



ARIT

NEWSLETTER

Volume. XV, Number 1

JANUARY 2008

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S CORNER

In 2007, Bay Area Friends of Armenia marked its fifteenth year of helping the people of the Republic of Armenia. In this issue of ARIT, the BAFA Board of Directors presents a comprehensive fifteen-year account of how your support has contributed to advancements in health, education and welfare. 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 by the continued strengthening of the Armenian currency, which according to the Central Bank of Armenia, changed from 363.3 Dram to a Dollar at the start of 2007 to 304.22 Dram to a Dollar at the end of 2007 (ARKA News Agency, January 10, 2008), marking a drop of almost 17 percent in the purchasing power of the Dollar. Thanks to our donors who increased their contributions and a special one time grant from an anonymous donor, we were fortunate to sustain our Soup Kitchen projects at the same level as in the previous year. Needless to say, the BAFA Board is extremely concerned with the downward spiral of the US Dollar. Every time I visit our BAFA Soup Kitchens in Hayasdan, I thank God for our supporters' commitment and hope that you will continue supporting our Soup Kitchen projects. I know too well that without BAFA, some of our elderly would perish.

You are cordially invited to

**Celebrate
Your 15 Years
of Giving**



**BAY AREA FRIENDS OF ARMENIA
15th Anniversary Dinner**

Guest of Honor
His Excellency Armen Lioyan
Consul General of Armenia,
Los Angeles

Special Honoree
John Halebian
For his distinguished service
to BAFA

RSVP by March 14, 2008

Rita Kabanian (650) 947-9205
rkabian@comcast.net
Suzy Anounian (415) 921-8781
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Saturday, April 12, 2008
St. John Armenian Church
275 Olympia Way
San Francisco, CA 94131

Reception - 7:00 pm
Dinner & Program - 7:30 pm
Price - \$125

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

In this issue of ARIT we provide BAFA's 2007 financial report for your review. Additionally, we feature various articles. In *Boundaries and Bridges*, Cheryl Touryan reflects on her visit to several BAFA projects and the importance of supporting schools within villages near the Azeri border. In *Santa Pays Surprise Visit to the Children of the BAFA Soup Kitchens*, Rita Kablanian shares a special story about how a generous donor brings the spirit of Christmas to our Soup Kitchens. Finally, in *Helping Others – A Responsibility*, I share how I came to learn from an Armenian gentleman, living in far away Rangoon, one of the most important lessons in helping others.

I am proud to announce that on April 12, 2008 BAFA will celebrate its 15th anniversary (details on page one). H.E. Armen Liloyan, Consul General of the Republic of Armenia in Los Angeles will be our guest of honor. We salute all of you who have been a part of BAFA's success and hope that you can join us for our festivities.

Finally, after twelve years of the most rewarding tenure of my life, as Executive Director of BAFA, I have requested that the BAFA Board relieve me from my day-to-day responsibilities and to continue on as a Board member. The BAFA Board has kindly agreed, and I am pleased to announce that I'll be passing the baton on to Ms. Suzy Antounian, who has graciously agreed to take over as our new Executive Director, effective February 1, 2008.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to each and every one of you for your amazing generosity and commitment. I also thank my fellow members of the BAFA Board for their encouragement, wise counsel and dedication. Last but not least, I am indebted to my wife, Arpi, for supporting me all along, enduring long and tiresome trips to Armenia and for serving as BAFA's goodwill ambassador. I promise you will continue to hear from me through ARIT.

I welcome Suzy Antounian as our new Executive Director. I ask that you support her as you have so kindly supported me over the years. I also urge you to remain committed to BAFA's mission and support the good work we do in assisting our less privileged and very needy compatriots in Armenia.

With warm regards,
John Haleblan

BAY AREA FRIENDS OF ARMENIA – A FIFTEEN 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 and welfare 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 and transmitted \$1,049,520 to the Soup Kitchens program during the past fifteen 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 the auxiliary location of Charbach. Fund for Armenian Relief manages our Soup Kitchens where a crew of 20 cooks and serves food at various locations.

According to Armenia's National Statistical Service (ARKA News Agency, Dec. 21, 2007) the poverty level across Armenia in 2006 dropped to 26.5% from 35% in 2004 and extreme poverty fell to 4.05% from 6.4% in 2004. This means that 850,000 of our compatriots still live in poverty, making our BAFA Soup Kitchens program a continued necessity for the survival of this most vulnerable segment of society.

