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PUBLISHER & CEO
Val Thompson

GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Craig L. Amos

CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER
Heidi Powell

**DIRECTOR,
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**
Sonia Guimbellot

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Vicky Pink (Cover Page)

ASSOCIATE EDITORS
Anita Long
Sandy Bernstein

SOCIAL DIRECTORS
Vanessa Iturbe
Dawn Gunther
David Ng (Sugar Land)

SOCIAL EDITOR
Annie Wang

**CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
/ REPORTERS**
Heidi Powell

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
TJenese Thompson
Centrell Reed
Yining Zou (Georgetown University Intern)

**INTERNATIONAL
CORRESPONDENT**
Ximena Murillo

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From the Publisher, Val Thompson

seen on the scene



River Oaks Plant House and River Oaks Royal Cigars

Ben Shamoelian President River Oaks Plant Home and River Oaks Royal Cigars, winner of the Young Philanthropist Award 2019, invited the International Focus team to a fabulous event at his location on Westheimer June 13, 2019. Born in the city of Esfahan, into a large family, Ben Shamoelian has “a great loving and caring family and great life” he says. But since he was an adventurous person, always looking for something challenging and daring, he convinced his parents to let him leave home. At 17, Ben arrived in Houston where his uncle, who is like a father to him, lives. Wanting to work while in school, Ben’s uncle gave him his first job in the flower industry. And what began as a temporary job turned into his career.

After several months of work, he obtained some skills, learned English and was promoted from labor worker to salesperson, and then earned promotion to Assistant Manager. Not long after that he became General Manager and started buying into the company, currently owning two of the most prestigious flower shops in Houston with his uncle.

Being in the service business, Ben believes the key to success is persistence in striving for customer satisfaction. By doing this, by going the extra mile, and by having loyal customers is how Ben’s small flower business has grown to where they are today. “By the end of each day, what brings satisfaction is when we see truly happy customers in whose lives we have made a difference and touched a heart, no matter what occasion they have chosen us to be part of,” shares Ben.

www.riveroaksplanthouse.com
www.RiverOaksRoyalgars.com

By: Heidi Powell, International Focus Magazine “Seen on the Scene”



seen on the scene



The Inaugural Launch of the American Caribbean Chamber of Commerce

Held in the Galleria Area of Houston on June 19th from 4-6pm with Marquee guests, Tonia Wells, Curator Mocha Toney; Fort Bend County Judge. KP George; and State Representative, Jarvis Johnson of District 139. The website for the Chamber describes their mission as follows:

“Our organization was established to promote growth and prosperity, provide networking opportunities for our Chamber members to generate mutual benefits internationally and nationally, and to advocate for the interests of the American Caribbean business community with all levels of government, nationally and internationally.

“As the year progresses, we will continually strive to strengthen commerce and industry. With this launch event, we will set ourselves firmly on the path for success and accomplishment. We are honored that you joined us on June 19th to witness history in the making!”

Six Reasons Why One Should Consider Doing Business in the Caribbean

The Caribbean region is the third largest export market for U.S. manufactured goods in Latin America after Brazil and Mexico.

- The Caribbean region market represents approximately 24 million people who import over \$18.5 billion of goods.

Co-operative Trade Relationship

- Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) provides beneficiary countries with duty-free access to the U.S. market for most goods.





Close Proximity to U.S. and Canada

- The Caribbean Region is a natural commercial partner of the United States and Canada.
- Beneficial to import/export business for reasons such as freight cost and guarantee of finding a niche on the market.

Regional Integration

- CARICOM-promotes economic integration and cooperation among its twenty members.
- The Single Market and Economy (CSM) treaty. The treaty establishes deeper regional integration through harmonized tariffs and duty free trade.

Work-Life Balance

- The Caribbean offers an environment that facilitates maintaining a balance between you and your work.
- The pace of life and a relatively lower cost of living enable someone to both work hard and have a social life.

Energy Sustainability in the Region

- Due the current focus on renewable energy in the Caribbean, it has become much easier for businesses owning operations in the region to generate their energy from renewable energy sources.

Our Values

- Passion
- Commitment
- Openness
- Ambition
- Integrity
- Respect

Our Motto

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Egypt After The Revolution

**Address by Hon. Khaled Mohammed Youssri Rizk
Consul General of Egypt in Houston**



“Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to welcome you to our event tonight, ‘Egypt After the Revolution,’ where I will try to highlight the efforts made and the measures undertaken by the Egyptian government to make reforms and to achieve prosperity for the Egyptian people who revolted in January 2011, hoping for a better future for themselves and their children.

“Anyone who follows the occurrences in the Middle East in general or Egypt in particular understands that the challenges hampering our path are immense, but I know for sure that our will is unyielding and our work is relentless.



“The wave of revolution that struck the Middle East at the turn of the decade has left the Egyptian political structure trembling, and the country’s economy weakened.

“In June, 2013, a second wave of revolution ushered in a new era for Egypt. Starting 2016, Egypt has adopted an ambitious and courageous reform strategy aiming to establish peace and security in our society and achieve economic welfare for all.

“Inspired by ancient Egyptian civilization, and aiming to bridge the present and the future, Egypt has formulated the Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS): Egypt Vision 2030. The SDS represents a path towards inclusive development. It also embodies the new constitution’s spirit, setting welfare, and prosperity as the main economic objectives to be achieved via sustainable development, social justice and a balanced geographical and sociological growth. Therefore, SDS has been developed according to a participatory strategic planning approach, as various civil society representatives, national and international development partners and government agencies have collaborated to set comprehensive objectives for all pillars and sectors of the country.



“The current local, regional, and global circumstances emphasize the importance of the SDS as a strategic vision to deal with both internal and international developments. Thus, helping Egypt recover and achieve specific objectives. In addition, SDS is based on the principles of ‘inclusive sustainable development’ and ‘balanced regional development,’ emphasizing the full participation in development and ensuring its yields to all parties. The strategy, as well, considers equal opportunities for all, closing development gaps and efficient use of resources to ensure the rights of future generations.”



Besides the tourists looking for art and history, Egypt has other valuable resources such as oil and gas. Laws and regulations have been passed to promote investments in that field. It will assist in easing the economic burdens on the Egyptian society.

Recently two undeveloped gas fields have been discovered. Approximately \$27.3 million is expected to be invested there with an eye to reducing or halting imports of LNG. Egypt's strategy for developing its Petroleum and Mineral resources targets the following:

- Meeting the demands of the Market
- Securing supplies of natural gas and oil through expansion, diversification, and modification of energy mix
- Contributing to the national economic growth rate
- Optimizing the value-added of the natural resources
- Creating highly qualified labor forces in the field
- Achieving environmentally friendly and sustainable development
- Modernizing and transforming the oil and gas industry in Egypt from production only to trading and distribution.

