

AFSA ELDERHOSTEL

Raising Awareness Among a Vocal Group

BY ASGEIR SIGFUSSON, AFSA/ELDERHOSTEL PROGRAM ASSOCIATE

The AFSA Elderhostel program is developing and expanding every season. The basic mission remains the same: To educate and inform the American public about the work and importance of the Foreign Service. The audiences — retired Americans from all over the United States — have been highly receptive to the idea that diplomacy is an important tool of foreign policy, and they often vow to go home and advocate on behalf of the Foreign Service. This is a key benefit of the program, as our participants are typically highly educated people of significant influence in their communities. We have also been pleased to see many people return to our weeklong programs multiple times, often bringing along friends.

In order to use retired Foreign Service personnel as our featured speakers, we have organized our programs in locations with a healthy concentration of such retirees. In addition to Washington, D.C., our locations include St. Petersburg, Atlanta, Chautauqua and Tucson. In the spring of 2007, our newest location will offer its first course,

the foreign policy issues of the Pacific Rim, presented in the heart of San Francisco.

Our one-day programs, so-called “Days of Discovery,” have also turned out to be a huge hit. We have so far offered four different topics — all immediate sellouts — and in 2007 we will add three new topics to that roster, including programs on Latin America and China. We have also designed two new courses for our weeklong programs in Washington, D.C.: One features China and East Asia, while the other focuses on Latin America and Africa.

We have also been lucky to have a deep pool of talent to pull from as far as speakers are concerned. This fall, we were able to bring such highly-regarded experts as Ambassadors Marc Grossman, Beth Jones, W. Robert Pearson, David Newton, John W. Limbert and Thomas Hubbard to speak at our Washington-based programs. We encourage interested retirees to contact us if they wish to contribute time and knowledge to our efforts.

Finally, we look forward to welcoming our hostellers in a brand-new Washington location next spring: the Savoy Suites in Georgetown. We are glad to be able to offer such excellent accommodations in the heart of the nation’s capital.

If you have an interest in participating in our programs, please visit www.afsa.org/elderhostel or contact AFSA Elderhostel Program Coordinator Janice Bay at bay@afsa.org. □

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