



ARIT

NEWSLETTER

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S CORNER

In 2003, Bay Area Friends of Armenia completed its eleventh year in helping the people of Republic of Armenia. In this issue of ARIT, the BAFA Board of Directors presents a comprehensive eleven-year account of how BAFA supporters' donations have contributed to advancements in health, education, welfare, and the sciences. And, we thank you for continuing to be the most faithful "Friend of Armenia."

My most rewarding experience in 2003 was being present at the dedication of the BAFA supported reconstructed Norashen "Michnagarg" School, which was damaged during the Spitak earthquake. It was wonderful seeing over 250 students in their Sunday best, singing, dancing and anticipating the return to their school. Because of your generosity, the children of Norashen have reclaimed their school after 14 years of suffering in make shift trailers.

In this issue of ARIT, Francois Antounian reminds us why we should continue to support Armenia, particularly the elderly who are dependent on the BAFA Soup Kitchens. Shushawn Touryan and Arpi Haleblian share their personal thoughts on their experiences at the BAFA Soup Kitchens. I provide a report on how BAFA is making progress in bringing 20/20 vision to school children who have not had an eye exam since Armenia's independence. Last, but not least, Anahid

Yeremian, the BAFA Board champion of the Cosmic Ray Division of Physics Institute, gives a detailed review of the scientific successes of CRD during 2003.

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 less privileged and very needy "Hayrenageetzner."

John Haleblian

Bay Area Friends of Armenia – An Eleven-Year Activities Report

You have been a faithful supporter of the Bay Area Friends of Armenia (BAFA). As in previous years, we would like to give you a comprehensive report on how your donations have been used to advance the health, education welfare and scientific excellence within the Republic of Armenia.

I. Welfare Projects

The issue of welfare of the elderly has been the primary concern of BAFA since its inception. As the attached Table indicates, BAFA has raised and transmitted \$652,000.00 for its Soup Kitchens program during the past eleven years of operation. Presently the program serves almost 900 retirees and orphans,

one meal a day for five days a week, in four Soup Kitchens located in Norki Massif and Erebuni areas, Yerevan, Nor Hadjn, Ashtarak, and auxiliary location of Charbach. These are managed by the staff of Fund for Armenian Relief, and currently have a kitchen crew of 22 who cook and serve food at the various locations.

Today, according to Ministry of Statistics of Armenia, 50.9 percent are poor and 16 percent of population are extremely poor, the average amount of Social Security checks received by the elderly, 6,200 drams (US\$10.30), buys only one loaf of bread per day. So you can see how our Soup Kitchens go a long way in filling the critical need in the basic survival of the elderly.

II. Support to Schools

This year we finally witnessed and celebrated the completion and official occupancy of the Spitak earthquake damaged, Norashen "Michnagarg" School. This was a collaborative micro-project with the Armenian Social Investment Fund (ASIF), where BAFA had to raise 10% of the \$144,000.00 reconstruction project. After spending 14 years in one of the most deplorable physical buildings we had seen, today over 250 students finally have a beautiful learning environment.

Unfortunately, the educational system in Armenia continues to be in real crisis. As the 2003 Republic of Armenia –Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

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.

prepared by the Ministry of Statistics of Armenia reports, the annual government expenditure per student is equivalent to \$85.00. Also the average monthly salary of teachers is 18,000 drams (US\$31.00), and in most cases, not paid on time. Minimal funds are allocated for the upkeep of schools, which are deteriorating due to lack of repair. Additionally, there are no funds for school supplies such as books, paper and pencils. Through your support we have been helping "Michnagarg" schools by contributing approximately \$1,000.00 to each. This sum amounts to about 10% of the annual budget of many village schools. During the last several years we have visited 39 schools, and transferred to their principals the sum of \$89,675.00. We have requested that the funds be allocated to supplement teachers' salaries and to purchase school supplies.

We also continued the program of providing breakfast to children at Melik Kyugh "Michnagarg" school, helping students concentrate on their schooling rather than on their hunger.

