

MISSION STATEMENT

The IDRC Alumni provides opportunities for former IDRC employees to maintain personal and professional links, and supports continuing dialogue on development issues.

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Membership Matters Survey

Alumni have their say

By Chris Smart

*Roughly one-third of Alumni members responded during May and June to our **Membership Matters** survey on the Internet. People who do such surveys for a living will tell you that is an excellent response. We interpret it to mean that the two-thirds who did not respond are generally satisfied with what your Executive is doing and the services provided to date. This article provides a summary of the 39 responses on a variety of topics. If you'd like to see the detailed data, email me at csmart@ca.inter.net.*

The question that generated the greatest response was the one that asked for suggestions on how to connect IDRC Alumni who are scattered around the globe. Many said we should continue using the Newsletter and the Website (see page 9) to keep members in touch. We should encourage 'champions' wherever there are known concentrations of Alumni to organize Alumni chapters and regional get-togethers with soft links to Ottawa.

Some high-tech suggestions include using the Web to facilitate links, and included an Alumni Facebook page, using Skype for video conferencing and seminars, webcasts, a chat-room and podcasts. Less high-tech ideas include impromptu brown-bag lunches for Alumni passing through Ottawa, and the idea of inviting members who are unable to come to Ottawa for the annual reunion to send messages that would be read at the event.

The second most energizing question for Alumni concerned this Newsletter. For the most part members said they are pleased with the Newsletter and understand that it can only be as strong/interesting/engaging as the contributions from the Alumni. The "Where are they now" feature is popular, and one member suggested we should encourage shorter, and so more, contributions. [*Editor's note: I'll take any and all contributions, short or long!*] Respondents also asked for more news about current IDRC comings and goings, programs and projects.

As for the Website (which was still under development at the time of the survey) by far the most common suggestion was for news about former colleagues in a 'where are they now' format – with contact information. News and links to sites featuring IDRC's projects and former colleagues was also popular as were links to other international development sites. Other web-related ideas included links to blogs of current or former IDRC staff; a chat room or blog to enable debate on international development – perhaps with a chance to influence current IDRC programs. Information on contract opportunities with IDRC or other agencies was also suggested. And there was comment on the obvious link between the Newsletter and the Website, with perhaps the Website eventually replacing the Newsletter.

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From the Board

Welcome to Autumn. In Ottawa we are enjoying an extended summer, which commenced in June with torrential rains and heavy flooding and has now settled in with little moisture and pleasant mid-summer temperatures.

Let me begin with the particulars of our next Reception and Annual General Meeting which will be held in Ottawa at IDRC Headquarters, 150 Kent Street, on Friday 30 October. As in past years the social events will be preceded by a seminar from 3 to 5 p.m. in the 8th Floor Boardroom, and followed by the Reception and AGM from 5 to 7 p.m. in the adjoining Conference rooms. The regional theme this year is Latin America, which will be reflected in the décor as well as the food and beverages. The breathtaking Latin music will be provided by musicians identified by Claude-Paul Boivin after a painstaking search of a variety of bistros.

We have been advised by our Members that they applaud our ability to conduct the business portion of our meetings in record time. This permit the social meetings to be carried on without serious intrusion. However our organization is now some years older and a number of members have also expressed an interest in IDRC Alumni's business activities. Accordingly, this year I will introduce our Board to the members present, and our Treasurer, Gerry Bourrier will review the organization of our finances, detail the cooperative activities conducted with IDRC, and the welcome financial assistance offered by some members for project activity.

Chris Smart, our secretary, will update us on some ongoing program issues, our fellowship program, and ongoing program activities that are being realigned. Of special interest to the members will be the substantive progress he has achieved with the development of an IDRC Alumni website which is now moving to successful completion.

