



ARIT

NEWSLETTER

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Executive Director's Corner

In May of this year, my wife Arpi and I took our ninth annual visit to Armenia to follow-up on BAFA projects. On the surface, Yerevan has undergone a great deal of transformation. For one thing, nine years ago you would observe few cars running, and now, it is a suicidal dance just to cross any street.

Although on the surface there are many changes—new hotels, restaurants and cafes for the visitor to enjoy, the standard of life of the group of people that BAFA serves, has remained unchanged. In fact, it has worsened. Unfortunately, 50.2% of the Armenian population is still either poor or extremely poor.

I have often been discouraged with the pace of improvements in Armenia. However, on our most recent trip, I had one of my happiest days as Executive Director representing the BAFA family at the opening celebration of the reconstructed Norashen School. As my article indicates, it was an uplifting experience seeing the happy faces of Norashen School students and teachers as they toured their reconstructed school. They had suffered too many cold winters in one of

the worst physical structures and circumstances.

In this issue of ARIT, Anahid Yeremian gives an update on Cosmic Ray Division Advanced Science Project, BAFA's latest endeavor to assure that top scientists remain in Armenia. Additionally, Rita Kablanian introduces a new pilot BAFA program called "Students-Helping-Students" that we hope will excite both our BAFA friends and their children.

It was a personal pleasure to have our daughter, Arpenny, with us on her first time to Armenia. She reflects on her visit to Nor Hadjn Soup Kitchen. Also, Mike Youssefian, who braved with us to undertake the tortuous trip to Tavoush area schools, writes about his experience. Finally, my wife Arpi, who pushes me to continue doing what I do, recounts the incident of a surprise gift she received from a generous "soul."

As Executive Director of BAFA, I thank each one of you for your unrelenting support to BAFA programs, and encourage and urge you to continue to help us assist our least privileged and very needy 'Hayrenageetznar.'

John Haleblian

Norashen Rafik Haroutiounian Michnagarg School

Since my involvement in BAFA, I have experienced the emotional highs and lows of overseeing BAFA projects, but during my most recent, and ninth trip to Armenia, I experienced my happiest day as Executive Director. I was present at the opening celebration of the reconstructed Norashen Michnagarg School.

Over the years, my wife Arpi and I have visited, and taken financial support to over 40 schools in Armenia on behalf of BAFA. We have seen schools in various conditions, but one that has had a major impact on us is Norashen, a school with a beautiful past but severely damaged by 1988 Spitak earthquake. We had marveled at the teachers who, for 14 years, have taught the children in the worst physical conditions that we have ever seen—an originally three-story complex turned into damp, cold and dark barn. These are dedicated teachers, with the will to stick with the children, even though they were paid a pittance.

For almost a decade, Rafik Haroutiounian, the principal, persistently tried to convince the govern-

Bay Area Friends of Armenia is a tax exempt, charitable organization with the sole purpose for promoting the health, education, welfare, and scientific excellence for the people of the Republic of Armenia.

ment to reconstruct the school. Finally due to funding by Armenian Social Investment Fund (ASIF) and additional \$14,400.00 grant from BAFA, the school was reconstructed.

When reconstruction was near completion, an unofficial celebration was held when two BAFA Board members visited Norashen during October 2002. The official opening took place on May 10, 2003 with the presence of the Minister of Education. There were numerous speeches, recitations and songs by students, and finally the dedi-

cation of the school renamed, well deservedly, Norashen Rafik Haroutiounian Michnagarg School.

It was my wife's and my great pleasure to represent the wonderful donors of BAFA, especially Lorraine Caven, who as reported in the January 2003 ARIT, was instrumental in contributing a substantial sum to the BAFA funds.

The three-story building plus the sports hall are now completely reconstructed. The school is furnished with new desks and chairs. Over 280 stu-

dents plan to return this September to a decent physical building after enduring 14 years of miserable conditions.

Yes, May 10 was my happiest day as member of BAFA Board. I hope dear donors that you share my enthusiasm and sentiments, and once again, I thank you for your generosity.