II. Education/Infrastructure Projects

This year, in cooperation with Armenian Social Investment Fund (ASIF), BAFA renovated the Mushegh Ishkhan Michnagarg School No. 5 in Yerevan. BAFA supplied \$13,304 of the \$157,320 project. The BAFA portion of the funds was undertaken by a generous donor, who wishes to remain anonymous. Official renovation celebrations were held during September 2007. We are currently working with ASIF on bringing water to homes in the village of Gugarg (population 6,830) in Lori Marz. Although the village has access to water, it lacks a distribution system. BAFA is funding \$7,914 of the \$158,283 project.

We are happy to report that during the last few years the Armenian government has begun to direct some attention to the

country's educational system. This has spurred the building of new schools, renovations and increases in teacher salaries. BAFA continued to support schools in impoverished areas. During 2007 BAFA focused on 10 schools, primarily ensuring that they are equipped with computers, and supplying students with textbooks. During the past fifteen years we have visited 50 schools, some once and others multiple times, and have contributed a total of \$137,239. This has included the three major renovations at Norashen, Bakhchyan (Goris) and Mushegh Ishkhan (Yerevan) Michnagarg schools in conjunction with ASIF.

During 2007 we were also pleased to continue providing breakfast to children at Melik Kyugh Michnagarg School and initiated similar breakfast programs at Lernabar and Vartablour Michnagarg schools, thus helping students concentrate on learning rather than on their hunger.

In 2007 Suzy Antounian led a group of donors to Yerevan, where they visited 14 Non Governmental Organizations (NGO's). Following a thorough evaluation of their work, the team chose three grantees. Furthermore, two members of the donors' circle decided to support two additional organizations on an individual basis. In all, the members of the donors' circle (seven women), contributed over \$24,000 to five organizations, furthering BAFA's mission in Armenia in a multitude of ways.

III. Medical Projects

Throughout 2007, the physicians on the BAFA board offered consultation on patient management to Dr. V. Markaryan (Erebuni Medical Center) and Dr. H. Avagian (St. Nerses the Great Medical Centre). These BAFA trained orthopedists continue to help elevate the level of patient care in Armenia and raise the standard of care expected from colleagues.

Under the supervision of Dr. Anna Hovakimyan, we sustained our eye/vision project, performing eyes examinations for students and teachers at BAFA supported schools. This project also served the elderly at our Soup Kitchens and covered the cost of eyeglasses.

BAFA shipped medical equipment donated by Dr. David Atkins of Operation Rainbow to St. Nerses the Great Hospital to be shared with few other hospitals in Gyumri. Dr. H. Avagian who was trained

in San Francisco, in turn, provided training to potential users of the equipment.

Finally, BAFA facilitated a donor contribution to APEC (AIDS Education and Prevention Center) to fund AIDS education and prevention in Armenia.

Since BAFA's inception, you have contributed a total of \$1,669,530 of which \$1,562,950 "dollar for dollar," has been used to support health, education and welfare related projects in Armenia. The balance of \$106,580 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 \$12,000 monthly commitments. During 2007 BAFA also received a special grant (stocks valued at \$98,847) from an anonymous donor to be used for children's projects. During the year the sum of \$47,955 was allocated to various children's projects. The remaining \$50,892 will be used during 2008.

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 fifteen years, BAFA board members have contributed a total of \$220,740. They regularly cover their own travel expenses to Armenia to monitor the various BAFA sponsored projects.

None of the achievements of BAFA would have been possible without your generosity. BAFA Board members deeply appreciate your being a dedicated "Friend of Armenia" during the past fifteen years.

On a final note, we'd like to bring your attention to the unfavorable Dollar/Dram exchange rates (17 percent depreciation of the Dollar during 2007). Due to the strengthening of the Dram, coupled with the rise in the cost of living in Armenia, we need to increase our Dollar transfer for projects in Armenia by at least 17 percent. This is imperative if we are to sustain our programs at current levels. We urge you to be mindful of this reality when you consider your next donation.

Again, thank you for your unwavering commitment to BAFA.