Changes on the Board

There have been some changes in our Board's composition during the year: Maria Williams has stepped down as Membership Director, and we are fortunate to have an efficient replacement in the person of Donna Bickford. Angie Anton asked to be relieved of her position as Director-National and Special Meetings, and Barb Davidson has taken on that position with efficiency and elan. Finally, Bob Stanley, who has been editor of this Newsletter almost from the beginning (see page 9), has stepped down in order to focus on other projects. This is his last issue as editor, but he will be replaced by his former Communications Division colleague, Gerry Toomey, who I am sure will continue to maintain that publication's high standard. I am please to note that Bob, Angie and Maria have all promised to continue to assist the Board in an advisory capacity when required.

James Pfeifer, Chairman

Your Board

Chris Smart - Secretary
 Gerry Bourrier - Treasurer
 Claude-Paul Boivin – Director, Special Programs
 Jean-Marc Fleury – Director
 IDRC Staff Liaison Director, Kim Daly
 Donna Bickford – Director, Memberships
 Barb Davidson – Director, National & Special Meetings

Membership Matters – from page 1

Several questions in the survey dealt with aspects of the annual Members' Reception/Reunion/AGM. Most were satisfied with the Reception, and those who said they did not attend live outside of the Ottawa region, or out of Canada. Some complained that the annual event provided too little time for interaction and suggested other opportunities for Alumni to socialize. Most felt that the business portion of the AGM was adequate, although there was one suggestion that business items be sent to members by email with only approvals sought at the AGM. (Worth noting here that, since IDRC Alumni is not incorporated under any Canadian law, there is no legal requirement for an AGM).

There was slightly less satisfaction with the annual seminar that precedes the Reception, but nonetheless there were plenty of suggestions for future seminar topics. The majority of the responses suggest using the seminar to keep Alumni abreast of IDRC's current priorities and programs with interest in current development challenges coming second. There was a suggestion to use the Seminar to explore lessons learned from the past.

Most respondents said they approved of the Awards Program, although five said they were not aware of the program. [*Editor's note: You haven't been reading your Newsletter!*] There is overall approval for the Alumni providing support for the awards, and one member thought that the program could be more imaginative – but offered no specific suggestion. It was also suggested that we look into the pros and cons of legally registering the IDRC Alumni Association as a not-for-profit to enable tax deductible donations.

Response from your Alumni Executive

First, our thanks to those Alumni who took the time to complete the questionnaire. Your feedback is important, and we will act on it where we can.

THE STATUS OF THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Your Executive will look into the question of a more formal legal status for the Alumni Association and report back.

MORE OF THE SAME

With current resources we can support the annual Reunion and will take into account suggestions for fine-tuning the AGM and Seminar. We can maintain the Newsletter in its current format and the Website.

MORE AND DIFFERENT

When we mention resources we have in mind the volunteer time available: more can be done with more volunteer time. The survey has suggested some exciting uses of the new technologies to enhance the networking of Alumni and most enticingly for connecting with members across Canada and the world.

IT'S UP TO YOU

If you are ready to help with any of the possibilities that have surfaced from the survey join us on the Executive to see them realized. We can create seats around the table for anyone wanting to start local chapters of the Alumni in Canada or the regions, for conveners of special features in the Newsletter/Website. For instance, is there someone ready to take on the task of gathering contributions for 'Where are they now?' Who has the skills and inclination to organize an IDRC Alumni Facebook page or a blog? Is there a member, still actively engaged in international development, who could do a column on compelling current links to development thinking? Is there someone who would be ready to do a periodic feature on the 'latest and greatest' at IDRC? The possibilities are endless if there are volunteers willing to take them on.

**We look
forward to
hearing
from
you...**

IDRC's *real* first office in India

Robin Hallam writes from Duncan, B.C.

It was great to see Chris Smart's reminiscences of IDRC offices he has visited over the years and in particular the three offices he has visited on Jor Bagh in New Delhi. He mentions that IDRC's first office was at 11 Jor Bagh but that is not true... the first IDRC office was opened in 1972 I believe. I am not really sure of the exact date but it had been there for many years when I first visited it in 1977. It was located at 1 Rafi Marg in the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society (AIFACS) Building and what an office it was!

