

AFSA NEWS

American Foreign Service Association • November 2007

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

AFSA-HQ Relocates During Renovation

BY SHAWN DORMAN

On Sept. 19, the AFSA Governing Board approved plans for the renovation of AFSA headquarters. In late October, the building was closed so work could begin. If the schedule holds, employees will be back at work in the new and improved building by May 2008.

The AFSA building, located at 21st and E Streets NW, across from the State Department, is one of AFSA's most valuable financial assets: prime real estate in downtown Washington, owned debt-free by the association. But the physical plant is in dire need of renovation, both for cosmetic and structural improvements and for safety and energy-efficiency upgrades. The 26-person staff working in the headquarters building has been squeezed into tiny workspaces, including closet-size work stations.

No major work has been done on the



building since it was purchased in 1968, and it shows. From the squirrels building nests in the bathroom window to the electrical hazards from old wiring, no one who has visited headquarters in the last few years could deny the need for a major upgrade.

Until now, we have spared you the details of the multi-year quest by successive Governing Boards to determine exact-

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TAKING A STAND

AFSA Calls on State IG to Step Down

On Sept. 19, AFSA issued a press release calling for State Department Inspector General Howard J. Krongard to step down, the day after Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., released a letter to the IG listing numerous allegations of interference with investigations. AFSA spoke out after numerous current and former OIG employees stepped forward with detailed allegations that questioned the integrity of the current inspector general. Several came to AFSA while a larger number approached the relevant congressional oversight committee.

The Waxman letter to the IG stated: "Officials from your office told my staff that you have consistently failed to pursue allegations of wasteful spending or procurement fraud in any contract involving Iraq and Afghanistan." As AFSA President John Naland explains, "Of particular concern to AFSA are allegations that he blocked investigations into possible substandard construction at the new U.S. embassy in

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"The fact of the matter is this Foreign Service needs more dissenters, not fewer. And it needs to encourage — not discourage — them."

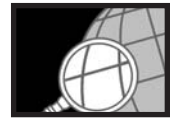
Former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger

Call to Honor Dissenters

Do you know anyone in the Foreign Service who deserves to be recognized for constructive dissent? Let AFSA know.

Look for the official call for nominations for the AFSA Constructive Dissent Awards in the next issue of *AFSA News* and on our Web site at www.afsa.org/awards/index.cfm.

AFSA NEWS BRIEFS



FS BOOK NEWS

FS Authors

This issue of the *Foreign Service Journal* features reviews of books by Foreign Service-affiliated authors (beginning on page 19). We encourage you to support your colleagues by purchasing the books you see on these pages. You can access them by going to the AFSA Web site at www.afsa.org/ads/books/.

We invite authors to send their new books for review to: Foreign Service Journal, 2101 E St. NW, Washington DC 20037-2990.

Books may be submitted at any time, but in order to be included in next year's compilation, they should reach the *Journal* by Sept. 1, 2008.

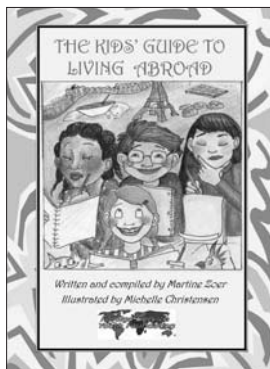
Inside a U.S. Embassy: Seeking Input

The 2003 AFSA publication *Inside a U.S. Embassy*, updated in 2005, is still selling well through Amazon and other booksellers (go to www.afsa.org/inside/). The State Department continues to send the book to all candidates who pass the Foreign Service Written Exam. Numerous military institutions purchase copies for training courses. More than 30 universities have adopted the book for courses, and it continues to be popular with students and others considering a Foreign Service career. U.S. embassies use the book for outreach purposes.

AFSA is exploring options for additional content to enhance the next edition. If you have suggestions on topics that should be included that are not in the current volume, please send an e-mail to embassybook@afsa.org. For the profile section — each type of FS position illustrated through one person serving in such a job — recommendations for outstanding Foreign Service employees are most welcome. Include contact information for the person being recommended if possible. We appreciate your input.