BAFA Board of Directors
December 31, 2007

**Distribution of BAFA Funds for Health, Education & Welfare
In Republic of Armenia 1993 - 2007 (x \$1,000)**

Distribution	1993 to 1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Total 93-2007
Welfare (Soup Kitchens)	167.7	47.4	52.5	57.5	54.6	54.3	69.9	73.6	74.5	76.1	83.1	93.85	144.47	1049.52
Health	12	12.2	4.1	16.2	1.6	10	15.9	0.8	8.2	15.9	6.3	4.25	11.65	119.1
* Education-Infrastructure	5.6	6.5	11.5	12	15.6	15.9	31.3	55.4	46.5	14.9	73.6	24.4	81.13	394.33
Total Annual Distribution	185.3	66.1	68.1	85.7	71.8	80.2	117.1	129.8	129.2	106.9	163	122.5	237.25	1562.95
Total Distribution 1993-2007														106.58
Additional Unused Funds on 12/31/07														1669.53
Total Funds Collected														220.74
Board Donations to Cover Office Expenses	41.8	10.3	12.6	12.6	11.3	12.8	12.4	15	19.1	16.1	19.3	20.96	16.48	220.74

* = Years 2002 - 2006 in Education/Infrastructure includes \$117.4 raised and transmitted to Cosmic Ray Division

BOUNDARIES AND BRIDGES

Boundary lines are always sensitive places, whether they separate enemies, neighbors or even personal identities. In the fall of 2007 I traveled with John and Arpi Haleblian to the boundary line (border) between Armenia and Azerbaijan, where we visited four villages in Tavoush Marz in the northeastern corner of Armenia. The area remains tense with Armenian soldiers standing guard along the road and on the hilltops. The villagers regularly hear gunfire and some have been injured by the land mines. While visiting a school in Bertavan, we asked a teacher whether the school was near the border (sahmanamertz). Her response epitomized the proud, tough, independent mentality of these villagers. She said, "We are not near the border. We guard the border (sahmanabah)."

BAFA provides support to meet critical needs in some of the schools in this forgotten, remote, bypassed border region. On our trip John Haleblian also distributed BAFA monies to three schools in another remote area south of Spitak. All seven of the schools* we visited were full of bright, enthusiastic, precious Armenian children. It broke my heart to realize that the future does not look promising for most of these children. Many of them have not traveled beyond their village. I saw almost no books in the schools, no colorful posters, no educational tools, nothing to satisfy a child's natural curiosity. BAFA's financial support enables the schools to at least provide each student with a textbook to keep during the year.

The most encouraging thing I saw during our BAFA visits was a new program instituted by the Armenian government that is helping to provide computers to the schools. It is a partnership between the government, computer businesses and local schools. If a school is able to raise 42 percent of the cost of a new computer, the government will facilitate the process by serving as a "bridge" between the school and a computer manufacturing company. It is a win-win-win situation and several schools we visited will use BAFA funds as their 42 percent share of the cost. In Achajur, the villagers had already met and discussed the need for computers for their children, but were unable to come up with the money. When John Haleblian

explained why he was there and the money he was giving, there were tears in the eyes of one of the teachers. This was truly a "gift from heaven" for this village school.

The children of Armenia are precious, beautiful and a valuable resource. The government is beginning to realize this but is slow in instituting significant change. The border villages are critical to the future of Armenia and help guard the integrity of the country. Providing a future for the children of Armenia, especially those from the border regions, is critical to the future of the country. BAFA's contribution is undoubtedly making a difference, especially as it is combined with the efforts of local entities and the support of the government.

Since returning from Armenia, I have watched with alarm the value of the US dollar decline from 340 dram in September to 295 dram at the end of November. It is no longer feasible to support projects in Armenia based simply on the value of the dollar. For this reason I am even more convinced that the most effective projects in the future will combine local, in-country funds, government support and US Diaspora funds. The need now is to break down barriers among various local and Diaspora constituencies, and build partnerships, in order to provide a future for the children of Armenia.

Cheryl Touryan

(*) Schools visited:

Tavoush Marz: Jujevan, Berdavan, Baghanis and Achajur
Aragatsotn Marz: Vardablur, Hnaber and Norashen

SANTA PAYS A SURPRISE VISIT TO THE CHILDREN OF THE BAFA SOUP KITCHENS

Two hundred and three children are happier this New Year thanks to a generous donor who offered \$1,500 to purchase toys for the children of BAFA's soup kitchens.

A close friend had visited Armenia and fallen in love with the children he had met at the BAFA soup kitchens, but their sad faces had remained with him since his return. He approached me last October with an idea—with Christmas and New Year just around the corner, he wanted to do something to bring cheer into these children's lives.

At the BAFA soup kitchens we offer the elderly and needy families one hot meal each day for five days a week and we decided to use the generous donation to buy toys for the children there. Rafik Martirosyan, our representative in Yerevan, helped compile a list of all the kids and helped choose wonderful, age appropriate toys, including cars, dolls, games and balls, all purchased in Armenia.

On December 26, Santa "Rafik" Claus made the rounds of all the soup kitchens. As you can see from the photo, the smiles on the children's faces and the joy in their eyes say it all. At least for a brief time, with their stomachs full, the children were warm and enjoyed their Christmas presents—what a rare luxury this must have been for them.