III. Medical Projects

BAFA Board physician members provided ongoing patient management consultations to Dr. Vigen Markaryan (Erebuni Medical Center) and Dr. Hayk Avagian (St. Nerses the Great Medical Center). Also, Dr. V. Markaryan officially became the consultant and team physician for the national football team of Armenia.

Under the supervision of Dr. Anna Hovakimyan our eye/vision project continued this year. We had the eyesight of children and teachers checked in three schools in the Aragatsotn Marz, and four schools in Tavoush Marz. Out of 2,100 children and teachers screened, 188 were fitted with eyeglasses.

Your unwavering commitment has made this evolutionary progress in the health care arena feasible. We look forward to expanding the cooperation with our colleagues in Armenia, and your continued support will make this possible.

IV. Advanced Science

The brain drain from Armenia is a real and urgent problem. Young Armenian professionals are forced to leave Armenia due to the lack of employment

opportunities upon their graduation from universities. Therefore, BAFA has decided to take a proactive approach by saving one of the jewels of the Armenian scientific community, the Cosmic Ray Division (CRD) in Armenia. The CRD employs about 100 personnel including Ph.D. students and recent postdoctoral scientists from Yerevan State University. It is striving for self-reliance by attracting funding from international scientific organizations, which value its research. In the meantime, BAFA has committed to closing the gaps.

The list of the impressive CRD achievements in the past 12 months include: the establishment of the ground-based Aragats Space Environmental Center (ASEC), the best in the world; 10 scientific papers in refereed international scientific journals; the return of an electronics engineer from Europe to Armenia who is now training the young engineers at the CRD; scientific Partnership with the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Agency's Space Environmental Center (NOAA-SEC); invitation to the NATO sponsored Space Weather Workshop in Greece; and a World Summit Award for best content in e-science. We thank you for your continued support of the CRD; it makes all these accomplishments possible.

The Table on page 3 shows that since BAFA's inception, you have contributed a total of \$981,100.00 of which \$933,300.00 "dollar for dollar," have been used to support health, education, welfare and advanced science related projects in Armenia.

Understandably, you have often asked, "How can you manage to transmit 'dollar for dollar' all of the donations to Armenia? Don't you have operational expenses in the U.S.?" The answer is, yes! BAFA employs a part time secretary. BAFA board members cover operational expenses (personnel and office-related) incurred in the U.S. During the past eleven years, they have donated a total of \$147,900.00. The board members regularly pay their own travel expenses to Armenia to supervise the BAFA sponsored projects.

None of the achievements of BAFA would have been possible without your generosity. BAFA Board members

sincerely appreciate you for serving as a dedicated 'Friend of Armenia' over the past eleven years. Your support at this juncture in the life of the Republic of Armenia has profound effects. We thank you for your continued support.

BAFA Board of Directors
December 31, 2003

Why We Should Increase Our Giving

It has been a tremendous experience and a great joy for BAFA to be able to positively impact the lives of so many in Armenia. The dreary and hopeless situation into which our homeland found itself in the aftermath of the 1988 earthquake and the collapse of the Soviet Union may now seem long ago, but the tremors, both physical and economic, still haunt and affect the daily lives of people in need of food and shelter. Life has been tough for them since December 1988 and we cannot embark on a new year without remembering those in need.

The Soup Kitchen project that BAFA adopted and still supports, has been a lifesaver to so many that we cannot imagine abandoning it. The elderly and the retired with no families to support them would literally die without that daily meal. The orphaned children, fatherless survivors of families who lost their providers, would not develop their full physical and mental capacities without the proper nutrition they get from our Soup Kitchens. Although not glamorous, our Soup Kitchen Project is a solid success, and this is all due to your continued support over the years. We are so thankful for your donations and heartfelt commitment that we will sustain this project for as long as you are with us. The BAFA board of directors continues to volunteer its time, and subsidizes all administrative and support costs so that every single penny of your donation reaches its intended destination in Armenia. This is a wonderful example of how far we can go with the partnership of donor-friends, and our pride in sharing and giving from the heart.

