



# ARIT

## NEWSLETTER

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### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S CORNER

In 2005 the Bay Area Friends of Armenia marked its thirteenth year of helping the people of the Republic of Armenia. In this issue of ARIT the BAFA Board of Directors presents a comprehensive thirteen-year account of how supporters' donations have contributed to advancements in health, education, welfare, and the sciences. We also thank you for continuing to be the most faithful "Friend of Armenia."

This year, like all Non-Governmental Organizations working in Armenia, we were challenged with the re-valuation of the Armenian currency from 555 Dram to 445 Dram to a Dollar. This made the purchasing power of the Dollar drop by almost 20 percent. Thanks to our donors who increased their donations by over 20 percent, we were able to sustain our projects at the same level as in the previous year. Every time I visit our BAFA Soup Kitchens in Hayasdan, I thank God for our supporters' commitment. I know too well that without BAFA some of our elderly recipients may have perished.

For your review, in this issue of ARIT we provide BAFA's 2005 financial report. Additionally, we feature various articles including, *Yerevan Diaries: October 2005* by Suzy Antounian about her impressions of Armenia after a three year hiatus; *Fulfillment* by John Pochigian on his

recent experience working with the Wellness Center team in Gavar; *Feed Armenia's Future* by Nancy Tengler on the status of BAFA Soup Kitchen's "Adopt a Child or Grandparent" program; *Who is Rafik?* by yours truly; and an acknowledgment of Triple X Fraternity.

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

John Haleblan

### BAY AREA FRIENDS OF ARMENIA (BAFA) A THIRTEEN-YEAR ACTIVITIES REPORT

In this issue of ARIT we are pleased to provide our faithful supporters of the Bay Area Friends of Armenia a comprehensive report on how your donations have been used to advance health, education, welfare and scientific excellence within the Republic of Armenia.

#### I. Welfare Projects

Since its inception, the welfare of the elderly has been one of BAFA's primary concerns. As our financial table indicates, BAFA has raised **\$811,200.00** for its Soup Kitchens program during the past thirteen years of operation. Currently the program

serves almost 900 retirees and children, one meal a day for five days a week, at its four Soup Kitchens located in Norki Massif and Erebuni areas, Yerevan, Nor Hadjn, Ashtarak, and auxiliary location of Charbach. Fund for Armenian Relief manages our Soup Kitchens where a crew of 20 cooks and serves food at the various locations.

Although the latest report, "Growth & Poverty Reduction in Armenia" published by International Monetary Fund (November 9, 2005), indicates that the poverty level of Armenia has dropped from 56.7% in 1996 to 32% in 2003, the level of absolute poverty of the *extremely poor* has increased. This makes the BAFA Soup Kitchens program a continued necessity for the survival of this most vulnerable segment of society.

#### II. Support to Schools

In cooperation with the Armenian Social Investment Fund, this year BAFA embarked on the much-needed repairs of The Bakhshyan Michnagarg School in Goris. BAFA will contribute the 10% of the \$75,640.00 project, scheduled to be completed spring of 2006.

Unfortunately the educational system in Armenia continues to be in real crisis. According to the 2003 *Republic of Armenia-Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* prepared by the Ministry of Statistics of Armenia, the annual government expenditure per student is

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

equivalent to \$85.00. The average monthly salary of public sector workers including teachers is \$50. 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. During the last several years we have visited 40 schools, and transferred to their principals the sum of **\$100,275.00**. These funds are allocated to supplement teachers' salaries and to purchase school supplies.

In 2005 we were pleased to continue providing breakfast to children at Melik Kyugh "Michnagarg" school, helping students concentrate on learning rather than on their hunger.

### III. Medical Projects

Throughout 2005 the physicians serving on the BAFA Board provided patient consultations to our American trained Armenian colleagues, who have significantly raised the standard of patient care in Armenia. Securing supplies and equipment continued to be one of this past year's most pressing issues. In 2006 our goal is to identify a physical therapist to provide training in the field of rehabilitative care of post-operative patients. We are actively seeking a qualified professional for a paid tour with our two trained physicians at Erebuni and St. Nerses hospitals.

We are pleased to report that we sustained our eye/vision project under the supervision of Dr. Anna Hovakimyan. We had the eyesight of children and teachers checked at the various BAFA supported schools. We also continued to check the eyesight of the elderly at the BAFA Soup Kitchens and supplied them with glasses.

### IV. Advanced Science

Armenia's brainpower is a resource that is key to its future self-reliance. Science, the foundation of industry, is dependent on brainpower. As such, BAFA is proud to have played a role in advancing

scientific excellence during the past four years by supporting the Cosmic Ray Division (CRD), one of the jewels of Armenia.