Realities II Released

On Oct. 23, a book launch was held at the State Department for the second volume of *Realities of Foreign Service Life*, published by The Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide. Edited by Melissa Hess, Patricia Linderman and Marlene Monfletto Nice, *Realities* sells for \$20.95 and is available from Amazon and other major booksellers. For more information, contact AAFSW at (703) 820-5420 or office@aafsw.org (also see page 39 of this issue).



The Kids' Guide to Living Abroad

Written for kids, this new book from the Foreign Service Youth Foundation, *The Kids' Guide to Living Abroad*, shares the excitement and fear kids experience when they learn they are going to live overseas. The book, by Martine Zoer, seeks to help children understand and cope with the harsh realities of homesickness and culture

shock, and lets them know what to expect on re-entry to their home country.

The latest in FSYP's collection of publications to assist globally-mobile families, the *Kids' Guide* is available through Amazon, and can also be ordered online at the FSYP Web site (www.fsyf.org/pubs/publications.html). The price is \$12.

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Time to Mobilize

One of the frustrating realities that AFSA faces every day is that, unlike private-sector labor unions, we lack leverage. When we disagree with a management policy or seek to change something, we cannot summon our members to strike, stage a work slowdown, or organize a sick-day protest. Not many of our members would be willing to go out and picket the C Street entrance of the Department of State. We are highly unlikely to sue the U.S. government in federal court. In some cases, we have limited options for filing institutional grievances, unfair labor practice petitions, or impasse disputes, but these are slow, cumbersome processes that rarely bring about the kinds of sweeping changes many of our members believe are necessary to address major concerns affecting the Foreign Service career.

Mostly, we must rely on our ability to persuade department management that a particular change would facilitate the goals of the Secretary of State, would save the department money or would significantly advance the interests of the Foreign Service. Our strength lies in the fact that we can claim to speak for the vast majority of members of our profession, which includes many of the same senior management officials sitting across the negotiating table from us.

But sadly, in recent years this has often been insufficient to bring about results. Persuasion and appeals to fairness have not succeeded in getting the department to budge on many of the action items on the “wish list” that AFSA submitted to the director general just over a year ago.

Moreover, increasingly, the things that we are trying to obtain for our members require legislative action. Much of our personnel system — salary, assignments, promotion numbers, leave, transportation/shipping rules — is dictated by the provisions of the Foreign Service Act, which only Congress can modify. Some of our regulations depend on the laws governing all federal employees. And, of course, any initiative involving money requires congressional authorization and appropriation.

Unfortunately, few members of Congress pay much attention to the unique concerns of the Foreign Service because we constitute such a thin sliver of the federal work force and because we are already unfairly perceived as an overpaid, pampered minority. We barely number 13,000 in total, and we have no natural constituency within the general public. Even including thousands of FS retirees and family members, there are not enough champions of the Foreign Service in any one legislative district to have much impact on the support of any single member of Congress.

There is a way, however, for us to maximize the influence of the Foreign Service and to increase our chances of getting both department management and Congress to sit up and pay more attention to our demands: by mobilizing ourselves as a small but

important special-interest group. We are, after all, a unique corps that plays a critical role in representing our country overseas. AFSA members all over the world need to start writing letters and e-mails directly to department management and to Congress about the issues that they consider vital.



We at AFSA hear from our members all the time about their concerns over hot-button issues such as Iraq, directed assignments, unfairness in bidding rules, limited promotion opportunities and the dwindling family-friendliness of the Foreign Service. AFSA brings all these issues to department management. Maybe now it's time for the DG, the under secretary for management and the Secretary of State's office to start receiving hundreds of e-mails and letters on these subjects. A groundswell of direct communication from the people of the Foreign Service would be hard for senior officials to ignore.

Increasingly, the things that we are trying to obtain for our members require legislative action.

At the same time, the 13,000-plus active-duty members of the Foreign Service at State and other agencies hail from every corner of our country and could be quite effective by writing directly, en masse, to their respective members of Congress

on key issues. (Just don't do it on government letterhead, from government e-mail accounts or on government time!)

For example, there are bills before Congress that would grant our long-sought goal of overseas comparability pay, as well as other objectives we have fought for, such as tax breaks for civilians serving in combat zones, changes in maternity/paternity leave rules governing federal employees and provisions to allow same-sex partners of federal employees to enjoy certain family benefits. Letters or e-mails from Foreign Service employees around the world to their respective members of Congress could help push the latter to get on board with these initiatives. For more information about specific bills that affect the Foreign Service and how to reach out to the appropriate member of Congress to urge support, please contact AFSA Legislative Affairs Director Ian Houston (houston@afsa.org).