John Haleblian



John and Arpi Haleblian being greeted with traditional bread and salt



Rafik Haroutiounian, Principal, with John and Arpi



The reconstructed Norashen School with celebrating crowd

Armenia's Cosmic Ray Division Makes International Impact

It was a year ago when BAFA introduced its newest project, Advanced Science. This project complements BAFA's objectives in meeting immediate humanitarian needs in Armenia, and further expands its support of long-term development opportunities. We chose Armenia's Cosmic Ray Division (CRD) as our first Advanced Science venture, because of its excellent track record, international scope, and potential to stand on its own one day. Despite severe economic hardships, the CRD continues to advance primarily due to the dedication of its scientists who are committed to staying in Armenia. For details about this vital and vibrant scientific organization, please refer to the previous two issues of the BAFA newsletter, ARIT, and the following web sites:

www.BAFA.org & www.crdfriends.org.

During the past year, the CRD's many great advances and accomplishments, have once again, proved it international standing. Armenia's CRD made a strong presence at the international workshop on Space Weather Forecasting in Rhodes, Greece, sponsored by NATO in March 2003. Professor Ashot Chilingarian, head of the CRD, shared his team's cutting edge research conducted at the high altitude research stations on Mt. Aragats in Armenia. The work at the CRD was so valued that the participants called for a follow-up workshop to be held in Armenia in the fall of 2004.

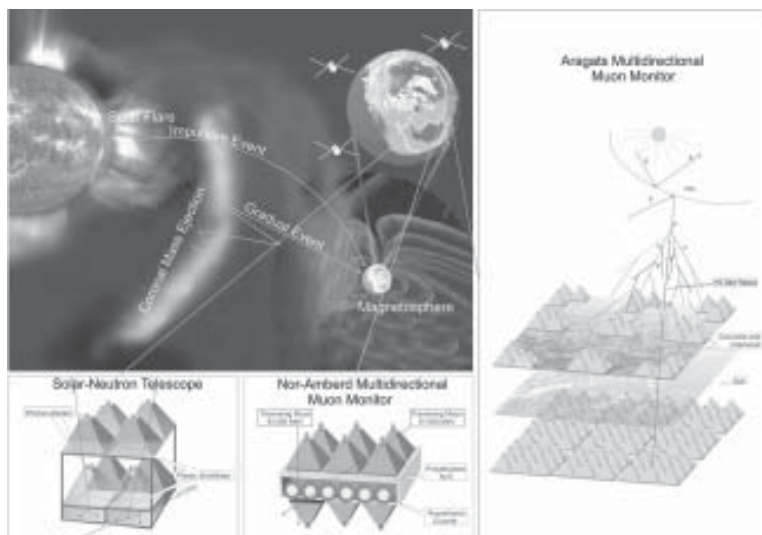
You, the BAFA friends, are instrumental in CRD's progress and we thank you for your continued support. In this article I thought it would be interesting to focus on one of CRD's most important projects, Space Weather.

When we think of weather, we typically think of temperature, hu-

midity, rain, and wind. Space weather is different from that. Space weather is created by the arrival of particle "showers," and the commencement of geomagnetic "storms" as a consequence of violent eruptions on the sun. The condition is at its severest every 11 years, and currently, we are near the peak.

The loss of several billion-dollar satellites has been attributed to severe space weather in the past couple of decades. Severe space weather can

hour in advance, allowing ample time for mitigating action to save orbiting satellites and space personnel. In the past year, the CRD has written more than 10 articles for refereed international scientific journals, which were accepted for publication. This is an excellent track record on par with any major scientific institution in the world. CRD's article on Gene Expression Analysis is the 7th most downloaded paper from the Mathematical Biosciences journal web site. CRD's



Newly designed detectors by the CRD scientists to monitor how space weather happens from the sun

also potentially harm astronauts in the space station and on shuttle flights, if it is undetected and mitigating action is not taken to protect against it. NASA's extensive investigation for what caused the catastrophic Columbia tragedy included a study of space weather effects. In that particular case, however, the cause was ruled out.