The leadership of Egypt, however, realizes that relations with other world powers like China should always be balanced. Mega investments from China are welcome like the New Administrative Capital and the Suez Canal Development corridor. Egypt also welcomed investors from the USA and the bilateral cooperation between Egypt and Russia has reached unprecedented levels. A partnership agreement was signed last year. All these objectives demanded a lot of diplomatic efforts.

Egypt, is not only involved with the U.S. economically, it is also a critical partner in international organizations including the United Nations, the World Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and World Trade Organization. Egypt also served as a non-permanent member in the UN Security Council and chaired a committee on Counter-Terrorism.

As influential as it is and as strategic as its location is, Egypt does not interfere in other countries' business. They refuse to play a partisan role. In fact Egypt tries to end conflicts and negotiate between adversaries.

And today, Egypt plays an important role in support of African countries. The Africa 2018 Forum attended by more than 1000 African businessmen and policy makers attests to that. In March of this year Egypt assumed the chairmanship of the African Union. They will be concentrating on security and peace-keeping. Because of this important role, Egypt has been chosen to host the Africa Cup of Nations for 2019. Egypt's vision for 2030 is a prosperous nation in a prosperous world. The leaders realize no one does it alone.

By: Heidi Powell, International Focus Magazine "Seen on the Scene"





Latino Learning Center 40th Anniversary Humanitarian Awards Ceremony “Inaugural Legacy Awards Barbara Bush”



It was my honor to be invited by Angelo Ferrari and Larry Smith of Beviamo International to the 40th Anniversary of the Latino Learning Center in Houston.

During the luncheon, Humanitarian Awards were presented to leaders from across the city in honor of their philanthropic service. We congratulate the Latino Learning Center on its 40th Anniversary serving the Houston community and all of the award recipients for their selfless acts of kindness and generosity. The individuals who made this celebration possible are:



- Master of Ceremony Awards:** Mr. Hector Villarreal
- Chairs - Humanitarian Awards:** Mr. George Strake Jr. & Annette Strake
- Co-Chair - Humanitarian Awards:** Lawyer Raed Gonzales Oliviri

To open the program, the Pledge of Allegiance was led by the Commissioner of Precinct 2, Adrian Garcia. Speakers included Mr. Mitchel M. Contreras, 1st Vice Chairman of the Board of the LLC and Mr. Rodolfo Gonzales, President and CEO of the LLC. During the program, the U.S. National Anthem and classical favorites such as, “Be My Love,” “Granada,” and “Nessun Dorma” were performed by internationally acclaimed tenor Angelo Ferrari, accompanied by pianist Shawn Heller.





There were 10 categories of awards presented during the luncheon. The following four are examples of the generosity and philanthropy of the recipients.

- **Philanthropic in Education**

Dr. Juan Sanchez Munoz, President and CEO, UH Downtown
Fr. Jeff Johnson S.J., President, Strake Jesuit Preparatory

- **Young Philanthropist**

Ben Shamoelian, President, River Oaks Plant House
JJ Watt, Houston Texans
Elisa Garnica, Marketing and Promotions Manager

- **Humanitarian Action in the Community**

Richard S. Figueroa, SVP, UBS Financial Services
Rodney Ellis, Commissioner, Precinct 1
Cesar Rodriquez, Owner, Doneraki's

- **Special Recognition “Helping Hands” Barbara Bush**

David Loving, President and General Manager, Univision
Roderick Brown, General Manager, UPS Houston Region



International Focus congratulates the Latino Learning Center and the recipients of the Humanitarian Awards. We wish them another 40 successful years!

For more information go to www.latinolearningcenter.org.

By: Heidi Powell, International Focus Magazine “Seen on the Scene”





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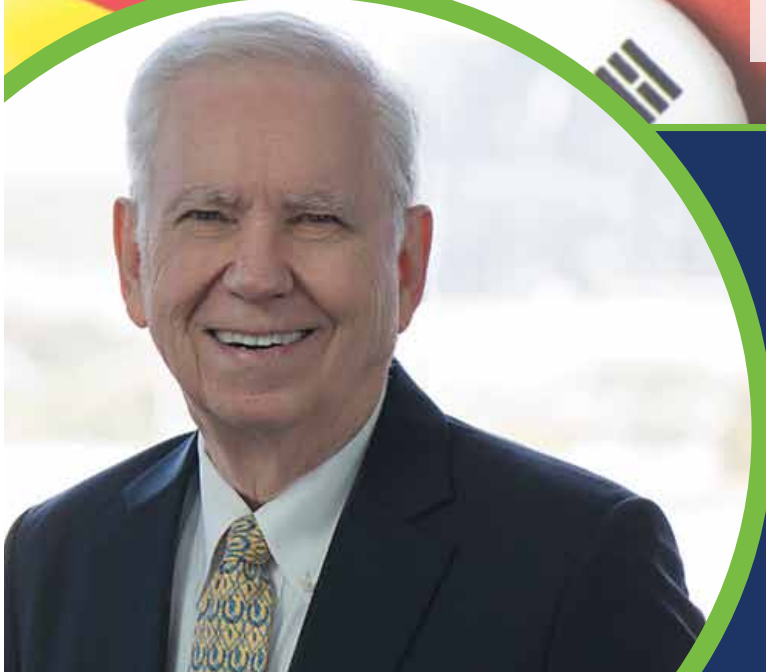
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Midsummer

by T. Jenese Thompson

Song, organ and violin

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about a lock of free strands

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the folklore moment

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GLOBAL. LOCAL. VOCAL.

By **Liz Schroyer** USGLC
President and CEO, U.S. Global Leadership Coalition

LOCAL LEADERS. GLOBAL IMPACT.

HEALTH ‘ZAR. Keynoting the Summit, **Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar** reaffirmed American leadership in confronting the global health threats the U.S. faces around the world – from the Ebola outbreak in the Congo to the rise of a pandemic flu, stating:

- American leadership on the world stage is indispensable to American peace at home... **infectious disease is not just a health issue, it’s also a matter of national security.**
- **America will always be willing to lend a hand and lead** where necessary to help every nation work toward a healthier future for their people and for the world.”