As BAFA continues its primary mission of Health, Education & Welfare within the Republic of Armenia, an equally proven and more scientifically oriented US 501(C)3 charity organization, the Armenian Engineers and Scientists of America (AES), 417 W. Arden Avenue, Suite 112C Glendale, CA 91203, USA, will become the parent organization for the CRD (<http://www.crdfriends.org>) as of February 5, 2006.

The CRD has recorded achievements well beyond what might be expected from a fully funded scientific organization. It has done it on less than a third of needed funding. The CRD with its 80 employees, 20 graduate and post-graduate students, and 20 undergraduate students from Yerevan State University continues to need Diaspora support. We encourage you to include the CRD in your philanthropic plan as we look forward to our scientists' continued successes.

Since BAFA's inception you have contributed a total of **\$1,268,200.00** of which **\$1,203,200.00** "dollar for dollar," has been used to support health, education, welfare and science related projects in Armenia. The balance of the **\$65,000.00** is kept in reserve to sustain our Soup Kitchens throughout the year. As is the case with most humanitarian organizations, the majority of gifts are received during the month of December. This reserve ensures that we are able to meet our \$7,000.00 monthly commitment.

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 thirteen years, they have contributed a total of **\$183,000.00**. Board members regularly pay for their own travel expenses when they visit Armenia to monitor the various BAFA sponsored projects.

None of the achievements of BAFA would have been possible without your

generosity. BAFA Board members sincerely appreciate you for having served as a dedicated "Friend of Armenia" over the past thirteen years. Your support at this juncture in the life of the Republic of Armenia has profound impact.

Thank you for your continued commitment,

BAFA Board of Directors  
December 31, 2005

## YEREVAN DIARIES: OCTOBER 2005

After a three-year hiatus I visited Armenia twice in 2005. First, I went to attend a wedding and a second time for no specific reason or mission, but just to spend the holidays, reconnect with friends, and witness the changes the country has experienced in the past few years.

Having worked and spent a great deal of time in Yerevan in the 90's, the city has become a second home for me, a place where memory and people come alive. I remember all too vividly the harsh realities of the past decade—life with little or no electricity, the incessant threat of war, and the huddled life of a society squeezed by the challenges of the country's transition. Most of all I remember the unbearable weight of change on people's daily lives. Their lives had become unpredictable, their financial condition uncertain, their security imperiled and their societal values undone. At every conversation one was reminded that change was the culprit of all misfortunes.

During my interactions with colleagues and friends, I would regularly have to step back to evaluate the most basic assumptions in our conversation for they were rarely the same. I did not know the world that shaped them; I had not lived under communism and did not know the Soviet Union and its insular culture. They did not know mine. The most interesting conversations and the best friendships were born from our mutual attempts to learn from our assumptions and redefine terms in their

**Distribution of BAFA Funds for Health, Education, Welfare & Advanced Science  
In Republic of Armenia 1993 - 2005 (x \$1,000)**

Distribution	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total 93-05
Soup Kitchens	43.5	66	58.2	47.4	52.5	57.5	54.6	54.3	69.9	73.6	74.5	76.1	83.1	811.2
Medical Projects	0.5	10.6	0.9	12.2	4.1	16.2	1.6	10	15.9	0.8	8.2	15.9	6.3	103.2
Support to Schools	0	1.4	4.2	6.5	11.5	12	15.6	15.9	31.3	30.4	16.5	9.9	23.6	178.8
Advanced Science										25	30	5	50	110
Total Annual Distribution	44	78	63.3	66.1	68.1	85.7	71.8	80.2	117.1	129.8	129.2	106.9	163	
Total Distribution 1993-2005														1203.2
Additional Unused Funds on 12/31/05														65
Total Funds Collected														1268.2
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	16.1	19.3	183.3

realistic context in Armenia. There was a sense of adventure and discovery in bringing these different worlds together.

While things started turning around by the mid 90's, the imprint of those early years have defined for me the city and its people as I have come to know them. If Yerevan was defined in the 90's by the shock of change, it has now survived it and is transformed by it at every level of society. Three years of absence was a long time to be away. Yerevan's dark days are over; today, neon signs delineate the city at night. Gas is once again centrally distributed to those who wish to bring it into their homes. For those who are 20 years or younger, the Soviet Union is merely the object of their parents' reminiscences. Their world was shaped by an independent Armenia and an Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh—Yerevan was certainly moving on.