**Distribution of BAFA Funds for Health, Education, Welfare & Advanced Science
In Republic of Armenia 1993 - 2003 (x \$1,000)**

Distribution	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Total 93-03
Soup Kitchens	43.5	66	58.2	47.4	52.5	57.5	54.6	54.3	69.9	73.6	74.5	652
Medical Projects	0.5	10.6	0.9	12.2	4.1	16.2	1.6	10	15.9	0.8	8.2	81
Support to Schools	0	1.4	4.2	6.5	11.5	12	15.6	15.9	31.3	30.4	16.5	145.3
Advanced Science										25	30	55
Total Annual Distribution	44	78	63.3	66.1	68.1	85.7	71.8	80.2	117.1	129.8	129.2	
Total Distribution 1993-2003												933.3
Additional Unused Funds on 12/31/03												47.8
Total Funds Collected Board Donations to Cover Office Expenses	18.8	11.8	11.2	10.3	12.6	12.6	11.3	12.8	12.4	15	19.1	147.9

Times have changed and we have all heard about Armenia's progress along the road from independence to economic development. But please do not forget that this movement forward does not necessarily reflect the realities of those whom we support. If anything, their lot got worse with the absence of a social safety net. It took our nation, here in the USA, several decades to raise its consciousness for helping the poor and needy. Yet, we still see the homeless and the dispossessed in need of massive "private sector" subsidies. If it is challenging to make it work in the USA, a mighty economy, imagine what it will take to make it work in Armenia.

This is where our continued and collective dedication helps the needy, and where friendship with Armenia counts the most. In these leaner times, our ability to sustain our fundraising power is of extreme urgency. We have all felt the economic downturn, and the non-profit, humanitarian sector has felt it even more keenly. BAFA, an organization depending solely on donations, has also felt the pinch. Alas, the hungry stomachs and the growing kids cannot comprehend that. They still pray for their daily hot meal.

In this era of tremendous economic and social change, and at a time of need, let us not forget our brothers and sisters in Armenia. Please be generous and recommit to supporting them and help keep their hope in humanity alive. Soup kitchens may not represent a glamorous cause, but needy individuals still count on

us for their daily bread. Please give, and give frequently.

François Antonian

Grateful Indeed!

I love visiting our guests at the BAFA Soup Kitchens in Armenia. Every occasion I have, I spend time with them and inquire if they are satisfied with the food. Their answers are always positive. They are thankful for the free meal that they receive. I hear comments like, "Please thank all the donors." Or "We feel very grateful to you for providing meals for us which we desperately need." Or "I am very grateful to you and all the supporters; if it were not for this meal, I would have no other means to obtain my food." It may surprise you to learn that when I sit down with them they often offer to share their bread with me, and insist that I eat.

During my last visit to the Ashtarak Soup Kitchen back in May, I had a pleasant and heartwarming surprise by Hrachouhy who welcomed me with an armful of flowers. They were wild blue lilies. I kept and enjoyed them back at my apartment until the day we left Yerevan. I had met Hrachouhy a few years ago. She had asked for a Bible and I had brought her one. She told me that she always prays for me. Needless to say, I felt touched by this very sweet and thoughtful gesture. Like many others, Hrachouhy informed me that she

wants to work, but there is no job for her in Ashtarak. She gave me her address and asked if I would write to her. I did, and now I am looking forward to catching up with her in again the next time I visit.

It feels good to have many guests who recognize me, and I too, remember them from year to year. I always look forward to visiting my old friends. It is a mutually satisfying feeling, as I often see their eyes light up as we get reacquainted. Our conversations go beyond the subject of food and delve into matters of health, family, and life in general. I must confess that I am awed by their survival instinct. I try to put myself in their place and I see much despair. These people, in the face of immense hardship, still manage to endure. The privilege to serve them is truly worthwhile.

Arpi Haleblian

A Trip Home

My name is Shushawn Touryan; I had the opportunity to visit Armenia for the first time in May of 2003. My father goes often and it had been a life-long dream of mine to go with him.