I see some air conditioners in the windows of this recent photo of the AIFACS building but I can assure you that there was no such thing as air conditioning when I first visited in May 1977 and during that entire week the temperatures hovered between 40 and 50 degrees Celsius. The building housed a major theatre and galleries for the exposition of art and crafts.

The IDRC office was located up several flights of stairs (no elevators) at the end of a long corridor down the right side of the building, near the back. One entered into the main office and there were two or three small rooms opening off it. The ceilings were high and although there were several windows there was not a breath of air moving in or out of them. There was no electricity the day I first arrived so not even a fan to move the oven hot air around. Presiding at an enormous desk in the middle of the main office was a small sari-clad lady, Maggie Thomas, behind a battery of imposing large telephones. Apparently in New Delhi at the time there was a multi-year waiting list for telephones so as various expatriates had been leaving New Delhi, Maggie had snapped up their telephones and that included the instrument itself, the line and its own separate phone number. Maggie was an amazing person could make things happen not only in New Delhi but from Dehra Dun to Coimbatore and from Calcutta to Hyderabad and to her native state of Kerala. She would have calls going out to and coming in from airlines, ministers' offices, research stations etc... and when a phone rang she instantly knew which one it was and thus who the likely caller was. In one of the small side rooms were two charpoys. Charpoy is Hindi for "4 legs" and these were the ubiquitous 'day cots' that Indians retired to when the heat became unbearable. I wonder if it is still like that 32 years later in modern India.

My first visit to India for IDRC was a month-long odyssey to six agricultural and fisheries research projects in every corner of India in the company of Ramesh Bhatia. The IDRC grants had been made several years before but nobody had been hired, no scientific equipment had been purchased and virtually no money had been spent. All the grants were tied up in bureaucratic knots in the Ministry of Agriculture in New Delhi but Ramesh and his amazing command of the huge administrative manuals that regulated the bureaucracy, was able to provide them chapter and verse as to how to get around the restrictions. One of the impediments was that positions could not be filled unless there were so many positions filled by scheduled tribes and scheduled castes, but Ramesh was able to find the specific rule that exempted projects like ours from this affirmative action hiring... it was right there in black and white! Ramesh was amazing! He was one of a clutch of protégés that David Hopper brought to IDRC from his years at the Rockefeller Foundation, Ford Foundation and the World Bank and he knew the Indian system inside out.



No.1 Rafi Marg...
what an office
it was

Continued on page 5

There was no such thing as privacy when meeting senior officials... There were always people sitting around whom we were never introduced to.



AIFACS building continued....

Although Ramesh and I had been planning our trip for months, on arrival in India very little had been organized for our visit and we had to start from scratch when we arrived. Maggie was the one who made it all happen. Every morning when we came into the office, Maggie would have our first meeting lined up at the Krishi Bhawan (Krishi means agriculture in Hindi) across the traffic circle. This was the brilliance of the location in the AIFACS building... across from the Ministry of Agriculture, a few hundred yards from The Lok Sabha (India's Parliament) and surrounded by all the other key ministries and official offices.

Across the traffic circle sounds simple but there were at least 12 lanes of chaotic Delhi traffic over Rafi Marg, Raisina Road and finally Dr Rajendra Prasad Road. The Krishi Bhawan was a huge pile of stone and like a fortress to get into. Thanks to Maggie's arrangements we avoided the crush of people at the entrance gate and were ushered into our first meeting. There was no such thing as privacy when meeting senior officials. There were always people sitting around whom we were never introduced to. Clerks and typists were running around and since all the telephones were located on the Director's desk there was a constant interruption by people answering phones and initiating calls. The offices were incredibly hot but high ceilings helped to make them bearable. In the doorways and at the end of the corridors hung loose grass mats and there were fellows who did nothing but throw water up onto the mats... such was the state of their evaporative cooling system. Ice water was always offered us which we had to refuse... but it looked so-o-o good. If we had even a half hour between meetings, Ramesh and I would run the gauntlet back to the IDRC office and prostrate ourselves on the charpoys. That was the best investment in office furniture IDRC could ever have made in the name of operational efficiency.