Construction was the most visible sign of change. It has redefined Yerevan's architectural profile, its social makeup, and ultimately its cultural flavor and esthetics. The privatization of government owned land has created many real and speculative opportunities in the past few years for those hoping to cash in today the promise of tomorrow. Talk of real estate deals, new roads, new development plans and public works fuel a sense of euphoria for the few who can invest for the future. Many Diaspora Armenians from Russia, Europe and America have invested in construction, bought apartments or land. Some are planning to retire there while others hope to build a vacation home for their families. All seek an anchor, a place that will turn the homeland into their own home.

We saw many Armenians from Iran who had relocated their families from Teheran to Yerevan. The men continue working in Iran and spend weekends and holidays in Yerevan. One of our most inspiring chance encounters was with a restaurant owner who was building a new Iraqi restaurant on Mashtots Street. He had just come from Mosul, Iraq 8 months earlier with his family. His kids liked Armenia and wanted to stay. He said he too liked Armenia and did not want to go anywhere else anymore. He had found

refuge in Armenia and was finally home. His Armenian was weak and obviously his Arabic much stronger. Another generation in Iraq, and his kids may have lost their language. He said, "Armenia is wonderful. All it needs is more jobs."

While McDonald's and Starbucks have not yet made their entry in Yerevan, globalization has. Consumerism, the age of information, and new values, standards and behaviors are infiltrating into the culture. The Internet, cable television and the realities of a market economy have accelerated the change in outlook especially among the young and the university students who are in their twenties. Those we met were open, agile, curious and gutsy. Among those seeking to expand professionally, their concerns were about business loans, interest rates and partnership opportunities. As a result of exchanges and emigration over the past 15 years, many people from Yerevan have either traveled outside of Armenia, know someone who has, or have interacted with foreigners or Diaspora Armenians inside Armenia. Over the years, we have come to know a great deal more about each other and increasingly the common realities of daily life are bringing our worlds closer together. Gone are the days where assumptions had to be redefined. We are now reading from the same book even if we are not always on the same page!

Yet change is not always for the better and there is much reason for concern and action. Those who pay the heaviest price in times of transition are society's most vulnerable—the elderly, the orphaned and single mothers. For many of them soup kitchens have become a critical lifeline. We visited two of BAFA's soup kitchens, one in Nor Hadjn and one in Norki Massif. Our visit gave us a renewed appreciation of the fragility of life and a new understanding of humility and vulnerability. We saw elderly people who were grandfathers and grandmothers embarrassed to be there, yet grateful for the support they received. We saw young children whose daily nutritional needs required a lot more than the daily meal that BAFA could provide them. Food prices are not cheap anymore in Armenia and a dollar buys a lot less today than it did when the soup kitchens first opened. In the chill of October, and inside the cold echoing stone buildings where the soup kitchens are

located, people whose lives had become lonely and barren had come to forge a temporary community—to share a meal and a fragment of life together. Where do they live? How do they keep warm in the winter? Who would look after them if they fell ill? I did not know nor did I wish to prod into their misery for I knew that each answer would take me deeper into a world of desperation.

I left the soup kitchens with an uneasy sense of a job left incomplete. I realized how vital these facilities are to the lives of many, and there is so much more to do—provide them with heat in the winter and look after their health, hygiene and clothing needs. Imagine, they could have been us; we could have been them. I also know that there are so many more needy people our soup kitchens cannot feed.

The precipitous fall in living standards in the years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, were the worse in Armenia as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh war and the ensuing blockade. While the economic growth of the past few years has provided opportunities for some, it has not been long enough to lift a majority of Armenians above poverty. Abject poverty, especially in rural areas outside Yerevan has drawn the men away from the villages in search of opportunities beyond Armenia. The breakdown of communities and social services, have been most alarming in the small remote villages. Many of the women left behind have become prime targets to be recruited in a circle of deceit and prostitution rings in Armenia and beyond in places like the Emirates, Turkey and elsewhere in the Middle East. Some end up being trafficked across borders and held hostage to the Armenian pimps who abuse them. Prostitution is now all too present on Bagramian Street and other street corners in central Yerevan.

While prostitution is not a new or unique phenomenon in Armenia, I was surprised by its visibility and openness this time around. I was also alarmed by the lack of attention and debate that Armenian organizations are devoting to it. What about the health implications of prostitution on spreading HIV/AIDS in

Armenia? What about providing special skills training and loans to women so they can get out of their condition? What about the long-term impact on society? What about the orphans and sub-class it creates? Do we want to be a country that attracts foreigners for sex tourism? Is this why our grandmothers fought so hard or committed suicide to keep their dignity? Don't we owe it to them to help our own get out of their misfortune? What about increasing advocacy efforts on the government to enact appropriate legislation and fight the underlying crime to its fullest extent? Human trafficking, a major international issue, is now part of the State Department's foreign policy concerns as well as those of major international organizations. Why is it not a major concern for our established organizations and churches?

