

The Legacy of Gratitude:

A Texan's Gift to the Foreign Service

By Gabriela Pierre

It wasn't until officials in Bombay threw her in jail in 1948 that Texas-born Una Chapman Dowd met the young vice consul who went beyond the call of duty to help her.

Concerned for their safety, the cruise ship's captain had refused to give any passengers their travel documents to go ashore. The strong-willed heiress disembarked anyway to explore Bombay and quickly found herself behind bars. Her sole advocate and source of counsel was the Foreign Service officer who promptly responded to her plight. He brought her books, sandwiches and a bottle of wine and arranged a flight for her to rejoin the ship.

Little did he know that his sincere act of kindness would later be generously rewarded.

Although his identity is unknown, the woman from Corpus Christi never forgot what he had done for her. Mrs. Cox had a soft spot for Foreign Service personnel who do things most people never hear about. It came as no surprise when she announced that she would leave farmland and oil and gas rights from her share of the Chapman Ranch, valued then at \$5 million, in a trust to benefit the Foreign Service. In 1980, she chartered the first nonprofit foundation to promote the effectiveness and professionalism of the Foreign Service.

A year before she died in August 1982, Mrs. Cox began funding the Cox Sabbatical Leave Fellowship. The oldest of the foundation's grants, the fellowship sponsors mid-level officers with demonstrated potential on one-year sabbaticals to reconnect with American society, recharge their batteries

Vonda MacCloskey, mother of Foreign Service officer Vonda Delawie, works with her equipment in Morocco in 1953. The Cox Foundation funded Ms. Delawie's research on her mother's experiences as a pioneering female civil engineer in the mid-20th century



and renew their commitment to the service. Applicants submit proposals and are chosen through a competitive process.

One of 49 chosen to date is Mark Bezner, a 2002 to 2003 sabbatical fellow who had spent 15 years abroad. He explored the United States on the historic routes that built America. The trips, along with a long and eclectic set of readings, deepened his appreciation of the history, geography, culture and ecology of America and gave his Japan-born spouse a better understanding of her adopted country. "I would estimate that the sabbatical has allowed me to attain the equivalent of a master's degree in American studies," Bezner said.

Another benefit of the sabbatical is that recipients recruit for the Foreign Service and promote public awareness of our nation's diplomacy. With plans for spending the next year working on a series of Habitat for Humanity projects around the U.S., Lynn Donovan looks forward to talking with people who might otherwise understand little about the relevance of the Foreign Service to their lives. "As an organization with a very narrow constituent base, the more who understand why we're out there and what we do, the better," she said.

The foundation's second oldest initiative, established in 1983, is the Aspen Institute's Executive Seminar, renamed the Alfred Atherton Jr. Executive Fellowship Program at Aspen

Institute in honor of the former director general of the Foreign Service and Cox Foundation executive director. Each year, the foundation sends two senior Foreign Service officers and their spouses to this seminar, which challenges participants to engage in a philosophical and historical dialogue with counterparts from the private and public sectors. "The seminar helped build bridges of understanding between government and the private sector," said Assistant Secretary of Administration Bill Eaton, who attended this year.

Each year the foundation co-funds with the Department the annual awards for excellence in foreign language instruction. This year, the foundation provided \$40,000 in travel costs, research and book support for an anticipated book on the Foreign Service in an age of terrorism by Nicholas Kravet of the *Washington Times*. Most recently, the foundation

approved a proposal by the Bureau of Administration to spend up to \$30,000 to send mid-level management officers on short details to learn best practices at top private sector firms, municipalities and other organizations.

Past projects have included funding the 1991 documentary "Profiles in Diplomacy: The U.S. Foreign Service," which aired on many public television stations; the 1999 report "Equipped for the Future: Managing U.S. Foreign Affairs in the 21st Century" and the initial design of the U.S. Diplomacy Center and Museum in the Harry S Truman Building's George C. Marshall wing.

Mrs. Cox designated her friend and attorney, Harvie Branscomb Jr., as foundation trustee, and he continues to serve as chairman of the board, implementing Mrs. Cox's dream. All foundation projects and efforts—totaling more



Kathy Kavalec, center, spent her sabbatical year teaching English as a second language and matching those students with FSI language students for practice and cultural exchange.

than \$5 million to date—are devoted to improving public awareness and understanding of the Foreign Service, recruiting the best possible people into the service and enhancing professionalism.

"The Cox Foundation's vision will be fulfilled if we can successfully support the Department of State in ensuring that our foreign affairs function is staffed, trained, organized, cared for and funded so it's highly professional and effective in responding to and anticipating tomorrow's exciting challenges," Executive Director Clyde D. Taylor said. ■

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