into the Canadian financial services industry, he quickly

came to the conclusion that his future was in the U.S. industry and that he needed to find a firm that would allow him to work wherever his wife's career might take them.

According to Todd, "The U.S. financial services industry is highly regulated, as it should be. Moreover, it is not an industry that lends itself to relocation; most people build a book of clients and stay in one place for their entire career. Thus, I needed to find a reputable independent firm which would be flexible enough to work with me through all my moves, follow industry regulations in a compliant manner, and consider my clients mine. I contacted *Westminster Financial Companies*, a firm started

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fundamentals of placement strategies, effective networking techniques, career counseling and development, internal and external program marketing, regional synergies, and best practices in the field. In addition to presentations on several FLO portfolios, the training included sessions with representatives from SOPEXA Mexico, Manpower, and Going Global. The GEAs also had



(From Left) FLO Director Ann Greenberg, DAS Teddy Taylor, GEA Award Recipients Kate Epperson, Bethany Singer, & Rick Furno, & GEI/SNAP Coordinator Aida Sacks

the opportunity to meet with Deputy Secretary Negro-ponte and discuss the program.

In conjunction with the training conference, Acting Director General Ambassador Heather Hodges hosted a GEA awards ceremony and GEI/SNAP networking reception in the Benjamin Franklin Room of the Department of State. Over 130 people attended the event, including senior executives and representatives from private industry, government, non-governmental, and academic organizations. The event provided a showcase for the opportunities GEI/SNAP offers prospective employers as well as the successes GEAs have achieved for Foreign Service family members overseas. Deputy Assistant Secretary Teddy Taylor presented awards to three GEAs for out-

standing performance in the placement of Foreign Service family members in professional positions overseas: Bethany Singer, GEA at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, came in first place, placing 80 family members during this fiscal year and 230 in total from March 2004.

Kate Epperson, GEA at the U.S. Embassy in Lima since 2006, took second place, placing 70 family members during this fiscal year.

Rick Furno, GEA at the U.S. Embassy in London since 2005, took third place, placing 37 family members during this fiscal year.

Finally, during the training conference, FLO Director, Ann DeLong Greenberg recognized three GEAs who have demonstrated the most effective contact outreach during the past fiscal year. Certificates of Acknowledgement were given to:

Ulrike Patzl, the GEA at U.S. Embassy in Vienna since September 2006, came in first place for her excellent contact outreach to IBM Europe and Western Union.



Martha Hathaway, the GEA at U.S. Embassy Athens since 2006, took second place for her contact outreach efforts to companies in Athens and Cypress.

Melanie McFeeters, the GEA at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul since 2006, took third place for her outreach to Korean companies.



After 600 total placements for Foreign Service family members overseas in FY 07, GEI/SNAP is proud and excited to move forward into the new year with a growing team of qualified and accomplished GEAs.



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Victor's love affair with food began more than ten years ago when, in order to help his mother who was ill, he began preparing meals for himself and his four siblings. As he and wife Susan traveled throughout Latin America – Peru, Brazil, Argentina – he has made it a point of learning how to prepare traditional dishes from each country.

He has also kept up with the musical scene in each of the areas they've been. He plays guitar and, along the way, has taught himself how to play percussion instruments. So it is with relish that he once again takes to the stage. He is also looking forward to helping with the Latino nights held by Centro Hispano and to hosting yet another Latin American Festival.

Original article published in *Bari News*





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ing training workshops and supply teaching materials to EFL consulting candidates. Maria's training with family members and networking efforts with various multinational companies and organizations have resulted in several successful placements with employers such as American Express, Burson Marsteller, Landor Mexico, PSI, and Exxon Mobil. These



types of consulting placements involve business English language training at the professional level, often in technical areas such as finance, technology, health, and communication. A family member who has been teaching English for Burson Marsteller, Landor, and PSI commented that Maria's "encouragement and resourceful-

ness has helped to place many Embassy family members in rewarding employment. Due to [her] aptness in finding companies interested in talent from the US, I have a great job in Mexico. Having this employment has definitely increased my quality of life here."

In the long-term, Maria envisions promoting her EFL consulting program more broadly among family members so that incoming family members would be able to receive training and take over consulting positions vacated by those departing post. Maria's focus is not only on placing her clients in Mexico, but equipping them with transferable skills for employment at any post. "Our goal is to provide family members who are leaving post with options for future assignments as GEI/SNAP Mexico has not only provided the practical experience in well known companies, but the teaching tools and binder for portable career solutions to start a business."