A mass letter-writing campaign might give a fresh impetus to our agenda. We at AFSA will keep fighting the good fight, but AFSA's lobbying efforts need a boost from the articulate, persuasive and usually not very shy people of the Foreign Service. □

Q&A



Retiree Issues

Survivor Annuities: The Mechanics

BY BONNIE BROWN,
RETIREE COORDINATOR

Q: What should a surviving spouse do in the event of the death of an annuitant spouse?

A: The first step is to promptly report the death to the Retirement Office by phone: (202) 261-8960, or toll-free 1 (866) 224-9053; or by e-mail: retirement@state.gov. Return to the State Department any uncashed annuity checks received after the death. HR/RET will enter the death into the annuity system database to place a hold on future annuity payments to the annuitant.

In order to stop an annuity payment the following month and avoid an overpayment, RAD must receive notification of the death of an annuitant by the processing deadline of the 14th of the month.

Within 24 to 48 hours, HR/RET will fax a report of death to the Retirement Accounts Division in Charleston, send a survivor benefits package to the surviving spouse and, if he or she is eligible to continue health benefits, change FEHB enrollment to reflect the appropriate coverage for the survivor.

Q: When will a survivor become eligible for a survivor annuity?

A: The survivor will be eligible for an annuity the day after the death of the annuitant. However, annuities are paid a month in arrears: the payment received at the beginning of the month is for the previous month. That means that, if the annuitant died at some point during the month, he or she had been entitled to an annuity for that portion of the month when he or she was alive, and the survivor became

entitled to a survivor annuity beginning the day after the death of the annuitant.

Q: How does the Retirement Accounts Division handle this allocation?

A: In order to stop an annuity payment the following month and avoid an overpayment, RAD must receive notification of the death of an annuitant by the processing deadline of the 14th of the month.

Q: What happens if notification of death is received after the 14th of the month, the annuity check is not stopped in time, and it is automatically deposited in a joint account?

A: If, upon reviewing its pay records, RAD determines that an annuity payment was made after the death of the annuitant, RAD notifies the Treasury Department. If this happens, according to Treasury regulations, the entire annuity payment for the month in which the annuitant died must be reclaimed.

Treasury begins the reclamation process by requesting a refund from the financial institution where the annuity payments were automatically deposited and taking payment from the account. The financial institution is required to mail a copy of the notice requesting return of funds to the last known address of the account owners. If the annuity payment is not returned to the Treasury within 120 days, Treasury will begin other administrative offset and collection procedures.

Q: When will the survivor begin receiving a survivor annuity?

A: After HR/RET reviews its records and sends an authorization for a survivor annuity to the Retirement Accounts Division. RAD then processes a final payment to the eligible survivor, beneficiary or estate and initiates the survivor annuity. Again, this authorization must be received by the processing deadline (the 14th of the month) in order to make the change in payments effective the following month.

Q: What is a final death benefit?

A: A final death benefit is a payment for the number of days the annuitant lived during the month in which he or she died and was entitled to an annuity. After adjudication by HR/RET, RAD pays the final net annuity payment to the designated beneficiary, which in most cases is the surviving spouse.

Q: Whom should I call if I need an explanation of my survivor payments?

A: You can contact RM/RAD by phone: (843) 308-5552, or 1 (800) 521-2553; or by e-mail: RAD2@state.gov. Both RAD and HR/RET are always available to assist retirees and family members during this very difficult time. □

AFSA NEWS BRIEFS

Apply now for AFSA Scholarships

High school seniors and college undergraduates who are children of Foreign Service employees can now apply for one-time-only Academic and Art Merit Awards and need-based Financial Aid Scholarships. Awards range from \$1,500 to \$3,000. The applications submission deadline is Feb. 6, 2008. Visit AFSA's scholarship Web page at www.afsa.org/scholar/index.cfm for complete details, or contact Lori Dec at dec@afsa.org, or 1 (800) 704-2372, ext. 504.

AmericanDiplomacy.org

American Diplomacy, an Internet-based professional journal, is seeking new authors. This Webzine publishes articles of commentary and analysis, feature stories, Foreign Service memoirs, scholarly research of general interest, reviews of books and Internet articles, comments from readers and announcements.