As I sat down for dinner on New Year's Eve with family and friends and



Children Receiving Their Christmas Gifts

looked at our table laden with plenty of delicious food and the Christmas tree surrounded with many presents, I thought about the abundance we enjoy and what little it took to make over 200 children happy in Armenia. As we all continue our busy lives in 2008, I hope that we do not forget those smiles and that we keep these beautiful children in our thoughts, and continue to support them in every way we can.

Thank you again to our generous donor for bringing the spirit of Christmas to our soup kitchens.

Rita Kablanian

HELPING OTHERS - A RESPONSIBILITY

While I was growing up, I had a keen interest in the Armenian Diaspora of South East Asia. I had learned that the first Armenian newspaper, "Aztarar," was published by Der Haroutioun Shmavonian in 1794 in Madras, India, and that in 1836 Armenians had built the Saint Gregory Armenian Church, the oldest church in Singapore. The Sarkies brothers had revolutionized the hotel industry of the Far East by building a chain of upscale hostelryes: the "Eastern and Oriental" in Penang, Malaysia, the "Raffles" in Singapore, and the "Strand" in Rangoon, Burma.

In 1960 when I left Beirut, Lebanon for my graduate studies in the United

States, I decided to travel via Asia, contrary to the established European route taken by most. I wanted to spend time in the various cities where Armenians had passed through. Although there were no longer large communities left there, one could count on finding an Armenian Church still standing.

After visiting Tehran, Bombay and Calcutta—where I had the opportunity to visit the Armenian Philanthropic Academy, the only Armenian day school of that time—I arrived in Rangoon, Burma. My brother, who had traveled to Rangoon before me, had suggested that I stay at the Strand Hotel, built by Aviet and Tigran Sarkies in 1901, and later in 1925, sold to Peter Bugalar Aratoon and Ae Amovsie. The Strand Hotel was the most impressive in its time and remains so until today. (See photo.)

Upon my arrival to the Strand Hotel, I was eager to meet Mr. Aratoon. Learning that I was an Armenian, the reception desk clerk immediately escorted Mr. Aratoon, a gentleman in his sixties, for me to meet.

Mr. Aratoon quickly made arrangements for his driver to take me around Rangoon while he finished his day's business. I had never been in a Bentley car, so I thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon drive. Later in the day when Mr. Aratoon met me at his waterfront restaurant, we visited for a long time. I was a young Armenian trying to understand why there were Armenians across the world and he, a mature man, was enjoying the presence of another Armenian, in a country where there were few.

Mr. Aratoon invited me for dinner at the Strand hotel, where we continued our visit,

exhausting every subject related to Armenians imaginable. His hospitality continued the next day when Mr. Aratoon offered his driver and his car for me to savor the touristy sights of Rangoon, including the Schwedagon Pagoda, the most beautiful I'd ever seen.

The following day at the reception desk when I learned that my bill had been settled by Mr. Aratoon, I insisted to pay. Eventually Mr. Aratoon came out, and my memory of our conversation continues to resonate in my mind till this day. He said: "Young man, I hope you enjoyed your stay in Rangoon." "Yes, but I need to pay at least for my hotel stay," I responded. Mr. Aratoon then looked into my eyes and said: "Young man why do you want to deny an Armenian the pleasure of helping another Armenian?" This was the moment I learned that as Armenians we have the responsibility to help one another, especially those in need.

That was the last time I saw Mr. Aratoon. After the Ne Win 1962 revolution in Burma, the hotel was nationalized. Mr. Aratoon stayed at the hotel until 1971 and later immigrated to England.

I do not know if Mr. Aratoon is still alive, but the lesson I've learned from him continues to inspire me to wholeheartedly engage in BAFA's work. In this way, I remain committed in words and in action to helping the plight of our "hayrenagitzs" in Armenia.

John Haleblian



Strand Hotel, Rangoon, Burma

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.

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.

BAY AREA FRIENDS OF ARMENIA

P.O. Box 3584

Daly City, California 94015-0584

Phone (415) 681-7148

Email: janigh@alumni.usc.edu

Website: www.bafa.org

Please Check Applicable Categories



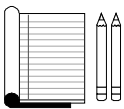
SOUP KITCHENS OF ARMENIA

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

FEED ARMENIA'S FUTURE

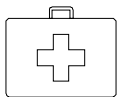
Adopt a grandparent Monthly \$20, Annual \$240 \$ _____

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: () _____