WOMEN OF THE WORLD. Top business and NGO leaders joined experts from multiple Administrations on stage to tackle what it would take to lift up and empower

women – all agreeing when Save the Children’s CEO **Carolyn Miles** concluded, **“There’s nothing more dangerous than a girl with a book!”**

HOT TOPIC. The Summit turned hot when confronting everything from Central America to China to the global refugee crisis, with headliners former National Security Advisor **Stephen Hadley**, the Wilson Center’s **Jane Harman**, USIP’s **Nancy Lindborg**, and CNN’s **Leyla Santiago**.

- Topping off the set was **Lt. Gen. Michael Nagata of the National Counterterrorism Center** who stated: “In my judgment, the only way we’re going to prevent not only the continuing growth of terrorism, but actually turn the tide back... is to prevent the emergence of the disease to begin with.”

LOCAL ELECTEDS UNITE. In a major bipartisan statement of support, **over 300 elected officials from all 50 states**, sent an impressive letter to Congress last week: protect the State Department and USAID – it matters to our local communities.

POWER PLAYERS. In recognition of these powerful local players, the USGLC proudly honored 6 distinguished champions with our 2019 “Leading Globally Matters Locally” Award. With extensive hometown press coverage, these local leaders are standouts when it comes to building a better, safer, more prosperous world – congratulations to:

- **Colonel James Dignan, USAF (Ret.),** President & CEO, Youngstown, OH Chamber of Commerce
- **The Honorable Bob Holden (D-MO),** Governor of Missouri (2001-2005)



- **The Honorable John H. Merrill (R-AL)**, Alabama Secretary of State
- **Kurt Meyer, Chair**, Tri-County Democrats of Iowa
- **The Honorable Mark S. Schweiker (R-PA)**, Governor of Pennsylvania (2001-2003)
- **The Honorable Alex Sink (D-FL)**, Florida State Chief Financial Officer (2007-2011)

FLOOR FIGHT. Hours after USGLC leaders stormed Capitol Hill to make the case for strengthening investments in development and diplomacy, the House overwhelmingly rejected four amendments that would have cut the topline funding level for the FY20 State-Foreign Operations spending bill by as much as 34%. All were defeated on a wide, bipartisan margin – with Appropriations Chairwoman **Nita Lowey (D-NY)** and State-Foreign Operations Ranking Member **Hal Rogers (R-KY)** leading the opposition.

IN OTHER NEWS...

CENTRAL AMERICA: CRISIS CONTINUES. While the State Department’s announcement last week that it would officially cut off all aid to the Northern Triangle was not unexpected, that doesn’t make it any less disappointing. Fortunately, bipartisan Members of Congress have been on record in recent weeks in opposition to such a move – making clear that pulling back our assistance to these countries would undermine efforts to address the drivers of migration.

PROSPER AFRICA. At the U.S.-Africa Business Summit in Mozambique last week, USAID Administrator Mark Green and Deputy Secretary of Commerce Karen Dunn Kelley rolled out more details on the Administration’s Prosper Africa initiative. The ambitious goal: doubling two-way trade and investment between the United States and Africa.

A FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT. *Foreign Policy Magazine* reports that “Finally, the U.S. Is Getting Some Diplomats in the Field” after the Administration advances more nominees for diplomatic and development leadership positions and Congress pushes through a logjam of appointments.

- **Be smart:** There have been more confirmations and nominations for senior diplomatics and development posts in the **first six months of this year** than in all of 2017 or 2018, according to a USGLC analysis.

- **Flashback:** Three months ago, a USGLC op-ed in *USA Today* op-ed helped shine a spotlight to the growing challenge with stalled nominations and confirmations. Maybe it inspired?

- **Just confirmed** as the new CEO of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, **Sean Cairncross** will be taking the helm at the innovative development agency in the coming days.



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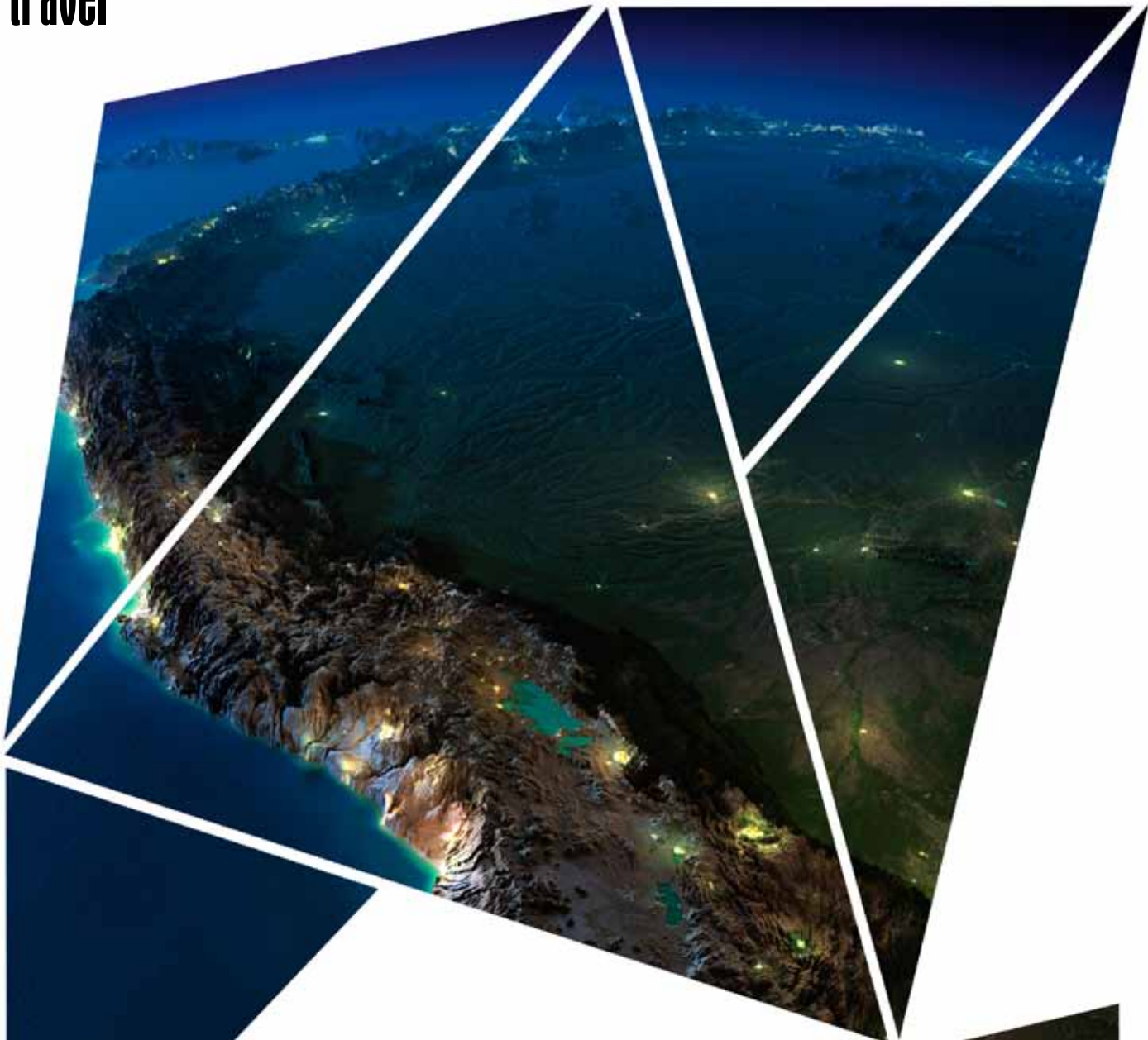
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The Heart of South America:

BOLIVIA

By Ximena Murillo, MIB

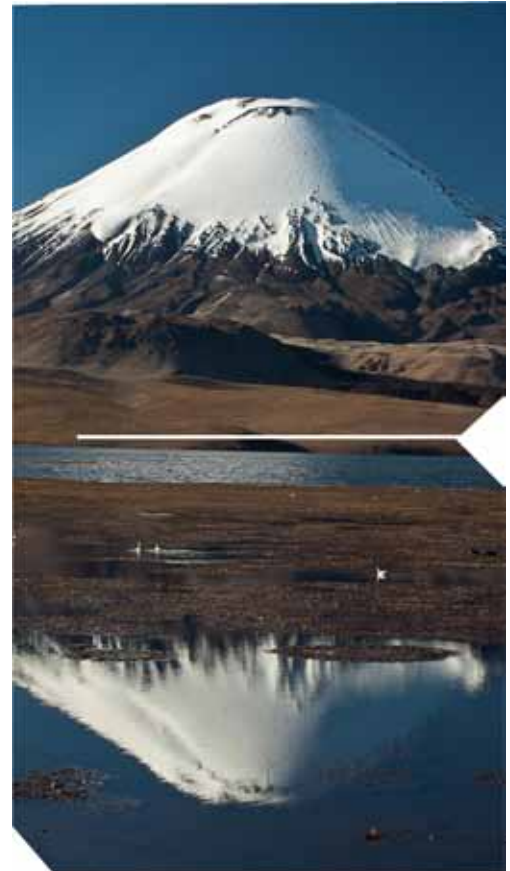
Research has discovered that when a woman's circumstances are significantly elevated, she tends to extend such positive changes to her family and community in lasting ways.

In previous issues I've written about various countries, providing a social and economic outlook as well as sharing the beauty, rich cultures, and uniqueness of people native to such places. In this issue, I would like to take you right to the heart of South America. With a population of approximately 11,306,341 (July 2018 est.) and a GDP of \$37.78 billion (2017 est.), Bolivia is one of only two landlocked South American nations bounded by Brazil to the north and east, Peru to the northwest, Chile to the west and southwest, Argentina to the south and Paraguay to the southeast. This is a country of contrast from the magnificent Andean glaciers, high altitude cities, rushing rivers, to rainforests, tropical areas with extraordinary bio-diversity and major tributaries to the legendary Amazon River, the high desert of the Altiplano (at about 13,000 feet in elevation), and towering presence of the Andes Mountains. If you watched the recent CNN special with Dr. Sanjay Gupta on Bolivia, you would have experienced the striking beauty, exceptional biodiversity, and rich culture that is unique to this wonderful country.

One of South America's most diverse and fascinating countries,

Bolivia is rich in resources and rightfully proud of its history as well as its culture. While Bolivia is rich in culture, heritage, and diversity, it is also one of the poorest countries in South America. The ancient Inca people from the Andes region of Bolivia were among some of the more advanced societies of their day. Many of the advanced technologies developed hundreds of years ago by the Inca's remain in use today, including navigational technologies. Bolivia has long been known for its abundant supply of precious minerals including gold, silver, tin, and lithium. From the early exploration of the Americas, Spain severely exploited Bolivia and its people in efforts to acquire and access these precious minerals, disrupting many of the institutions of Inca society, traditions, and economic systems. The indigenous people of Bolivia have never recovered from this disruptive force, leaving them in a perpetual state of illiteracy and extreme poverty.

Indigenous people constitute approximately 62% of Bolivia's population. Recently, indigenous people have become a potent political force in the country, exercising considerable influence with respect to governmental policy. Today, many indigenous people hold key cabinet positions in gov-



ernment and throughout a variety of political institutions. This, for the most part, has been an urban dynamic, leaving questions regarding what has happened with indigenous populations in rural areas.

Over the past several years, an award winning Houston-Based international nonprofit, United4Change Center (U4C) (www.united4changecenter.org), has led efforts to comprehensively and sustainably create opportunities for women living in isolated and vulnerable communities of rural Bolivia, lifting them out of extreme poverty through access to education, healthcare and economic opportunities. Women are, by far, the most exploited people in Bolivia, but they also represent the best opportunity for improving circumstances for their families and communities. While women may have the greatest need, they are at the same time meaningful agents of change for others. In rural Bolivia, women and girls are often denied access to education, leaving them without the most essential literacy skills. In some areas, women rarely enjoy access to healthcare, resulting in tragically high rates of premature death. Domestic violence as well as sexual and economic

exploitation of women is rampant.

Research has discovered that when a woman's circumstances are significantly elevated, she tends to extend such positive changes to her family and community in lasting ways. Thus, U4C has targeted women as levers for positive social change for the purpose of lessening the burdens of extreme poverty. Together with several local and international partners, U4C has launched enhanced literacy and healthcare initiatives followed by the establishment of a Center where women acquire new technical and entrepreneurial skills, while establishing a support system to help women culturally transition to greater social independence and economic freedom. This year only, 400 participants have discovered their talents, developed leadership skills and achieved the confidence to transform themselves, their families and communities. The goal is to empower women and expand economic opportunity while preserving a rich culture for these beautiful people.

These women are now launching their own businesses and contributing to their local economies while asserting leadership and supporting

other women in similar efforts. In doing so, women are discovering, too often for the first time, their sense of value and worth as human beings — something their conditions have previously denied them. U4C and its partners are observing wonderful transformative dynamics emerging from this wonderful effort. Some of the products now being produced are consumed locally. U4C is developing cooperatives and access to regional buyers for others. For products that need access to international markets, U4C has established an online fair-trade store. Please feel free to see some of the wonderful artisan products these women are now creating at: www.united4changecenter.org/shop-for-a-cause.