The target audience includes the Foreign Service community, educators, students and others interested in foreign policy and the practice of diplomacy. Articles are peer-reviewed by professionals or scholars in the relevant field. New material is posted weekly on the Web site at: www.americandiplomacy.org.

Launched in 1996 by a group of retired FSOs in the North Carolina Research Triangle area, it is published with the active cooperation of the Triangle Institute for Security Studies and the Curriculum in Peace, War and Defense Studies, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Visits to articles appearing on the *American Diplomacy* Web site have increased steadily, now totaling more than 200,000 per year.

The editors welcome and encourage submissions from active and retired Foreign Service professionals, as well as from scholars. Submissions may be sent to the editor, Ambassador (ret.) Jim Bullington, at: editor@americandiplomacy.org.

V.P. VOICE: FCS ■ BY STEPHEN J. ANDERSON, FCS REPRESENTATIVE

Should Commercial Officers Do Domestic Tours?



As your new AFSA representative, I am directly concerned about domestic tours outside of headquarters. Commercial officers hired after 1994 are required within the first seven years of service to begin a two-year assignment at U.S. Export Assistance Centers. I am now serving on such an assignment at USEAC Baltimore. To complete my full disclosure, I barely made our flexible deadline, receiving my assignment at the end of my seventh year of service. As I have come to expect, the needs of the Service result in considerable flexibility in the "seven-year rule."

For newly hired officers, the seven-year rule for USEAC assignments results in ambiguities for tenure, promotions and career planning. In a recent survey, management asked about the impact of these assignments on commissioning and tenure. The survey itself was conducted by an executive-level development team at Commerce to compare C&T procedures at FCS with those at the State Department and Department of Agriculture.

The survey asked junior commercial officers, senior commercial officers and Commissioning and Tenure Board members about mentoring and evaluations, and also addressed domestic assignments prior to tenure among other career-path issues. The survey results indicated that SCOs and JCOs appeared to agree that mentoring had improved.

SCOs said that the three-to-five-year window under current C&T policy should not be expanded. JCOs thought that evaluations should be more standardized. C&T Board members (only three responses) found room for improvement in the evaluation narratives addressing candidate potential: in general, the narratives showed a "lack of courage" by raters and reviewers, and used "nuanced language" that left the board guessing about whether to tenure JCOs.

The survey did not address the impacts of domestic assignments on promotion (see the April FCS "VP Voice") or the directions for renegotiating the "seven-year rule" (see the AFSA Web site's FCS page for the March 2007 proposal). In responding to "Please indicate the number of domestic tours you believe that one should have prior to being considered for C&T," commercial officers were split: 14 of 30 JCOs (47 percent) thought one domestic tour was appropriate and 14 of 34 SCOs (41 percent) thought one domestic tour appropriate. On the flip side, 16 of 30 JCOs (53 percent) would consider less than one tour acceptable, and 20 of 34 SCOs (59 percent) considered less than one tour a good idea. While the percentage differences are relatively small, they indicate that SCOs ascribe on average less importance to USEAC domestic tours for tenure, and probably for overall career path and promotion as well.

One of my projects as FCS representative will be to focus on domestic assignments and the need for more clarity about tenure, USEAC tours and career paths. The recent survey shows some divergence of opinion and shared concern about the domestic tours. We will stay in touch via AFSAnet, the Web site and future columns, and I hope to hear from commercial officers (as well as encourage them all to become AFSA members!). I would also like to survey all commercial officers and incorporate your opinions in appropriate and focused questions to as many of our colleagues as possible. Please let us know your reactions and any concerns so that AFSA may better represent commercial officers in Washington. □

IG Resignation Call • Continued from page 55

Baghdad, which may leave our members there even more vulnerable than they already are. Because OIG can only do its vital work if it maintains independence, credibility and objectivity, AFSA concluded that the public interest required new leadership at OIG until the allegations have been resolved.”

AFSA’s call for the IG to step down was reported in a Sept. 19 Associated Press article that was picked up by many newspapers nationwide.