The CRD employs 100 highly skilled personnel and puts Armenia among the top 5 countries in the world with its expertise in the field of Cosmic Ray research. Using the monitors at the two high altitude stations atop Mt. Aragats, the CRD Scientists have gathered proof-of-principle data to demonstrate that with their techniques, they can predict the arrival of severe space weather approximately half an

advances in the field of space weather have attracted the strong interest of the scientists from NASA, NOAA (National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Agency of the U. S.) and many European organizations.

Undergraduate and Graduate students from the Yerevan State University continue to come to the CRD headquarters twice a week for lectures and hands on experience. Ph.D. students continue their thesis work under the watchful eyes of the CRD scientists, and the guidance of Professor Chilingarian.

Perhaps the following comments by Professor Johannes Knapp, High Energy Astrophysicist from the University of Leeds in Leeds, UK, best express the importance of CRD: "I

firmly believe that the Cosmic Ray Division at the Yerevan Physics Institute pursues very interesting and timely questions in the field of cosmic ray and solar physics research; enjoys international reputation for both its experimental work and its know how on novel analysis techniques; is internationally competitive (given the appropriate financial support); makes best use of the available infrastructure and personnel and builds on the invaluable experience of the people working there; and last but not least provides an excellent platform for stu-

institution. Recently the Armenian government has issued a postage stamp to commemorate 60 years of excellence at the Cosmic Ray Division. Please see the CRD merchandise section of the www.crdfriends.org web site for how you may purchase the first-day issue of the CRD commemorative stamp, envelop and postcard.

CRD's success is in part possible because of your generous financial support, and the staying power of all involved. We thank you for investing in the CRD and thus, the future of



Some of the scientists, technicians, and students at Armenia's Cosmic Ray Division following a seminar at the Yerevan headquarters

dents' education in theoretical and experimental physics as well as modern analysis techniques. I strongly support the continued and increased financial support of the scientific projects of this group. I also suggest providing funds for the maintenance of the Mt. Aragats infrastructure which once gone, will be nearly impossible to rebuild."

Due to the perseverance of the Armenian scientists, technicians and support personnel, under severe financial difficulties, the CRD continues to be an internationally recognized and valued Armenian scientific

Armenia. We ask you to stay with us until together we can reach the goal of making the CRD totally self-supporting through international scientific grants.

Anahid Yeremian



Postage stamp issued by the Republic of Armenia to commemorate 60 years of excellence at the Cosmic Ray Division

An Unforgettable Trip

We went to Tavoush.

There were four of us, John, Arpi, Leonid, our very special driver, and me. It was a sunny day when we left Yerevan, but when we passed Lake Sevan, the weather started to change, and we could hardly see the road ahead of us.

Every now and then the clouds cleared away, and we could grasp the beauty of the green hills floating in the sky. It was heaven on earth. This was Armenia at its best, reflecting the touch of the Creator.

It took us five hours to reach our destination. We drove on a road that needed extensive repairs. The car was jumping up and down, nevertheless, we were in heaven—the beauty and serenity of nature around us was breathtaking.

John and Arpi had a mission. They were undertaking much sacrifice to achieve their goal. They wanted to visit a school that was to get financial help from BAFA, and this was the best way to get the contribution to the assigned school. I doubt that any other person would visit a village school so far from civilization, despite it being a place so full of warm people, wonderful principal and teachers, and beautiful Armenian kids.

When we finally arrived, we were greeted under the rain and led to classrooms full of village hospitality and with lots of cheers. The classrooms had broken desks, chairs, chalkboards, and the rain kept dripping down from the ceiling, but there was an unforgettable smile in the eyes of the students who seldom see visitors from far. We must have seemed from a distant planet.

Finally, as part of 'Last Bell' celebrations, we enjoyed the performance of the kids on stage, the festive dresses of the graduates, the Ten Commandments recited by two eleven-year-old

children, and the lively atmosphere in a very crowded hall.

We went to Tavoush.

It was a lifetime experience. Ten hours of travel in one day on a bumpy road, but with all the pleasure of seeing Armenia at its best, the nature, the villages, the kids and the promise of their future. We hope that these kids will one day grow up and become proud members of a people rich in history, culture and heritage, and have endless possibilities. And this will be the gift and reward of every BAFA contributor.