“La Unión es la Fuerza” (“Unity is Strength”), the national motto of Bolivia, is inscribed on Boliviano coins. www.united4changecenter.org
xmurillo@united4changecenter.org



Ximena Murillo,
MIB

An advertisement for International Focus Magazine. The background is a dark blue space scene. A young boy in a white spacesuit with blue and red accents is looking upwards. The text "THERE'S SPACE" is written in large, bold, white letters on the left. Below it, in smaller white letters, is "FOR YOU TO ADVERTISE WITH US" and "PRINT • WEBSITE". In the bottom right corner, there is a red square with the letters "iF" in white, followed by the text "INTERNATIONAL FOCUS MAGAZINE" in white.

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VIETNAM

Ready to Contribute to International Efforts for Peace, Security

At a plenary session of the UN General Assembly on June 7, Vietnam was elected a non-permanent member of The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for 2020-2021 after getting 192 votes out of the 193 member countries and territories of the United Nations. This showed the international community's high appreciation of Vietnam's foreign policy of independence, self-reliance, peace and development, the country's stature in the international arena, along with its reform achievements. However, it is also a heavy responsibility that requires Vietnam to make utmost efforts to fulfill tasks assigned by the international community.

This was the second time Vietnam has been voted as a member of the UN organ with a leading role in maintaining global peace and security over the past more than 10 years, proving the international community's recognition of Vietnam's improving position as well as trust in its responsible contributions to regional and international peace and security in the coming years.

When joining the UNSC for the first time during the 2008-2009 tenure, Vietnam, with the support from UN members, successfully fulfilled its assigned tasks in line with international law and the UN Charter, helping to ease tensions and promoting cooperation and settlement of peace and security issues in many regions across the world.

With a foreign policy of peace, independence, self-reliance, multilateralisation and diversification of international relations, Vietnam has actively joined important multilateral organisations and forums such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and has successfully hosted significant international events, and most recently the APEC Year 2017 and the World Economic Forum (WEF) on ASEAN 2018.

The country has also actively participated in the UN peacekeeping oper-

ations, successfully deployed a level-2 field hospital to South Sudan for the UN peacekeeping mission in October 2018, and successfully hosted the second DPRK-USA Summit in February 2019, gradually upholding its role as a mediator in regional and global peace and security issues.

Over the past more than three decades of comprehensive reform and global integration, Vietnam's annual gross domestic product has grown by 6.67 percent on average, which rose to 7.08 percent last year.

Vietnam was among a few countries to fulfill the UN millennium development goals 2015 ahead of schedule, especially the goal regarding poverty reduction.

The country also formed strategic and comprehensive partnerships with 28 countries around the world, including all five permanent members of the UNSC.

Amid the fourth industrial revolution, the emergence of national-



Vietnam began joining in UN peace-keeping operations in 2014.

ism and populism, and geo-political competition among major countries, the UN faces both challenges and opportunities, adding that the UN needs to urge all countries, especially small and medium nations, to rally resources and seek long-term solutions to global challenges at present.

During the first year of serving as UNSC non-permanent member, Vietnam will also take over the role as the ASEAN Chair 2020, enabling the country to boost ties between the UN and regional and sub-regional organisations, including the ASEAN. With experience during the 2008-2009 tenure, Vietnam has been ready to do its best to successfully undertake the role of a UNSC non-permanent member for the 2020-2021 term, towards becoming a partner for sustainable peace.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is the most important organ of the United Nations (UN) that has the leading responsibility for maintaining global peace and security under the UN Charter. It is also the only UN organ with the power to make decisions about peace and security which members are obliged to follow, and those decisions directly affect countries.

Vietnam has been implementing the consistent foreign policy of independence, self-reliance, multilateralisation and diversification of foreign relations, and active integration into the world; being a friend, a trustworthy partner and a responsible member of the international community; and promoting the compliance with the UN Charter and international law, thereby actively contributing to global joint efforts for peace, cooperation and development.

Source: Consulate of Vietnam in Houston
5251 Westheimer Rd, Suite 1100, Houston, TX 77056
Tel: (713) 850 1233. Fax: (713) 871 0312
vietnamconsulateinhouston.org



TODAY'S EAST ASIA Challenge – Vulnerability

By **Yining Zou**

Overview

East Asia still enjoys growth with high speed and will continue to grow in future years. But the growth rate has slowed down and uncertainties are threatening this region. How to sustain the growth before the advantage of demographic dividend, cheap land, and cheap raw materials disappear, and what to do to achieve sustainable development and inclusive growth are the questions with which to be concerned. Unfortunately, the vulnerability pervades in both society and economy, which is a severe and common problem East Asian countries are facing. Only by eliminating the impact of vulnerability can regimes in that area achieve robust development with utility, high quality, and longevity.

The following paragraphs will introduce two types of vulnerabilities in East Asia, and solutions to the problems.

Society Vulnerability

After the Paris terrorist attack, there was a large scale “RIP” activity in China social media, but the earthquake in Qinghai Province at the same time didn’t receive much spotlight. Some people said that the distance between Shanghai and Paris is shorter than that of Shanghai and west China. This separation is not rare in East Asia.

Until 2015, nearly 40% of people in East Asia and the Pacific didn’t reach economically secure levels. And the labor-intensive and export-oriented development model has made disadvantaged social groups, like the elderly and the unskilled more vulnerable to the shocks of change. Rapidly aging speed weakens future potential sustainability and exposes challenges for a more effective and comprehensive policy.

One general solution is to improve social protection. Asian countries have widely different social security programs, and most of them don’t have a good social security result yet. But I don’t think that is entirely a bad thing.

In the first place, that creates opportunities for late comers to learn from each other. Japan, Korea, and Taiwan each provide good examples from which to learn as they are countries at a different developmental level. Urbanization damages the traditional safety net. Governments should think about how to combine family support with public service under a specifically Asian model. Some cities in China already have such types of home-care experiments. I believe this could be an effective way to han-



dle problems that come with the aging trend. And it also saves more and employs more.

Second, “old before rich” creates a new domestic demand and a unique development opportunity in the elderly support industry; such as a nursing home or a medical industry. A huge market, government subsidy, and the experience from adjacent countries could make it happen. Also, it is a good time for a late developer who still enjoys a demographic dividend to think about what he should do as the next step to avoid the same trap, and to push the already old but not rich country to adjust the social structure to a healthier mode.