One hears a great deal about government corruption in Armenia. It seems to have filtered every layer of society and impunity for the powerful is feeding a reckless disregard for the public good and societal consensus. Easy money and its unequal distribution create an environment ripe for excesses, artificiality, social indifference, exploitation and subservience. The cost of corruption is huge and its toll pervasive. It impacts the safety of the new buildings being built. One cannot help but wonder if the lessons of the 1988 earthquake in Gumri are being implemented in the new highrises in Yerevan. Corruption impacts the functioning of society. One hopes that all graduating engineers, doctors and lawyers actually merit their grades so they can serve society at their best. Corruption erodes the hope in the future for it prevents the building of merit-based institutions. At the end the whole country pays for it because it erodes the fabric of society.

Yet, corruption cannot be an excuse for inaction. Armenia will continue to face immense challenges but we should not forget how far it has come from the first days of independence. Its problems are also ours to face and its future ours to trace. If we cannot transcend the challenges of today, we cannot claim the promise of tomorrow.

Suzy Antounian

## FULFILLMENT

How do we attain fulfillment? Philosophers have debated this question for millennia. Now that we have reached the stage where most of us no longer worry about survival on a daily basis, we too have the luxury to preoccupy ourselves with this question. I enjoyed reading Aristotle's theories of the "greater good" and the notion of doing more of what we do well in order to achieve that greater good. I believe that most of us would like to leave the world a better place than when we arrived. Helping people who, in turn, can help others can certainly be fulfilling.

The reality is that we have limited resources of time and money. Maximum benefit will occur by investing these limited resources where the recipients are well educated and where the cost of food, shelter, clothing, and education is low. In Armenia the literacy rate is 99%, a figure much higher than in America. In Armenia the cost of living is a small fraction of that in America. In Armenia 100 percent of your BAFA donations reach your intended destination—a claim few organizations can make anywhere.

Last summer, we once again had the opportunity to work in Rita Balian's Armenian American Wellness Center clinic in Gavar. We made time to converse with the staff about the state of health care in an ideal world and heard about what was possible in their world. We quickly came to the conclusion that we all shared a common goal—that is, to improve medical care.

We also had occasion to interact with other Diaspora Armenians visiting Armenia at the same time and shared our experiences in the motherland. We visited the CRD where we were delighted to discover much good news to report. There has been significant progress in the last three years and the CRD is closer to becoming financially self-sufficient. It is a productive organization despite its meager budget. Although the CRD still needs our help, it is now generating a higher percentage of the funds needed to meet its needs. It is noteworthy that there are

few research labs in the world as dedicated to self-reliance as the CRD.

During this past trip to Armenia my father died. He had never visited Armenia and had no family there. Yet, he had been sending money monthly to an Armenian family he had never met. I visited my father just before leaving for Armenia. He requested that he be cremated when he died. He so believed in what we were doing in Armenia, that he did not want his death to cut short our time there. At various stages of our lives we achieve fulfillment in different ways—this was my father's final sacrifice for others, and his ultimate fulfillment.

We hope to return to Armenia this year to enhance the quality of life for ourselves, as well as, the lives of others. When you go to Armenia you will discover for yourself what we can do together to achieve the "greater good."

John Poochigian

## FEED ARMENIA'S FUTURE JANUARY 2006

In January of 2005 we launched Feed Armenia's Future (FAF), a sponsorship program designed to provide our supporters with a personal connection to those we serve in the BAFA Soup Kitchens in Armenia. On this one-year anniversary of FAF, I am happy to report that we received annual sponsorships for 21 children and 15 grandparents! We are very pleased with our results and eager to see the program grow more dramatically in 2006.

The BAFA soup kitchens serve about 900 individuals 5 meals per week. At the launch of the program we estimated the monthly cost to be about \$20 per person and established our sponsorship rate at that level. For \$20 per month or \$240 per year you can ensure that one child or grandparent will be fed five nourishing meals per week. But as the Armenian currency gains strength against the dollar we have to face the fact that our dollars no longer go as far as they once did. No amount of planning could have predicted this change, so we appeal to you to consider

renewing your commitment in 2006 and to even consider adopting a second person. We realize that we are asking for a great deal. We only do so because the need is so great.

We also invite new benefactors to come on board. To sponsor a child or grandparent in 2006, simply mark the reply form in this edition of ARIT. Or send your check with a note instructing us of your preference for sponsorship (child or grandparent) and we will send you a picture and profile. Our annual beneficiary update is currently being prepared—2005 supporters can expect to receive it soon.