Mike Youssefian

Now I Know What My Father Does in Armenia

Hungry people, eager faces and a kind staff—I had read about BAFA’s Soup Kitchens for years. What a difference to see one of them in action! I visited the Nor Hadjn Soup Kitchen this May. Immediately I was impressed by the

cheerful, friendly faces of the staff. They genuinely cared about the elderly people and the young children they served. I was given lunch that day and was pleased with its quality. Hot soup, rice, potatoes, beans, eggs and bread provided all of us a tasty and nutritious meal.

The elderly there were genuinely needy, with missing or rotten teeth and heavily mended clothes. Some of them shared with me about their hardships, including poor health and finances. The children (see picture), who had so little, wore big smiles as their stomachs were filled.

As I left the soup kitchen that day, I felt changed. I knew I would never forget the faces of the old and the young I had met that day. I knew I would remember the people who shared their lives with me. I was struck by how wealthy I am as an American, and how grateful I am that our support of BAFA projects makes such a difference in the lives of our needy Armenian brothers and sisters.

Arpenny Haleblian Hart



Children who are fed at BAFA Nor Hadjn Soup Kitchen

A Surprise Gift

As we were leaving Charbach, where we had just visited a group of elderly women, one of them approached me, handing me a tiny package wrapped in a piece of wrinkled potato chip bag. She said, “Please accept my small gift and may God bless you.” She was part of a group that had just received freshly baked bread and “boereg” brought to this suburb of Yerevan by Khachig, the chef of the BAFA supported Soup Kitchen in Norki Massif. Three times a week, these needy ladies gather to receive their food supply. As is customary during these visits, I had listened to their concerns and difficult living circumstances.

So back to the elderly woman and her surprise gift—the potato chip bag revealed a worn, old worry-bead chain and the writing inside—a brief story of her life, signed, Victoria Ohanian. She had written about her parents’ long voyage to Yerevan with their three children. She, the sole survivor, now has two sons and three grandchildren of her own. One granddaughter plays the violin, and has recently won a prize. As parting words, she asked me to remember her by this gift.

This surprise gift has touched my heart deeply. I will keep both the worry-bead and the wrapper. I admire Victoria’s generosity—passing on a sentimental item, most likely, left behind by her husband. Moreover, as I read her good handwriting on an old and used potato chip wrapper, I can only imagine that she has no writing paper.

I thanked Victoria, and gazed in her direction as she hurriedly disappeared. What a sweet gesture and generous act. I will cherish it always.

Arpi Haleblian

BAFA Students- Helping-Students Program

The children of Norashen, in the Aragatsotn Marz in Armenia, have a new school building thanks to the BAFA friends who helped meet the challenge of the Armenian Social Investment Fund's (ASIF) 9 to 1 program. We are excited for the 280 students who will benefit from this new building, but were troubled to learn that 80 of them cannot afford textbooks. They rely on notes copied from the blackboard to do their homework. Although disturbed by this situation, we are encouraged that for only \$10 a student, we can supply a full complement of 'loaned' textbooks, writing paper, pens, pencils, and erasers for an entire school year. We saw this as the perfect opportunity to get Diaspora parents and students involved in helping raise the necessary funds.

Parents and students in Los Angeles, San Jose, and San Francisco responded quickly and generously to our plea. Within three months, we raised enough funds to assure that all the students in Norashen will have textbooks and school materials for the upcoming school year starting in September 2003. John Haleblian, BAFA's Executive Director, has already personally delivered one thousand dollars to Norashen. The funds were given to Dr. Leonid Manukyan, Professor at State Engineering University Armenia, to make arrangements for needy students to receive 'loaned' textbooks. In Armenia text-

books are 'loaned' rather than sold. They are collected at the end of the year and used again for a period of five years.

Inspired by this success and concerned for all the students in the Armenian villages, we decided to launch a new program expanding this effort until every student in Armenia has a full set of textbooks and school materials. The program is called BAFA Students-Helping-Students. BAFA will identify the first group of schools that will participate in this program by September 2003.