I cannot leave off my reminiscences of the first Delhi office without mentioning Shrinath Singh who sat in one of the small side offices at IDRC. This wonderful old man was a living link to India's independence struggle, to the early days of the Green Revolution and to a young Canadian who had lived in one of India's 10,000 villages in the 1950s and went on to be IDRC's first President, David Hopper. Shrinath later moved to ASRO when the Delhi office was closed by the new President, the late Ivan Head. I have no idea what Shrinath's job was at IDRC but he was always available with a wise word and instructive story on many subjects but especially agricultural development. He was a devout Hindu and was passionate about the reform of Hinduism as started by Mahatma Gandhi. It was a privilege to have known him.

Donate the United Way

IDRC Alumni are invited again this year to contribute to the Government of Canada Workplace Charitable Campaign (GCWCC) — better known as the United Way — through the IDRC employees' campaign. You can make your gift in such a way that it can be included as part of the IDRC campaign. If you are receiving CPP, you should receive by mid-September an invitation to give to the campaign. Instead of returning it directly to the United Way office, you can send it to: Guy Gascon, IDRC, PO Box 8500, Ottawa, Ontario K1G 3H9. If you are not yet receiving your pension, and want to make a donation, you can contact Guy (613-236-6163, ext. 2335 or email ggascon@idrc.ca) who will send you a Gift Form, which you can return with your donation. IDRC will forward all donations and forms to GCWCC and will add your donation to the total raised from current IDRC employees, helping the Centre to achieve its campaign objective.

WARO: No “Tour d’Ivoire” in Dakar

More Regional Office reminiscences from Chris Smart



IDRC’s third office in Dakar is on Avenue Cheikh Anta Diop. That IDRC logo topping an impressive facade tempts one to ask if the tower is made of an ivory-like substance (a building material not permitted in an ‘Agenda 21 Agency’!).

Katherine Touré, the RD, assures us however that ‘cold and unfriendly’ is not IDRC in West Africa and with the office moves IDRC was able to become “bigger and maintain the human touch!...we put an emphasis here ...in crossing the street,” of “getting out of the laboratory.” This is evident in the richness of projects funded, ones in which researchers listen to the concerns of everyday people and try to make their research meaningful ... We also emphasize valorizing research results so they actually make a difference in the quality of life.” Bravo!



IDRC’s second office was also on Avenue Cheikh Anta Diop. Unfortunately WARO does not have a picture of the first office IDRC had in Dakar from 1974-1981 at Immeuble Seydou Nourou Tall, Avenue de la République. Is there an Alumnus out there with pictures from those earliest of days—hopefully with people in them to illustrate that Kathryn’s concern has been a perennial for IDRC wherever it is in the world.

MERO: Nestled beside the Nile



Handsome offices for IDRC beside the Nile! A fitting home for the originators of the Order of the Camel! But an opportunity missed? With ASRO in a renovated Chinese *shop-house* dating from the time of Raffles, and LACRO in a refurbished *belle époque* mansion, was it too much to anticipate IDRC's 'thinking outside the usual (office) box', putting a whole new interpretation on a *ponzi* scheme, by acquiring a *pyramid*, the ultimate in fixer-upper, to surround MERO staff with pharonic inspiration. They do say *mummy* knows best.



The pyramid behind the picture of the staff raised hopes but alas, no the staff are at a hotel on retreat—from what, you ask! Contemplating the *Sands of Time*, the distant past of IDRC in the Middle East, does anyone have pictures of the Centre's first MERO offices in Beirut, Lebanon? And stories to share of those early days would be most welcome.

Alumni if your travels for work or pleasure put you within reach of an IDRC Regional Office why not drop in to renew old and make new collegial acquaintances. And then drop us a note on the visit for the Newsletter.