The text of the AFSA press release follows:

State Dept. Inspector General Must Step Down

WASHINGTON, D.C.: The president of the American Foreign Service Association today called on embattled Department of State Inspector General Howard J. Krongard to surrender day-to-day control of State’s vital Office of the Inspector General pending the resolution of grave allegations of malfeasance leveled against him by numerous current and former career government officials.

AFSA President John K. Naland, noting the 13-page list of allegations released on Sept. 18, 2007, by Henry A. Waxman, chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, revealed that AFSA also has been approached in recent days by several concerned former State Department employees with direct knowledge of some of the events in question. The allegations against Mr. Krongard cover all aspects of the work of the Office of Inspector General: investigations, audits and inspections. They include allegations of his blocking investigations into possible substandard construction at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, Iraq, which may leave employees there unacceptably vulnerable.

Naland commented: “The worse-case scenario in corruption is when it endangers lives. The worse-case scenario in public service is when the watchdog becomes the suspected violator. Both of these allegations have been leveled against Mr. Krongard. As long as he maintains day-to-day control, his office’s ability to do its vital job with full credibility will be compromised. He should step down until the allegations are resolved one way or another.” □

AFSANEWSBRIEFS**Support AFSA with Your CFC Gift**

Please consider supporting AFSA programs with your 2007 Com-

bined Federal Campaign donation. The Scholarship Fund (#11759) provides grants to Foreign Service children to help pay for their college education (www.afsa.org/scholar/CFC11759.cfm). The Fund for American Diplomacy (#10646) educates the public on the critical role of U.S. diplomacy in the world (www.afsa.org/CFCFAD.cfm). Simply designate #11759 and/or #10646 on your CFC pledge card.

State Department employees (active-duty or retired) can obtain a CFC pledge form or return their card to Shelly Kornegay in the Office of Employee Relations at (202) 261-8166 or kornegaysv@state.gov. Contributions will be accepted through Dec. 14. Thank you in advance for your support.

E-Classifieds on the Way

Be on the lookout for a new addition to the AFSA Web site. Coming soon and available exclusively to AFSA members are the all-new **E-Classifieds**, www.afsa.org/classifieds/. Members will be able to post advertisements in a variety of specific categories similar to those in our print version of classifieds within the *AFSA News* section of the *Journal*. For a limited time, all AFSA members can post ads for no charge.

The benefits of electronic ads will be the rapid turnaround time to reach the Foreign Service community and beyond. Have an apartment to sublet; a house to sell; furniture to pass on? In lieu of posting a notice on the bulletin board in the Truman Building (we all know how convenient *that* is!), AFSA is offering this pilot classifieds program as a service to members. As an added bonus, the option to insert a picture will be available. The basic interface is designed to be concise, effective and, hopefully, user-friendly. Contact FSJ Business Manager Andrew Kidd with questions (kidd@afsa.org).

Update on IRS Rule Change for Foreign Earned Income

The April edition of *AFSA News* reported on a change in the calculation of the Foreign Earned Income Exclusion that allows U.S. citizens who are not government employees and who live outside the U.S. to exclude a significant portion of their foreign-source income for tax purposes. This change could increase the tax liability for some Foreign Service families.

In order to help AFSA develop an advocacy approach and gauge the depth of the problem, President John Naland highlighted the issue in his Aug. 3 AFSA net, and asked that members tell us if they have been affected by the changes. The response was strong and identified an initial group of 50 members who have been affected and want to help work to reverse the new rule.

AFSA then worked to connect members of this core group (representing 14 states) with their House and Senate members, and is now developing other ideas to raise the profile of this problem with Congress. If this rule will have an impact on your tax liability but you did not respond to the request earlier, please send an e-mail to Legislative Director Ian Houston at houston@afsa.org with details, including the names of your congressional representatives if possible.

Success on Educational Travel Allowance

AFSA, working with the State Department, helped convince Congress to pass legislation that provides a long overdue group of enhancements to education and travel allowances that benefit FS members and their families. The new benefits cover certain dependents’ travel to the U.S. and now, for the first time, to a third country, for their secondary or post-secondary education. The measure covers storage of personal effects at or near the school, or shipment of those effects

once a year during trips to post (away-from-post Education Allowance). The measure also extends educational travel to children attending graduate-level programs prior to their 23rd birthday.

