

Paying It Forward

Some believe that the work of one person can affect many—that just one person can help save the lives of thousands. After the loss of three U.S. government officials, Ambassador Robert C. Frasure, Dr. Joseph Kruzal and Colonel Samuel Nelson Drew, in a tragic automobile accident in Bosnia, the U.S. State Department's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA) and James Madison University's Mine Action Information Center decided it was time to do just that: aid many with just one.¹

by Natalie Wall [Mine Action Information Center]

In 1999, the Frasure-Kruzal-Drew Humanitarian Demining Fellowship was established to provide fellows the opportunity to work with PM/WRA as it raises American awareness about the global landmine problem and rallies support for U.S. government initiatives to eliminate this problem.¹ PM/WRA now supports 36 countries on five continents.²

This opportunity to work with landmine-remediation programs began with the tragic loss of three men with the same mission. During the inaugural ceremony of the fellowship, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs Robert M. Beecroft said in remembrance of the men he knew personally, “They did not see themselves as heroes. Rather, they were doing a job that needed to be done in the service of humanity and peace.”¹

Since 1999, one JMU student or recent graduate has been selected to spend a semester and, more recently, a full year working at the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement. For that year, the fellow is immersed in the field of landmines, unexploded ordnance, and small arms/light weapons, from preparing basic unexploded ordnance PowerPoint™ presentations to traveling around the world engaging in landmine-affected countries.²

But for many fellows, the global field of landmines does not end after their one-year stint at the State Department. After being immersed in WRA, many fellows discover that mine action is their passion.

Each year, the fellowship program selects a new and highly-qualified individual. Current JMU fellow Anthony Morin, who began his fellowship in the summer of 2008, hopes to change the world. “I just want to leave the world a better place than how I found it,” Morin says. “As cliché as that sounds, ultimately, this line of work—conventional weapons destruction—[is a means for] achieving that goal.”³

Morin, who graduated from JMU in 2008 with a bachelor's degree in justice studies, has found the fellowship as an “amazing opportunity to grow.”³ Through this experience, Morin has gathered a deeper understanding about mine action and small arms/light weapons issues, and the ways they are addressed in different countries across the globe.³

Morin has also quickly learned that textbooks and classrooms fall short in comparison to actually working in a specific field. “Studying the ins and outs of American government in a college classroom pales in comparison to the knowledge and experience gained from working as a part of it on a firsthand, daily basis,” says Morin.³

Not even halfway through his fellowship, Morin has already expressed that he would like to continue his career in mine action. “During my first week in the office, I took some time to myself and created a list of things that I wanted to get out of the program before the end of my time here, and I tacked it onto my wall. I look at it now and can't help but smile because everything that I have been involved with to date has lined up seamlessly with the goals that I set out for myself,” says Morin.³

Erin Snyder, the first appointed fellow, initially began preparing presentations about U.S. Humanitarian Demining Programs (the precursor

office to PM/WRA).⁴ Further into her fellowship, Snyder attended conferences, researched and edited projects, and traveled to Africa. At the end of her semester assignment, Snyder was recognized for her significant contributions with a certificate of appreciation.¹

Snyder was eventually hired for an extended stay at the State Department after her fellowship. Her exposure to practically “every component of mine action” and her experiences later landed her a job with Adopt-A-Minefield.⁵

Another fellow, Kurt Chesko, worked as a program assistant on a multimedia CD-ROM, “Landmines: Clearing the Way,” during his fellowship. As a program assistant, he profiled 39 mine-affected countries and collected information from deminers around the world. With this experience Chesko was able to get a job as a program coordinator for The HALO Trust, which soon led him to a demining position in Jabul Saraj, Afghanistan.⁵

“Until you have been on your hands and knees clearing mines and UXO, you cannot appreciate the work that thousands of deminers are doing for months at a time in some of the harshest conditions,” says Chesko.⁵

Elise Becker, the 2006–07 fellow, assisted the WRA Senegal program manager in creating and implementing the *WRA Humanitarian Mine Action Plan* for Senegal. Becker conducted research on Senegal's mine/UXO and small arms/light weapons contamination. With this research, she helped decide where the 2007 funding for Senegal would be best spent and helped incorporate that information into a plan of assistance.⁴ Becker's role as program manager for Senegal culminated in a program assessment visit to Senegal at the end of her fellowship.

Becker was also given the opportunity to take courses at the Department of Defense's Humanitarian Demining Training Center. “The courses I took at HDTC provided me with a clear picture of the technical, in-field practices and standards for mine and unexploded ordnance detection and clearance,” says Becker.⁴

Since her fellowship, Becker has continued her work at The Marshall Legacy Institute, a

non-profit PM/WRA partner in the mine-action field. “The opportunities that PM/WRA provided me have created a solid base of knowledge and experience in the mine-action field,” says Becker. “I feel that my duties as assistant program manager to Senegal furthered a set of job skills that I am especially interested in expanding.”⁴

Similar to Becker's experience, Jennifer Lachman, the 2005–06 fellow, helped design the fiscal year plan for Sudan. During this planning she had a two-week stint in Sudan to conduct the field research. In Sudan she attended a mine-risk education assessment and a UXO demolition demonstration.

Lachman was able to experience mine action from the perspective of an individual who must acclimate to the mines around them. “I walked through a real, live minefield to observe the steps involved in manual demining operations,” says Lachman.⁴



Elise Becker with a group of village chiefs in the Casamance region of Senegal.
PHOTO COURTESY OF DAN HUTCHENS

After her fellowship, Lachman continued her work in the mine-action field at the Mines Advisory Group in Washington D.C. “[The fellowship], therefore, not only provided me with seven months of the best postgraduate experience I could have ever hoped for but [it also provided] a future career in an [field of work] that I have come to appreciate and respect,” says Lachman.⁴

No individual can be forgotten in their service to the Frasure-Kruzal-Drew Humanitarian Demining Fellowship. Every fellow fervently works for peace and faces an unrelenting environment in need of betterment, no matter how frustrating his/her job may be. Ten years into the fellowship, the ideals of service and peace have not been forgotten. With each year, through the Frasure-Kruzal-Drew Humanitarian Fellowship, one individual has gained valuable experience and made significant contributions to mine action.

“Whether you look at it through the lens of a pure humanitarian or a political-military strategist, everyone involved in this field is bound by the common thread of desire to make the

world a better place to live in and to help those that are in need,” Morin says.³ The 2009–10 fellow will be chosen in early 2009 and will begin his or her service in the summer of 2009. ♦

See Endnotes, page 113



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