Chris Smart

Alan Meltzer IDRC 1980-1983



Dr. Alan Meltzer, former program officer with the Health Sciences Division, died on Friday, March 20, 2009 at the age of 72. The following article, written by his daughter Judith, appeared in the Globe & Mail's "Lives Lived" feature.

Alan Meltzer grew up the only child of a single mother in Leeds, England. He never knew his father, who left when he was young, but his extended family instilled in him a passion for learning and an interest in the natural world. His childhood memories included concocting homemade chemistry experiments and making his own transistor radio.

In search of adventure after graduating from medical school in Leeds in 1960, Alan signed up to be the sole physician on Ascension, a small island in the middle of the Atlantic, halfway between South America and Africa. He and his new wife Ann arrived on the island in 1966 and spent nearly a year in this volcanic rock. They returned with tales of giant sea turtles, wild donkeys, and climbing rope ladders in rough seas to provide medical assistance to sailors on passing naval vessels.

This same spirit of adventure inspired Alan and Ann to emigrate to Canada ? twice. The first time, in 1968, they arrived in Regina in the middle of a cold winter with their newborn son, Simon. They left six months later, returning home to England, but moved back to Canada in 1970, settling in Ottawa with Simon and their daughter Judith.

There Alan pursued his passion for international health and development, working in travel medicine and at the International Development Research Centre, and later a senior adviser on infectious diseases at Health Canada. He was a founding members of the Canadian Society for International Health, and after retiring became an active volunteer with the Heart and Stroke Foundation in Kingston.

Alan was a paradox – adventurous and widely travelled but a consummate worrier, particularly where his family was concerned. His children remember early curfews, slow driving and a steady stream of “good advice”.

Alan's interests were wide ranging, from science to philosophy to classical music. He wrote and published several books and articles on infectious diseases and medical history. He left Ottawa for Kingston in 2001, primarily to be closer to his grandson, Tristan, whom he adored. Alan conveyed his passion for science, nature and storytelling in games with Tristan; together they spent hours concocting experiments, catching bugs, making up stories and perfecting paper planes.

Alan had rare qualities of humility and selflessness, caring for others, but neglecting his own health. He had few material needs but took immense pleasure in treating family and friends, although he had a hard time accepting generosity in return. Alan had a great sense of humour and wide imagination; he will be missed and remembered for his generosity, gentleness and love for his family and friends.

Coming soon to a computer screen near you...

idrc.ca/alumni

Pending any last minute hitches the IDRC Alumni website will finally go live any day now in both official languages (*see also* crdi.ca/anciens).

Meanwhile, please don't hold your breath. We'll notify you by email just as soon as the Alumni finally makes it on to the Internet!

Editor's final note

It has been almost exactly six years since the Fall of 2003 when Mary Blackwell (Mary Baker to those with long memories) took me to lunch and asked me if I would help her put together the Alumni Newsletter, thereby demonstrating once again that there really is no free lunch. Mary had produced the first three issues on her own, but felt that the newsletter could use a little professional help. Always ready to help a former colleague, I put together a new look for issue number 4, which seemed to be well received.

Seventeen issues later, Mary has long since moved on to other things, and now it's my turn to say "enough".

I've enjoyed the opportunity to renew contact with IDRC alumni around the world that being editor of the Newsletter brings, and I'll miss that connection. However, life in "retirement" seems to get more busy rather than less so, and there just aren't enough hours in the day for all the things I want to do ? something had to go. The good news is that I'm handing over the job to another former Communications Division colleague, Gerry Toomey, who is known to many of you. So please welcome Gerry, and keep those articles and reminiscences coming (especially "Where Are They Now" items) Gerry's email address is on the front page of this issue.

My thanks to all who have contributed over the years, and especially to our faithful translator, Michèle Wilson, who has put up with my irregular deadlines, last-minute changes and deficient proof-reading skills through most of those 17 issues to ensure that Alumni who prefer to read the *Bulletin en français* can do so.

Bob Stanley