We call on Diaspora students to save from their allowances and wages to contribute to the textbook program, and also to inspire and organize their non-Armenian friends to do the same. We hope that this outreach effort will expand the horizons of students in both America and in Armenia. Through collective effort, the possibilities will be endless.

Stay tuned for more information about our BAFA Students-Helping-Students Program in subsequent issues of ARIT, and on our website at www.BAFA.org under the Textbook Program, Education section. There you will also find a contribution form.

Thank you very much for your support.

Rita Kablanian



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Yes: I wish to make a Tax-Deductible donation to B.A.F.A.

Dear Bay Area Friend of Armenia,

To support the health, education and welfare of the people of Republic of Armenia, BAFA is continuing its major Soup Kitchen program; and is actively enlarging the number of schools it supports.

As we look to the future, we are also expanding to projects, which reverse Armenia's brain drain. We have added the Cosmic Ray Division in Armenia, an advanced scientific organization of world-class caliber to our list of projects. These are programs that make a real difference in the lives of many.

The key to implementing any, and all of these projects, depends directly on your financial commitment. If you wish to make a separate contribution specifically to one, or more of these projects, please mark the box below and return the form with your tax-deductible contribution to the Bay Area Friends of Armenia.

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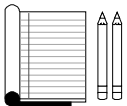
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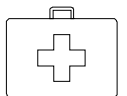
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Sydney Opera Soloist Arax Mansourian ***in Concert as a Tribute to*** ***Armenia's Cosmic Ray Division***

California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco
Sunday November 2, 2003 at 7:00 pm

For Tickets call: Anahid at 650 – 926 – 4444, Lily at 415 – 681 – 7148, Anto 510 – 843 – 8454, Rita 408 – 441 - 1321



ARAX MANSOURIAN



ARAX as Katya Kabanova

“Arax brings her real-life drama to the role of Katya [in Janacek’s Katya Kabanova]. Arax Mansourian’s life is the stuff of which operas are made. A star of the operatic stage for two decades, famous in her own ancient, turbulent land, who leaves everything behind for love in a new country where her name was unknown.” Joyce Morgan, Sydney Morning Herald, January 31, 2002

Born in Armenia, Arax Mansourian Graduated from the Komitas State Conservatory in Yerevan, Armenia. She is acclaimed as one of the leading interpreters of Armenian songs. In 1994 Arax immigrated to Australia to marry her current husband, an artist and engraver in Sydney. Could she leave Armenia, where for 17 years she had been a high-profile soloist with the Yerevan State Opera, and start anew in Australia? That was a question she thought long and hard about before taking the step. Since then she has carved a place for herself with international recognition.

“Arax Mansourian returns to the Opera House [in Sydney], fresh from her triumphant Melbourne and Brisbane Seasons”, Sydney Opera Media Release, July 9, 2002.

Her repertoire includes: Tatiana in Eugene Onegin at the Komitas State Conservatory in Armenia; The title role in Aida, Leonora in Il Trovatore, Mimi in La Bohème, Nedda in Pagliacci, Maddalena in Andrea Chénier, Lisa in The Queen of Spades at the Yerevan State Opera in Armenia; Concert arias by Aram Khatchaturian with the Moscow Symphony Orchestra; Amelia in A Masked Ball and the title role in Tigranian’s Anoush in the USA; Leonora in Il Trovatore in West Australian Opera; Aida/High Priestess in Edgley Entertainment’s arena production of Aida in Singapore, Perth, Brisbane and Auckland; Soloist in the Canberra Symphony’s “Gala Opera Concerts; Soloist for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra’s “Swoon Concerts”; Soloist in “Opera in the Park” concerts with Opera Australia, Soloist in Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony with Australian Chamber Orchestra; Verdi’s Requiem at the Sydney Opera House with Sydney Philharmonia; Britten’s War Requiem for “Independent Classics” in Melbourne; Liù in Turandot, Santuzza in Cavalleria Rusticana in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney; Title role in Katya Kabanova” in Sydney. She will be singing Tosca in May in Brisbane, and concert aria “See My Children Fly” by John Haddock , written for her voice in Sydney.