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Maintaining Your Profession Abroad

An Interview with Martin de la Torre - San Salvador

Martin de la Torre moved to San Salvador with his wife, the Department of Justice Attaché, and four young children in October 2005. Prior to coming to San Salvador, the de la Torre family lived in Houston, Texas where Martin's wife was an Assistant United States Attorney and Martin had a private law practice specializing in personal injury litigation.

How did you find out about GEI/SNAP and what kind of assistance did you or are you receiving from the program?

I found out about GEI/SNAP through the CLO. I did not expect to find many opportunities to utilize my legal experience because I wasn't familiar with the Salvadoran legal system and I don't speak Spanish at a professionally functional level. After thoroughly reviewing the parameters of various options (NGO, private practice, etc.), GEI/SNAP arranged several interviews with the leading Salvadoran law firms. Each interview arranged by GEI/SNAP was informative and productive – virtually all of them extended offers. Ultimately I was pleased to affiliate with one of the best firms in El Salvador, Romero Pineda & Associates. Romero Pineda is one of the largest Salvadoran firms and provides a full range of legal services to local, international, and expatriate clientele.

Can you briefly describe your professional history and what you dedicate yourself to now?

I practiced trial law for 13 years in Houston, Texas. I worked with mid-sized and boutique law firms before forming my own firm in 1999, specializing in off shore and oil field injury litigation. While I am obviously focused on different issues here, I am still able to utilize my law degree and my understanding of the U.S. legal system.

Can you describe how you have gone about continuing your profession in San Salvador despite the obstacles?

I am in the process of helping the firm find ways to provide a US style legal experience to its clients. Romero Pineda has a significant US client base and the firm strives to provide a familiar experience to those clients. This process includes identifying and reconciling the differences in legal terminology and translation, legal processes, and professional culture/etiquette. Additionally, I am involved in marketing activities and have contributed to the firm's "Doing Business in El Salvador" publication.

I had very low expectations regarding employment opportunities, especially given the language issue, but was pleasantly surprised at the options that GEI/SNAP assisted in identifying for me. Give Gail Emrick (GEA San Salvador) a call and discuss your skills, there may be a niche for someone just like you.





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After El Salvador I plan on continuing photojournalism either abroad or with US paper. The experience here has



been invaluable and I have crammed more assignments into my time here than many photographers for established pa-

pers in the States...which is lucky because I am not getting any younger.

Some advice for people looking for a career is that you

have access to every level of society and work here; you simply have to know who to talk to. If you called an investment banker in the US and asked him to show you the ropes, he would laugh. Here, you definitely have a chance, and being affiliated with the embassy and working through the GEI/SNAP office does not hurt. My point is figure out what area you want to work in, find out who's running the show, call them and set up an interview. This is where Gail, with her knowledge of El Salvador, is invaluable. No experience? You are going to have to bite the bullet in the salary department but the work will help you later on and you will have a great time. Language fears? You would be amazed how fast you learn. My suggestion would be generate a list of ideas, from the practical to the outrageous, then sit down with Gail and start making calls. That and getting over the initial terror of working in a foreign country is all it takes.

Original article published in *Volcano Views*



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by family friends over twenty years ago. I explained the uniqueness of my situation and they agreed to work with me. So far, it has been a wonderful experience. Westminster's structure is such that I will be able to provide excellent service and customer care to my clientele, regardless of my location or that of my client."

Todd's other venture, *CrossBorder Benefits*, is related to financial services as well. Ottawa is home to a growing high-tech sector. When these companies develop a product or service, they quickly seek to sell into the U.S. market, which means they hire U.S. employees. These employees need group benefits such as health insur-

ance and 401(k)s. Because Canada has universal healthcare and a vastly different retirement regime, many Canadian executives are uncomfortable dealing with U.S. benefits. Todd started *CrossBorder Benefits* to help secure competitive U.S. benefits for these companies and their employees. Todd says, "I've just implemented a 401(k) plan for the U.S. employees of my first Canadian client company. We should have their health insurance up and running in a couple months. My only regret is that I did not pursue this immediately upon arriving in Canada."

Original article published in *The Maple Leaf*



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 Are you interested in being published? Do you have a success story you would like to share?

Send your submission to the *Global Employment Connections* Editor to see your story in the next issue!

Global Employment Connections

"Your Link to Global Workplace Information"



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