The first thing I saw in Armenia was Mount Ararat—an absolutely unforgettable sight. I was in Armenia for only a week, so time was very limited. I went there for two reasons. The first was to see what types of programs Armenia

has for children and adults with disabilities, primarily cognitive delays. I was thoroughly impressed with what several non-profit organizations are doing with the little resources they have. World Vision and Punyc are the ones I observed, and was excited to see how open minded and forward thinking they are. My goal is to go back on a regular basis and provide training for teachers, parents and caregivers on different ways to help the disabled become accepted, functioning members of society.

The second reason I went to Armenia was to discover my roots. I got to see so many amazing places, and learned a great deal of history about my country. I'd like to share an experience I had that really struck me as interesting, while visiting one of the BAFA Soup Kitchens. It occurred when I started taking pictures and everyone gathered around me to pose in a formal way and have us take family photos. My cousin and I did our best, but I began to wonder about the reason behind this great desire to be included in the photos. So the following is my theory. Armenia is a very poor country and the people I met at the BAFA Soup Kitchen were the poorest of the poor. Many of them have had most, or all remnants of their history destroyed or lost over the years of suffering and war.

Try to think of one person you know who doesn't have either family photos hanging on a wall, or in a photo album or on his or her desk at work. Why? We all want to remember the ones we love, and have a record of our existence, our family lineage and our heritage. The people I met at the BAFA Soup Kitchen have nothing, nor do they have the ability to document their lives through a camera lens like the rest of us. I hope this article tugs at someone's heart. Wouldn't it be wonderful if a photographer would be willing to donate time to visit families in tiny poor towns of Armenia and capture a slice of their lives.

I do plan on going back to my country as soon as God allows. Armenia is a beautiful country with beautiful people, and it is important that we, who live in America, support our sisters and brothers in that tiny but strong country.

Shushawn Touryan

Determined to Succeed, Unwilling to Accept Anything Less! Armenia's Cosmic Ray Division and Armenian Diaspora Synergy

As we embark on the New Year, it is a good time to reflect on our priorities and goals, measure our accomplishments and set standards for the future. As I reflect back not only on the past year, but also on the past four years, I can say that one of the most significant experiences in my life was to visit Armenia in 1999 and experience the resolve of the Armenian people not only to survive, but also to excel and succeed in the face of many seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Their hospitality, which might suggest that they have all they need and so much more left over to shower on their guests, paints a rather deceiving portrait of the realities they face every day.

I have developed a particularly tremendous respect for the people in Armenia who have the opportunity to emigrate out of Armenia because of their specialized skills, yet they choose to stay in the homeland and contribute to its development at a rather high personal sacrifice. A case in point is the Cosmic Ray Division (CRD) in Armenia. It is one of the exemplary organizations headed by a visionary leader, Professor Ashot Chilingarian, and his responsible team of 100 scientists, technicians, students and staff. It is their resolve that compels us to continue to support them and their research projects, which consistently deliver many practical applications and consistently earn international recognition.

The list of the impressive CRD achievements in the past 12 months includes: 1) Establishment of the ground-based Aragats Space Environmental Center (ASEC), the best in the world; 2) Over 10 scientific papers in refereed international scientific journals; 3) the return of an electronics engineer from Europe to Armenia who brings with him state-of-the-art experience and now trains young engineers; 4) scientific partnership with the U.S. National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Agency's Space Environmental Center (NOAA-SEC); 5) scientific partnership with the European Space Agency; 6) participation by invitation at the NATO sponsored Space Weather Workshop in Greece; and 7) World Summit Award for best content in e-science for the ASEC web site, DVIN (Data Visualization Interactive Network). DVIN was chosen from a pool of 800 submissions from 136 countries. As one of the top five finalists, it was on display at the World Summit in Geneva, from December 9 to 13. Because of CRD's award, the Armenian president, Robert Kocharian, was named a patron of the Summit and asked to present the awards at the award ceremony in the presence of high-ranking officials from the UN and heads of states. The CRD project DVIN will also be displayed at various international exhibitions in 2004 and 2005, as a result of this award.

In addition to its contributions to the scientific community and its international



Professor Chilingarian with his team of CRD scientists and students who created the World Summit Award winning web site, DVIN.