Remember that 100 percent of all funds donated to BAFA and FAF go directly to those in need. Do consider us as your giving plan for 2006. Thank you for your generous support.

Nancy Tengler

### WHO IS RAFIK?

Any time friends of BAFA want to visit one of our Soup Kitchens in Armenia I am quick to tell them, “Rafik will accommodate you at any one of our BAFA Soup Kitchens in and around Yerevan.” So who is Rafik? He is our very capable manager of the BAFA Soup Kitchens in Armenia.

In the early days of BAFA when we began to support soup kitchens in Armenia, Mr. Libo Libaridian had already voluntarily launched various soup kitchens. These eventually became our BAFA Soup Kitchens. When due to health reasons Mr. Libaridian was unable to continue his much appreciated services, BAFA needed to find a partner organization that could oversee the BAFA Soup Kitchens. BAFA was introduced to one of the best-run humanitarian organizations in Armenia, Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR), which since 1996 has been managing our BAFA Soup Kitchens.

From the onset, Mr. Rafik Martirosian was charged with the overall supervision of BAFA Soup Kitchens



*Rafik Martirosian (left) with John Haleblian*

where around 900 retirees and children are served one meal, five days a week. Today, Rafik, along with Mr. Garik Shahgaldian, runs every aspect of the Soup Kitchen operations including qualifying recipients, purchasing the food, and preparing monthly financial reports.

Rafik was born in 1967 in Yerevan. He has a degree in Finance and Accounting from the National Economic University of Yerevan. Prior to assuming responsibility for the BAFA Soup Kitchens, he was involved with organizing the PAROS system in FAR. Rafik is married to Gayane Gzogyan. They have a daughter, Anna (15) and a son, Arman (12). He is soccer fan and a real lover of outdoors and has camped all over Armenia.

BAFA would not be able to run its various Soup Kitchens in Armenia without Rafik’s on site supervision and caring management. BAFA Board thanks Rafik for his tireless dedication.

John Haleblian

### CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT RAISES MONEY FOR ARMENIAN ORGANIZATIONS

Since the inception of BAFA we have been privileged to receive the support of the Armenian Community. In addition to the commitment of individuals and Church organizations, we have been generously supported by national and local chapters of such organizations as the Armenian Professional Society, AGBU-YP, Knights of Vartan, Daughters of Vartan, Armenian-American Citizens’ League, ARS Erepouni Chapter, and Triple X Fraternity.

We are pleased to share with you the following note from Golden Gate chapter of Triple X which we recently we received.

On August 1, 2005, The Golden Gate Chapter Charitable Trust of the Triple X (Trex) Fraternity held its first Charity Golf Tournament at San Francisco’s Harding Park. Ninety- one golfers from all over California attended, enjoying the beautiful refurbished course, which hosted the American Express PGA Tour Event in October. As a result of the Charity Tournament and its fund-raising efforts, the Trust has contributed \$3,500 each to BAFA and other Armenian-

related charities such as the Armenian Eye Care Project, NorCal Senior Services, and the KZV School. The Charitable Trust intends to hold another Charity Tournament in 2006 at Harding Park, and anticipates even more community participation.

The Triple X Fraternity is comprised of about 1,000 adult men of Armenian descent with 13 separate chapters located throughout California and Nevada. The Golden Gate Chapter, centered in San Francisco, with 45 brothers, was chartered in 1928. The organization promotes brotherhood and charitable activities, and is not affiliated with any religious or political groups.

The Brothers of the Golden Gate Chapter of Trex salute the wonderful work of BAFA and its dedicated volunteers.

BAFA Board extends special thanks to the Golden Gate Chapter of Triple X for its generous gift of \$3,500 to benefit our Soup Kitchens.



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

Dear Bay Area Friend of Armenia,

Bay Area Friends of Armenia continues to support health, education and welfare within the Republic of Armenia.

We have initiated a new program called Feed Armenia's Future, which is designated to provide our supporters, with a personal connection to the grandparents or children who are being served in our Soup Kitchens.

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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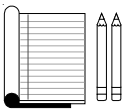


#### SOUP KITCHENS OF ARMENIA

\$50    \$100    \$200    \$500   Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

#### FEED ARMENIA'S FUTURE

Adopt a grandparent   Monthly  \$20,   Annual  \$240 \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Adopt a child   Monthly  \$20,   Annual  \$240 \$ \_\_\_\_\_



#### EDUCATION PROJECT

\$50    \$100    \$200    \$500   Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_



#### MEDICAL PROJECT

\$50    \$100    \$200    \$500   Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (   ) \_\_\_\_\_