After congressional passage and presidential signature into law (PL 109-472), AFSA then engaged on the implementation plan. The changes to the educational travel benefit took effect on July 22. Details were included in a July 22, 2007, State ALDAC allowance biweekly.

Renovation • Continued from page 55

ly how to handle, and fund, a major AFSA-HQ renovation. The initial debate inside AFSA concerned whether to renovate the existing space or to build up from the three-story footprint to create space that could be sold or rented to outside parties. Experts were hired, committees were formed and countless meetings were held. In the final analysis, the numbers did not point to a guaranteed profit that would make adding new floors worth the cost and the risk.

There was also much debate about whether to add an elevator to the building, a costly proposition. AFSA's legal counsel and staff strongly urged the inclusion of the elevator, not only for the convenience of the staff—who pitch in daily to haul boxes of magazines, mailings and pamphlets, even copy machines and other equipment and furniture, up the three flights of stairs—but for visiting members, many of whom are advanced in years. Liability concerns were also highlighted. The elevator was approved and is included in the plans. The renovated building, unlike the current one, will comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The Governing Board met on Sept. 19 in a special session to consider the recommendations from the Finance and Audit Committee on the reconstruction plans and budget. Votes were taken on which construction company to select from three viable bids, and on how to fund the \$2-million project. The board agreed to take the first million from the AFSA reserve fund, which was created for just such a purpose.



The board is still considering options for the second million, but will likely decide to borrow, at market rate, from the scholarship fund.

As the voice of the Foreign Service,

AFSA needs an improved face. The new building will be a more welcoming place not only for those who work inside, but for members and visitors as well. AFSA will be open for business throughout the construction, with some staff members and officers working out of temporary offices in

Rosslyn and others telecommuting. The Labor-Management Office in the Truman Building (Main State) will remain open. The AFSA e-mail system will remain operational throughout, and all employees will access their accounts from outside

the headquarters building. The temporary AFSA-HQ office is located at State Annex SA-15, 1800 N. Kent St., Arlington, Va.

Thank you for your patience during the renovation. □



Photos: Shawn Doman

MILESTONES: HONORING 10 YEARS OF SERVICE TO AFSA

Ed Miltenberger: A Great Fit

BY SHAWN DORMAN



Ed Miltenberger has been the *Foreign Service Journal's* circulation and advertising manager for 10 years. Responsible for the yearly expansion of advertising support for the magazine, he has raised annual ad revenue from \$344,000 in 1997 to \$531,000 today. Editor Steve Honley notes that thanks to Ed's hard work and creativity, the magazine covers approximately 70 percent of its costs through advertising.

Ed enjoys seeking out the most appropriate advertisers to serve the Foreign Service community and forming new relationships with advertisers who offer things that AFSA members need, such as housing, insurance, transportation, schools, etc. He established the *Journal's* popular twice-yearly Schools Supplement and the property-management

section. His team puts together advertising information charts to make navigation of information easier, and has added "Marketplace" to the AFSA Web site (www.afsa.org/ads) to offer an online compilation of advertiser information. Ed has sought to maximize the potential of the Internet to bring advertisers — and their services — and the *Journal's* unique readership together to benefit both.

Originally from Cumberland, Md., Ed came to AFSA from years of international work and travel. After graduating from Frostburg State College in 1986, he joined the Peace Corps and served in Ecuador and then Bolivia, spending a total of six years in Latin America. Following his return to the U.S., he worked for the Cochran

Fellowship Program at the Foreign Agricultural Service, focusing on the countries of the former Soviet Union.

In 1996, a temp job assignment to AFSA introduced Ed to his future employer and colleagues. While working in Bosnia with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1997, he got a fateful phone call from AFSA. It was his first day in Brcko, and he was attending a regional team meeting. He closed the deal on the new position right then and there, and hasn't looked back since.

"I have a lot of freedom and independence to make decisions," Ed explains. As long as his sales goals are met, he says, he is free to try new things, experiment with innovative ideas. "The best part about AFSA is the people that you work with here. I actually like to come to the office." He adds that it's hard to imagine working anywhere else. And it's hard to imagine AFSA without Ed. □

CLASSIFIEDS



LEGAL SERVICES

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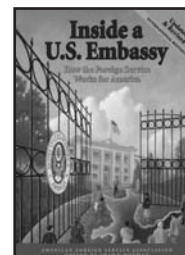
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