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## Golden West Humanitarian Foundation

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**G**olden West Humanitarian Foundation is a public charity established in 1997 to address operational limitations in mine and unexploded-ordnance-clearance efforts, and to protect the lives and livelihoods of individuals affected by landmines and UXO.<sup>1</sup> Since 1997, Golden West has grown and built upon its work, starting new programs with governments, the United Nations and nongovernmental organizations, while expanding operations to Belize, Cambodia, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Moldova, Nicaragua, the Solomon Islands and Vietnam.<sup>2</sup>

Based in California (U.S.), with offices in Cambodia, Hawaii (U.S.), South Africa and Vietnam, Golden West consists of nine full-time American employees and 13 local staff in Cambodia and Vietnam, as well as a number of part-time employees who are engaged as needed. Combining experience with explosive-ordnance disposal, engineering, chemistry and more, Golden West works to create innovative technology for the mine-action community making operations safer, faster and/or cheaper.<sup>3</sup>

#### Activities

As part of its mission to help those affected by landmines and other explosive remnants of war, Golden West undertakes numerous activities, including:

- **Consultancy:** Golden West offers specialized methods and/or technologies to groups that dispose of mines or ERW. In the past, Golden West has consulted on developing national mine-action standards, mine/UXO/ERW-detection technology, cluster-bomb/small-arms stockpile destruction, white phosphorus munitions destruction, battle-area clearance and related subjects.<sup>4</sup>

- **Munitions-risk education:** Golden West operates several programs aimed at providing MRE. One of these programs, the Mine Indicator Program, offers participants country-specific materials with visual indicators that signal the presence of landmines or UXO. The program encourages individuals to mark the location of a perceived threat and submit a report to authorities.
- **Children's education division:** Golden West offers educational materials designed for and distributed to children to teach them how to respond to mines and UXO. One teaching tool is a graphic novel demonstrating landmine threats exclusively through illustrations to ensure accessibility. Other efforts include an educational video game offering visual cues of contamination that mirror reality for the One Laptop Per Child program and an illustrated storybook explaining how to alert authorities in the event of a discovered threat.
- **Detection technology:** Golden West conducts extensive research and designs improvements for land and shallow-water UXO detection instruments; increasing their capacities into multifunctional turnkey systems with digital global positioning systems interface for digital recording and accurate mapping.
- **Cluster-munitions stockpile destruction:** Golden West has developed safe and effective techniques for the disposal of low-density cluster-munitions stockpiles and uses that expertise to advise and assist other countries and organizations in disposal activities. Golden West has already provided disposal education in Cambodia, Moldova and Vietnam, and will offer these services to other countries as the need arises.
- **Harvesting explosives:** Golden West's Explosive Harvesting System safely extracts the explosives from excess ammunition, bombs and anti-tank mines; it then converts these explosives into small, highly effective disposal charges to assist with landmine and UXO clearance. This process allows countries and mine-action programs with small budgets to save money instead of spending it on commercial explosives and shipping costs.
- **Small-arms/munitions destruction:** Golden West has also developed sustainable and cost-effective small-arms burners for the destruction of small arms, light weapons and certain ammunition types. In Cambodia and Central America, these burners were fabricated using readily available local materials by fully qualified welders. In Central America alone; a single munitions/small arms burner unit processed more than 100 metric tons (220,462 pounds) of

small-arms ammunition in a five-month period, fully destroying the propellant but containing all metallic/lead components.

- **Munitions cutting:** Expanding on the techniques used with the Explosive Harvesting System, Golden West has manufactured mobile and stationary units intended to safely cut explosive ordnance up to 2,000 pounds (909 kilograms). The mobile system allows EOD technicians to safely remove the initiating system from larger ordnance items that would otherwise need *in situ* destruction and transport it to a safe storage/disposal area. The stationary units allow remote cutting of safe-to-move/hard-to-destroy explosive-loaded items, reducing the time, effort and expense of normal disposal by detonation methods.
- **Training aids:** Additionally, Golden West provides inerted ordnance and fuzing systems to other nonprofit groups—often for little-to-no cost, thus providing an essential resource for organizations to teach EOD, demining and UXO disposal.

#### Employee Scholarship Program

Finally, Golden West provides education support to developing nations through GWHF's Employee Scholarship Program. The ESP affords local staff—and often their families—with the money needed to continue their education while employed with Golden West. Since the program's origination in 2008, 90 percent of the local staff acquired a secondary education, with the program covering the costs.

#### Funding

Golden West's funding comes from a combination of grants, contracts, corporate donors and private donors. A large majority of government funding comes




Photo collage courtesy of Golden West Humanitarian Foundation.

from the United States Department of Defense's Humanitarian Demining Research and Development program, Night Vision and Electronic Sensors Directorate, and the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA). In addition, Golden West has contracts with the Organization of American States for SA/LW destruction, stockpile reduction, training and UXO-clearance work.

#### Future

In the future, Golden West plans to increase involvement in SA/LW and stockpile-reduction efforts in Latin America through the Organization of American States. It also intends to continue expanding shallow-water detection technology to assist UXO clearance in Southeast Asia's ponds, rivers and

canals, improving the capacities in the South Pacific as well as increasing partnerships in Vietnam and Laos to expand technology and training. The Children's Education Division is creating a new graphic novel—a scrap metal/munitions-risk story—that relies heavily on a visual component to increase communication. 

~Eric Wuestewald, CISR Staff

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