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Anatomy of a Program: UNA-USA Takes on Landmines

Melanie Velez

Bill Rigler

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Melanie Velez and Bill Rigler

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Adopt-A-Minefield

On December 3, 1997, over 100 countries convened in Ottawa, Canada to sign an historic landmine-ban treaty. The event marked the end of a six-year campaign by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines to end the scourge of these deadly antipersonnel weapons. Simultaneously, the United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA), a non-government organization (NGO), launched a program called Adopt-A-Minefield. Through this program, civic groups, corporations, and other organizations "adopt" a mine-strewn area pre-selected by the United Nations for demining. These private and public groups raise funds to clear their adopted minefields in order to return the land to productive use. This new program freely borrows its methodology from the successful "adopt-a-highway" and "sister cities" programs.

UNA-USA's involvement with the landmine issue grew out of the Association's many fact-finding visits to various UN peacekeeping missions. The toll that these anti-personnel (AP) mines take on the lives of civilians was immediately visible, and it moved the Association's top leadership to ask what special contribution UNA-USA could make to the ban-the-landmine movement. In the second half of 1996, UNA-USA convened four meetings that brought together some 40 experts to discuss various aspects of the landmine issue and UNA-USA's landmine program. Soon after, UNA-USA joined the International and the U.S. Campaigns to Ban Landmines and established its own Landmine Awareness Program, which is designed to draw on the Association's long experience in informing and educating the American people.

Two months before the 1997 Ottawa conference, the Association led landmine experts and victims on a four-day, nine-city tour across the U.S. designed to raise public awareness and to urge the Clinton administration to back the "Ottawa process." The tour kicked off with a rally on the steps of the U.S. Capitol. Several hundred people attended the rally, including members of Congress, journalists, and activists. Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), the leading U.S. proponent of a ban on landmines, addressed the crowd and decried the lack of U.S. leadership on this issue.

UNA-USA chapters and divisions hosted the speakers as they crisscrossed the country to Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Denver, Dallas, San Diego, and San Francisco.

The Adopt-A-Minefield program was formally launched at a press conference in the Government Conference Center in Ottawa on December 3, 1997, when the treaty was opened for signature. U.S. "demining czar" Karl F. Inderfurth, the Clinton appointee for U.S. Special Representative for Global Humanitarian Demining, addressed the crowd, praising UNA-USA for its initiative. Bernard Miyet, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping, similarly welcomed the new UN alliance with the UNA-USA.

Mines-to-Vines

As CNN cameras rolled, UNA-USA introduced the press to three California wine makers who were the lead donors of the Mines-to-Vines campaign, an element of the Adopt-A-Minefield program. Each of the three—Beringer Wine Estates, Wente Vineyards, and Robert Mondavi Winery—will "adopt" a mined tract of land in a region of the world suitable for grape-growing and restore the land to use as a vineyard. To inaugurate the process, UNA-USA is working with the UN to identify tracts in the former Yugoslavia where grape growing has previously been a staple of the economy.

Similarly, the Napa Valley Vintners Association has pledged to donate the proceeds of a spring wine-tasting and silent auction to the demining cause. "The wine industry is a natural partner for UNA-USA's Mines-to-Vines campaign," said Association President Dennis Cakebread at a press conference. "Several states devastated by the humanitarian and economic effects of landmines were once thriving wine regions. We are committed to raising the funds necessary to clear landmines, cultivate land, and plant grapevines." On hand were Eric Wente of Wente Vineyards, Tor Kenward of Beringer Wine Estates, and Martin Tekela of Robert Mondavi Winery.

Atlanta's International High School, another Adopt-A-Minefield sponsor, heard about the project during the September speaking tour hosted by UNA-USA. Shortly after, over 100 students, led by the newly formed "Students Against Landmines," marched on downtown Atlanta. The march was designed to encourage state politicians to support the landmine-ban treaty. The student participants have pledged to adopt a mine-afflicted schoolyard or other appropriate setting and plan to activate a network composed of 650 sister high schools around the world to raise additional funds.

Down to Details

The United Nations Office for Project Services is now compiling a list of

minefields for UNA-USA. They are also determining the necessary resources to clear these minefields. UNA-USA's Board of Directors has authorized an Adopt-A-Minefield fund, into which all monies raised by sponsoring organizations will be placed. The funds will then be forwarded to the United Nations to be used for demining operations.

Since the press conference in December, a heavy stream of calls has poured into UNA-USA offices. These calls come from civic groups, schools, and city leaders interested in meeting the demining challenge. To communicate UNA-USA's efforts to a broad constituency, UNA-USA has participated in conferences with UN demining experts, government representatives, and private organizations. The Association will also participate in the State Department's May 1998 Demining Resource Coordination Conference.

Adopting a Minefield: How It Works

To request information on the Adopt-A-Minefield program, interested parties should contact Mr. Oren Schlein, Director of Corporate Affairs at UNA-USA, by phone at (212) 907-1300 or by e-mail at unahq@unausa.org.

UNA-USA will send preliminary information and a catalogue describing minefields in various countries around the world. The cost of demining ranges in price according to minefield size and location. UNA-USA will send a representative to meet with the potential sponsor and initiate a series of meetings leading to formal adoption of the minefield. The sponsor, in consultation with UNA-USA, will develop a fund-raising strategy (if necessary) to mobilize the local community. Once a field is selected, UNA-USA will arrange meetings of the sponsoring organization and representatives of the United Nations. The aim is to keep sponsors informed about the progress of demining in "their" field and to ensure that the field is cleared.