However, there is still one problem concerning TEAs, how to keep a balance between the market and the traditional system in social protection. Because of the communist background, they set up a relatively good social protection system covering social insurance, health insurance and unemployment insurance. But the quality of service is not satisfactory.

So they are at a crossroads, relying of the old way or turning to the free market way.

As far as I am concerned, I would recommend that governments provide protection at different levels— everyone in the society is required to choose at least the minimum level. For those who are relatively better off, can buy private insurance. For relatively poor population, governments can give more subsidies for a higher level of protection. In this way, transitional economies can take advantage of the well-established system while introducing the market model to release some pressure.

Economy Vulnerability

The competition from not only the outside world but also within the countries in the neighborhood presents more challenges to deal with vulnerability. Inflation, regional protectionism, heightened financial market turbulence, massive domestic debt, and a vast amount of foreign sovereign debt require governments to increase their capacity to maintain macro- and microeconomic stability.

First, governments should enhance financial management ability, includ-

ing a more flexible exchange rate to adapt to the international market shock; encouraging households to accumulate a certain level of assets to be able to survive a potential shock; improving financial service accessibility in rural areas and among low-income groups, providing more information and more alternatives; to foster the bond market, making the stock market and bankruptcy procedures more transparent; adjusting government investment plan, stopping blind urban expansion, consulting scholars and experts to make qualified urban and infrastructure development blue plans, and narrowing the government deficit.

Second, expanding domestic demand and reducing dependency on exports. Evidence has shown that investment and export contributed a lot to EA economic growth, but the share of private consumption has declined. This is dangerous. Rapid investment causes excessive waste of resources and does not create enough jobs. Meanwhile, unemployment and underemployment rates are pretty high. And people won't just go shopping because they are asked to do so. Countries that have a high saving rate, like China, also have a disappointing social safety net. People have to save for education, housing, medical care.

To stimulate domestic demand, institutions could improve social service quality, reduce saving interest rate, provide more public vacations, explore potential consumers like the elderly, reward corporations who significantly promote consumption and provide more jobs, reduce taxes in a burgeoning industry, and regulate an overheated real estate industry.

Third, they should be trying to find new partners to lower risk. For countries with a high level of extreme

poverty, it is far too soon to reject foreign investment and say no to export demand. In that case, the priority should be enlarging the cooperation base to reduce the potential international trade risk.

Finally, there needs to be improvement in government ability and responsiveness to society. East Asia is such a diverse region. There are countries with democracy, semi-democracy, authoritarianism. But the main point is how to address problems like poverty, crime, identity-based conflict, political instability. No matter what kind of regime is in place, the authorities have to provide a stable and trustworthy environment and a quick response to institutional flaws. Singapore does an excellent job in the free market and with an authoritarian government. But it's impossible for China and Vietnam to learn from them considering the population and economic bases. TEAs need to give more power to society and free market; countries like the Philippines, Thailand should improve administrative efficacy so that they can better handle upcoming opportunities.

Will Rebalance Be A New Washington Consensus?

All the solutions mentioned above could be included in "rebalance"—a social safety net, financial market development, better financial system efficiency and so on -- it sounds like a perfect panacea that can cure everything. So will "rebalance" be the next Washington Consensus? To some extent, it might be. But it's unnecessary to worry. The term "balance" is a dynamic word which means it could fit into any context. Balanced statuses

vary from country to country. The things in rebalancing are so general that an even "perfect" country like Switzerland can fit in. Every country needs to deliver better social services and provide better macroeconomic policies. Every country needs to keep a healthy ratio rate between export and domestic demand. Besides, East Asia doesn't have a strong coalition like Latin America, neither politically or culturally speaking. The competition and partnership will make them think twice and examine a new policy.

Notice: East Asia in this article includes Southeast Asian countries, to be clear and consistent with the references, I only use the term East Asia.

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Yining Zou

HITDC Intern, Master of Public Policy Candidate' 2020, McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University. Originally from Beijing, China





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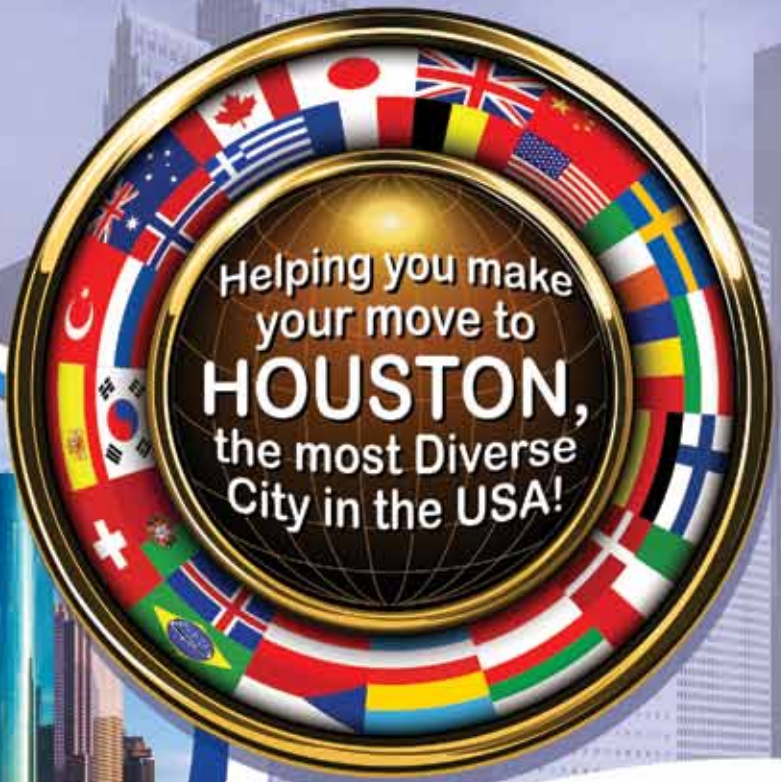
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THE INTERVIEW



THE HONORABLE
ASTRID MARKLUND

*Honorary Consul-General
of Sweden In Houston
Speaks With Heidi Powell
& iF Magazine*

First, tell us about yourself and walk us through your background.

I was born and raised in Sweden. Together with my husband Soren and our two sons we moved to the US in 1985 on a 2 year contract.

We came here because my husband was sent over to run a subsidiary to Nobel Industries, a chemical company that originated with a company founded by Alfred Nobel.

During our time in Texas, I studied at Baylor University and received my MBA. Our sons also have degrees from Texas universities.