President Kocharian congratulates Professor Chilingarian as he awards him the World Summit Award in the e-science category in Geneva.

recognitions, the CRD also makes a mark (although generally unnoticed) as a socially responsible organization. Every year the CRD donates 10% of the honey produced by its beehives at the lower station to the soup kitchens sponsored by BAFA and operated by FAR in Armenia. Also this past year, as some of the CRD computers were upgraded to Pentium II, several of the working 486 computers that were freed up were donated to secondary schools. The CRD computer experts installed the computers in the schools and assured their proper operation with the school staff. The CRD computer system continues to need critical upgrades due to the complex nature of their calculations. The practice of upgrading the CRD computers and donating the functioning surplus computers to schools in Armenia will continue. With your generous support of the CRD, you curb the brain drain from Armenia. You also enable Armenians in Armenia to take on the social responsibility of taking care of their own.

I dream of an Armenia that will one day impose quotas on immigration into its borders, because too many people will want to move there. I dream of an Armenia where the citizens can earn a living, take care of their own and preserve their pride and dignity, which are so important to them. And, with our help today, this day will come for Armenia. I see a small model of my dream already developing as we help the scientists of the Cosmic Ray Division in Armenia.

Currently, the struggle continues and the CRD scientists, students and support personnel continue to need our assistance.

We can be proud that with our generous financial giving, we are partners in their international success, and are stemming the brain drain from Armenia. We realize that we simply cannot afford to let this jewel of Armenia slip away due to lack of funding.

Professor Ashot Chilingarian, the 100 scientists, technicians and students of the

CRD in Armenia, along with the Support Committee for Armenia's Cosmic Ray Division, thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your continued generosity and partnership. Together we stand!

Anahid Yeremian

The Precious Gift of 20/20 Vision

As a young man growing up and attending school in Lebanon, I remember how our exam questions were written on the blackboard and we had to copy them. I was good in math in elementary school, but in high school my grades started to slip. It wasn't until one day when I realized that I was incorrectly copying numbers from off of the blackboard, and that I badly needed vision correction. Yes, it has been over 50 years now that I have not removed my eyeglasses, which have been my life saving companion.

When my wife and I started visiting schools in the far corners of Armenia on behalf of BAFA, we set out to learn about their

needs. We were always told about the need to upgrade the physical structure of buildings of earthquake-damaged schools in the earthquake zone or the demolished schools at the Azeri border. We were also told about teachers' meager salaries, which were often months behind schedule. Based on these findings, the BAFA Board immediately started supporting schools in these obvious and key areas.

It was not until a few years and a few visits later, that it dawned on me that I had not seen even a single student who wore eyeglasses. How many students were there who, like me, were not doing well in school because of poor eyesight? After checking with the principals, we discovered that almost no child had had even a simple eye exam since the independence of Armenia.

The idea of checking the eyesight of school children was presented to the BAFA Board, which immediately approved a pilot program in 2001. Our program was so successful that during the past three years we have had ophthalmologists visit 22 schools in Aragatsotn Marz (near the earthquake zone) and Tavoush Marz (near the Azeri border) and examine 5,087 students and teachers. Our screening resulted in identifying 380 students and teachers who desperately needed eyeglasses. Aware that even a \$20 pair of eyeglasses would be out of their reach, BAFA funded the purchase. The prescriptions were filled in Yerevan, and the glasses delivered to each recipient. The picture captures some of the Melik Kyugh Michnagarg students enjoying their 20/20 vision.



Melik Kyugh Michnagarg School students with their new eyeglasses.

Upon receiving his new eyeglasses, a teacher who had worn a cracked pair for ten years told me, "Finally I have normal vision, please thank BAFA supporters for their wonderful gesture."

Often, we in the Western world, take such simple things as an eye check-up for granted, but there are thousands of school children in Armenia who have had no eye exam since the past 10 years. As funds become available, we will try to extend our eye-screening project to additional schools. Dear BAFA donors, the 5,000 children who were examined, thank you.

John Haleblian



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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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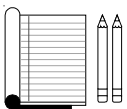
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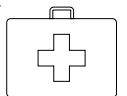
SOUP KITCHENS OF ARMENIA

\$50 \$100 \$200 \$500 Other \$ _____



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