

Press Releases: 2018 AAFSW Secretary of State Award for Outstanding Volunteerism Abroad

Notice to the Press
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
November 14, 2018

Four winners will receive the Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide (AAFSW) Secretary of State Award for Outstanding Volunteerism Abroad (SOSA) at a ceremony on Thursday, November 15, 2018 at 11:00 a.m. in the Benjamin Franklin Room at the Department of State. Department Spokesperson Heather Nauert will deliver remarks, highlighting the winner's exemplary service.

SOSA awards recognize U.S. government employees; family members, including domestic partners; and other members of household at embassies and consulates who performed exceptional volunteer service to their communities, mission or host country, or rendered outstanding assistance in emergencies. This year's award winners are:

AF – Abigail Hankin-Wei, Maputo, Mozambique

Abigail Hankin-Wei is a U.S. Emergency Medicine attending physician associated with Emory University and a Foreign Service spouse currently posted in Maputo, Mozambique. She started volunteering within the public health system, and soon realized that physicians had limited knowledge of emergency medicine, and even more limited equipment, ultimately resulting in needless suffering and loss of life. It was then that she expanded her volunteer commitment to attempt to change the future of emergency care in Mozambique. Dr. Hankin-Wei has partnered with a local medical school to start an Emergency Medicine residency program and is training the very first class of Emergency Medicine specialized physicians in the entire country. When she departs post, the first six newly minted Emergency Medicine physicians in Mozambique will be in place. She has also collaborated with the U.S.-based nonprofit organization, PLeDGE Health (<http://www.pledgehealth.org/>) to develop a plan for sustainable support for the training program and the partner hospitals even after she and her family depart from this post. Dr. Hankin-Wei's efforts are changing the entire structure of the Mozambican medical system. In ten years' time, these doctors will have saved countless

lives and will be engaged in training the next generation of Emergency Medicine physicians.

EAP – Nicola Hil, Guangzhou, China

Nicola spent her two-year tour as an eligible family member (EFM) in Guangzhou making invaluable contributions to Mission efforts to promote women's and gender issues through public outreach events. From October 2016 until June 2018, Nicola strengthened the Consulate's "Women in Society" group responsible for putting on these events. She organized events to raise awareness of domestic violence and sexual assault; a networking event to promote Chinese women entrepreneurs; a presentation on the intersection of LGBTI movements and feminism; and a panel on the role of men in ending gender inequality. Audience responses to these events were overwhelmingly positive. Nicola and the Women in Society team were successful in their efforts to give attendees a safe space to learn about and discuss issues affecting women in the United States and the world. Nicola also took the lead in organizing a joint event between the Consulate General and WeConnect, a U.S. nonprofit focused on championing women entrepreneurs. The event connected Chinese women entrepreneurs with multinational businesses, thus providing important professional opportunities in what is still a male-dominated sector.

EUR – Matt A. Ellsworth, Nicosia, Cyprus

An accomplished genealogist, Matt Ellsworth arrived in Cyprus in 2015 expecting to help Cypriots discover their ancestry through easy access to well-developed resources. He discovered that while records were plentiful, access to them was limited. Matt began compiling a database of Cypriots named in published and online resources, most of whom were born more than 100 years ago. He became familiar with cemeteries, libraries, and archives on both sides of the island and started to compile an impressive personal library of village histories and other biographical resources. Matt has access to resources that will provide the names of at least 50,000 Cypriots and offer helpful data for every village and family in Cyprus with more than 25,000 names in his ever-growing database. Matt agreed to turn over the database to a major university in Cyprus. In the meantime, he has let interested Cypriots know about it by creating a not-for-profit Facebook page for Cypriot genealogy (www.facebook.com/CyprusFHP/) and offering to look up names. During a presentation at a local institute, Matt recommended cooperation between both sides of the island to share resources on ancestry and laid out a "road map" to increased access. Matt has created a valuable gift that will endure and serve the Cypriot people for generations to come in Cyprus and the large Cypriot diaspora.

WHA – Jessica McInerney, Ciudad Juarez, Mexico

Over the course of three years, Jessica built a library from scratch at a local bilingual school. The library now contains over 2,000 books (in English and Spanish) and the school now has a legitimate library class where children of all grades can learn about and check out books. Jessica also helped raise over \$6,000 for the purchase of new books and created a community of school parents and administrators who now understand the value of reading and a

strong library program. Jessica formed a corps of volunteers whom she trained to continue expanding and improving the library long after Jessica and her family's departure in July 2018. She received guidance from a book publishing company and learned how to run a book fair. Jessica launched Colegio Americano's first annual book fair, during which they sold an average of two books per child and raised \$3,340 for the school to purchase library books. Most importantly, the fair showed everyone how much enthusiasm the children had for reading. Jessica found the best library software the school's budget could afford, and organized her army of volunteers to categorize more than 2,000 new books. Jessica asked the school director to find the best teacher to serve as the librarian and then she trained him to run the library. Jessica has contributed in a big way to make things better for current and future students in Ciudad Juarez.

For more information about the award, please visit:

<http://www.aafsw.org/services/sosa>

The award ceremony is open for press coverage. Members of the press wishing to attend should contact Public Affairs Officer Brenda Greenberg at 202-647-1679.

Pre-set time for cameras: 10:00 a.m.

Final access time for all press: 10:45 a.m.

Media representatives may attend this award ceremony upon presentation of one of the following: (1) a U.S. government-issued identification card (Department of State, White House, Congress, Department of Defense, or Foreign Press Center), (2) a media-issued photo identification card, or (3) a letter from the requester's employer on letterhead verifying his/her employment status as a journalist, accompanied by an official photo identification (driver's license or passport). Those who do not have a State Department building pass should allow adequate time for security processing at the 21st Street entrance.

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