I have worked for several international companies during my years here in the US. In 1997 we moved to Houston, and I got involved with the Swedish American Chamber



*Makeup for Consul General Astrid Marklund and Heidi Powell by: Glamalux Makeup Artistry
Heidi's Hair by: Michael Demarse of Le Prof*

of Commerce. It turned out to be a 5 year commitment as the President for the Swedish American Chamber of Commerce in Texas and one year as the chairman for the umbrella organization for the entire U.S.

What does a Consul-General in your capacity do?

The Consulate works in several fields. We serve the Swedish community with passports and various registrations with the Swedish authorities, and we help Swedish citizens in various situations when in a foreign country. We issue temporary passports when needed and visit prisons to assist incarcerated Swedish citizens.

Business and cultural promotions are other important activities.

We receive business delegations and make programs for them to visit various organizations and companies. On the Cultural side, we promote Swedish films, theatre, musicians, authors and other events based on requests and suggestions from Sweden and from the Embassy.

Tell us about the Consulate General of Sweden in Houston. What parts of America are covered by the Consulate, and what are the services it provides?

The Consulate in Houston covers Southern Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas. There are two working in this office, myself and Lovisa Larsson who is focusing on consular activities. As I mentioned before, we focus on consular, business and cultural activities. Our main duties are to serve the Swedish community, to promote Sweden and to build bridges between Sweden and the, U. S.

It is also important to keep the traditions from Sweden alive. We have just celebrated the National Day, an event organized and celebrated jointly with the local Swedish organizations such as the Swedish American Chamber of Commerce, The Swedish Club and SWEA.

What are some past, present and future goals for Sweden's relationship with the United States?

The U.S. has always been fascinating to Swedes. In the 19th century over 1,000,000 immigrated from Sweden. At that time, Sweden was very poor and people took the chance to come over on boats to Ellis Island and to Galveston. Many settled in Minnesota and other northern states, but there is a Swedish Community in Texas called New Sweden (near Elgin) where there is a Swedish Church and a Swedish school house. The University of Texas Library also has a collection of Swedish books by Svante Palm, one of the first settlers in Texas.

Currently there is an extensive business collaboration between the countries. The U. S. is Sweden's 4th largest trading partner and the largest outside E. U.

The U. S. is even more important for us on the investment side. Swedish investments in the U. S. have more than doubled over the last decade. In 2017 Sweden was the 14th largest investor in the U. S.

More than 70 Swedish Companies are present in Texas such as Ericsson, Tetra Pak, Atlas Copco, Alfa Laval, Sandvik, IKEA, H&M just to mention a few, and Swedish companies in the U. S. create approximately 360,000 jobs of which there are more than 30,000 jobs created in Texas.

We also have collaboration in the



medical sector between Karolinska Institute and MD Anderson, and an exchange between Swedish and Texas universities.

In the future, we want to encourage more trade relations between our countries and to get more Swedish companies to establish themselves in the U. S., as well as getting more U. S. investments to Sweden. In this context, Sweden is, of course, interested in increasing our presence in Texas. The Sectors of most interest include hi-tech and innovation hubs, digitalization, energy and shipping. We

would also like to deepen our relationships with universities and cultural institutions.

Tell us about your perspective on ways that the United States-Swedish cooperation may be furthered.

Texas has been identified by the Embassy of Sweden as one of a handful of key states for Sweden to focus on.

For Swedish companies, Texas is an important economy that provides an



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innovative business climate for both trade and investments.

Sweden would also like to deepen our relationships on the cultural side with film, music, theatre and art.

In 2018 we celebrated the 100th anniversary of Ingmar Bergman, the well-known Swedish film director, with approximately 50 screenings of his films. This was a collaboration with Rice University, MFAH Film and theatres in Austin and College Station.

This fall we will collaborate with Alley Theatre and a Swedish Theatre called “Unga Klara” which will perform in Houston. They are also introducing their concept of focus on a younger audience.

Swedish film and actors draw attention with Academy Award winners such as Alicia Vikander and Alexander Skarsgard, as well as film directors such as Ruben Ostlund, Ray Andersson and Anna Odell.

Music is also an important industry for Sweden. Did you know that Sweden is the world’s most successful exporter of chart music in relation to GDP? Maybe you know Avicii, First Aid Kid, Robyn or ABBA. They are all Swedish and hugely popular. Spotify and Soundcloud are also Swedish and leaders in music distribution.

Each year Sweden is well represented at SXSW in Austin to explore and exchange views on the newest innovations.

What are some big picture issues facing Sweden today?

Sweden is a small country and dependent on trade and business outside our borders. To maintain an open international trade regimen is therefore of crucial importance.

Climate change is high on the Swedish political agenda. Our Prime minister has announced that Sweden will be one of the world’s first fossil-free nations. Today, Sweden benefits from having the highest share of renewable energy in the EU with close to 60 percent of our energy coming from renewable energy sources. We have also agreed on the objective that 70 percent of sold vehicles in 2030 should be fueled by non-fossil based fuels. The demand for smart innovations and technologies within the



environmental sector has increased in both Sweden and the rest of the world. This is currently a growing export sector and the U. S. is an important market. ,

How is the Swedish business community uniquely positioning itself to help Americans who are interested in doing business in Sweden?

As I mentioned earlier, Texas is identified, by the Swedish Embassy, as one of the states that will get extra attention and resources to identify business partners and investment op-

portunities. Visits by the Ambassador and/or trade delegations have taken place every month so far this year.

We also have Business Sweden, a governmental trade organization, and the Swedish American Chamber of Commerce. Both organizations are well equipped to assist in trade and investments in both Sweden and in the U. S.

Is there anything we have not discussed that you would like to mention?

Yes, since I am a woman I need to let you know about the gender equality in Sweden. The Swedish government strongly believes that gender equality benefits everyone, including boys and men. Research shows that gender equal societies enjoy better health, stronger economic growth and higher security. Research also demonstrates that companies with a high degree of diversity are more profitable. Violence against women decreases when cultural norms about masculinity change. Children all over the world would benefit from having more engaged and active fathers. Boys and men are key agents of change and the Swedish government promotes the involvement of boys and men in the fight for gender equality.

For example, Sweden has 80% labor participation, the highest in E. U. Currently 52% of the Swedish cabinet members are women and 46% of the parliament members are women. However, women are still underrepresented in CEO positions.

All this is possible due to a very generous parental insurance through the Swedish Social Insurance Agency. That allows for 480 paid days of parental leave, making it easier for both women and men to combine work and family.

