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Paying it Forward

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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 Kruzel 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-Kruzel-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. PM/WRA now supports 56 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 C. Frasure and 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.”

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 base unexploded ordnance PowerPoint2 presentations to traveling around the world engaging in landmine-affected countries.3 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 during 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 de-struction—[is a means for] achieving that goal.” 3 Through this experience, Morin has gathered a deeper understanding of justice studies, has found the fellowship as an “amazing opportunity” and as “another step” in his career in mine action.4

Anthony Morin, a senior in international studies at James Madison University, was selected for the 2008–09 fellowship. After his fellowship, he was able to extend his work abroad in order to gain a broader understanding of demining issues.

Morin, who graduated from JMU in 2008 with a bachelor’s degree in international studies, has found the fellowship as an “amazing opportunity to grow.” Through this experience, Morin has gained a deeper understanding of mine action and small arms/light weapons contamination. With this research, he helped decide where the 2007 funding for Senegal would be best spent and helped incorporate that information into a plan of assistance. 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.5

Since his 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.

“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.5

Elise Becker with a group of ejection chairs in the Casablanca region of Senegal.

After her fellowship, Lachman continued her work in the mine-action field at the Mines Advisory Group in Washington D.C. “[This fellowship], therefore, not only provided me with seven months of the best professional 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.6

No individual can be forgotten in their work in the mine-action field. Every fellow has gained valuable experience and made significant contributions with a certificate of appreciation. 1

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Note from the field: the Journal of ERW and mine action | winter 2008/09 | 12.2

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