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business

Media Moment

**A Behind the
Scenes Look
at the Global 7 Awards**

Part Deux

I hope you didn't think we were going to leave you hanging without sharing the remaining G7 Award Honorees! There is definitely something to be said for being recognized with an amazing group of people who are all doing worthwhile and special things for the community at large. Although the G7 Awards were held in May 2019, it feels like just yesterday that my team and I were planning for the event and sitting down with each honoree to capture their business on video. I still remember searching for what I felt would be the perfect dress to receive my honor as The International Rising Star.

CRreed Global Media's recognition as a Houston-based enterprise enabling global organizations to thrive in business was just one of the major moments of the event. The others that I truly enjoyed were our CGM team's time with each G7 honoree, and of course the Congressional Award given by Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee on behalf of the United States Congress.

In this article I am sharing my experiences with the final three honorees with you. I encourage you to meet them below, and then take initiative to contact and connect with each of them. You never know what magic may rub off!



Flor Dimassi (*third from left*) is the beautifully poised and statuesque CEO of Global Speak Translations, who received the Excellence in International Business Service Award. Global Speak is a translations company that aids in conversations of international operations for companies and organizations translating training manuals, meetings, and other important dialogue. Global Speak Translations operates in several different locations including New Orleans,

Los Angeles, and Houston. When Flor came to CReed Global Media Studios to record her video, she was ready to step in front of the camera as soon as she walked in the door. Accompanied by her business associate Thomas (who has roots in my hometown of New Orleans), she had her responses to each of my questions written out. After touring the studio, we got right to work! Thomas was on the sidelines offering support, capturing all the great moments for

social media spots, and creating videos using his phone to share Flor's experience with her social media and online world.

With a recorder and earplug in her ear, Flor was able to listen to her speech as she said it out loud. I thought this was an amazing trick: recording what she wanted to say, and then repeating after herself as she played the recording back in her ear. Now I use that trick too! I record

what I want to say and listen to it over and over again until it becomes part of me. Flor was such a professional; she even remembered which video of our several takes she liked from the previous recordings.

After the session and a tour of the studio space, we took some fun photos and boomerangs for Instagram, then said our goodbyes. Flor's special tour included meeting my mom and sister, who were in the studio adding some decor to bring life to our walls.

The next honoree is an amazing man, **Harry Gee, Jr.** (*fourth from left in photo on previous page*), the only male recipient for the 6th Annual Global Seven Awards. Harry is the President of Sister Cities Houston, and he received the Outstanding Non-Profit Award. Looking back, I recall a defining moment with Harry. After we learned who the recipients would be, I emailed all of the honorees to get their video shoots scheduled well in advance of the awards date. This would give my team time to decide on templates, edit and compile the videos, add intros and outros, animate logos, etc. Mr. Gee is an immigration attorney here in Houston, and the day we were set to record at his office, he experienced a death in the family. Harry contacted me to let me know of his loss and asked to postpone the interview...by just one hour. I was floored! I thought for sure he would have wanted to reschedule entirely, or maybe even cancel. I gained so much respect for Harry in that moment, as it was a demonstration of both his humanness and his commitment to keeping his word and following through. This will forever be etched in my brain.

When we arrived, Harry's assistant Darryl got us settled and made sure my team and I had what we needed in the conference room. As I looked

around the room, I noticed plaques, books, pictures, and certificates of all kinds. Not only is Harry the President of Sister Cities, he also serves as a fellow for other organizations in the city. He is very passionate about family, including his daughter, who runs a local multi-million-dollar nonprofit.

Perhaps one less well-known fact is that Harry Gee, Jr. is one of the owners of the Houston Texans. In honor of his 80th birthday this year, Harry received an Andre Johnson jersey — since Andre's number is 80, Harry says Andre is now his favorite player! Harry is a wise man who had much to share with me and my producer Vic Herron. We had such an impactful time interviewing him, with future collaborations on the horizon.

Shawntell McWilliams (*far left in photo on previous page*), the CEO of SM Global Consulting, rounds out our list of honorees as the Outstanding Advocate. She is a beautiful woman focused on her passion and purpose to help people help people by maximizing philanthropic efforts of your brand and business. Before Shawntell, I had not met anyone operating in this unique space. Shawntell puts her actions where her mouth is, serving on non-profit boards such as the Greater Houston Women's Chamber of Commerce. Her efforts procure scholarships and create opportunities for those in need. Shawntell is truly doing her life's work, and she is an inspiration.

I enjoyed my time with Shawntell as we laughed and joked over the hour-long session, making fun of all the details that go into doing a recording. You must know your lines, be prepared, and look beautiful on camera (just to name a few). And Shawntell nailed them all! She is an amazing person, and I look forward to staying

connected with her.

I'm thrilled to be a part of this prestigious group of honorees. May we all continue finding ways to support each other and add value to one another's endeavors. Holding the role of Chairwoman for the Houston Entertainment Industry task force reminds me of the leadership it takes to get things accomplished. Each of the honorees I introduced to you has exhibited that they have this quality and more. Watch out for what's coming next from this crew!

In media, the global landscape is my playground. I will forever find ways to connect its many fabrics and communities to enhance the whole. That means shining a spotlight on all of the many stories and diverse narratives that exist in this world. For CReed Global Media, this looks like distributing important stories on our on demand television and music streaming platforms for the entire world to see and hear. I look forward to staying connected with each honoree, and I truly hope we collaborate often in our future.

This has been a Media Moment written by: Centrell Reed, Founder and Co-CEO of CReed Global Media & Production. Get in touch with Centrell at info@creedglobalmedia.com.



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there's an international language, and I'm not sure there isn't and I don't claim to know all about languages, however, for the sake of getting my message through, the three most important words for our unsettling times would be diplomacy, diplomacy and diplomacy.

"We must embrace our international alliances and security partnerships. History is clear: nations with strong allies thrive and those without them wither."

Quoted by Retired General James Mattis

With that said, Houston is blessed with some of the most intelligent and brightest diplomats you'll find anywhere in the world. That shouldn't be a surprise because most of Houston's Consular Corps' heads of posts will tell you our city is one of the most desirable posts on the planet! Including the Honorable Astrid Marklund, Honorary Consul of Sweden, our cover page feature for July. She was a delight to interview.

Our consulates, heads of posts and staff do an amazing job day in and out bringing business, money and new Americans to our great city as well as exposing new opportunities to our citizenship in their home countries. Hats off to our Houston Consular Corps!

While our hats are off, I'd like to mention our great team of directors, graphic artist, photographers, writers and editors who are driving *iF Magazine* to heights ... I'm very excited about that. Have I mentioned how they all came together and pulled off our third anniversary celebration which I'm certain is going to be very successful? Stay tuned, we've got more celebrations planned!

As always, thank you for your readership!

Val Thompson

Publisher & CEO

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