MY HOME ARmenia

ARMENIA FUND QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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Antranik Baghdassarian: The Quest for National Excellence

Gyumri Housing Project: Terese’s Healing Herbs
Dear [Name],

This year, the Armenian Fund has continued to support important projects that benefit the people of Armenia. Our mission is to improve the quality of life for Armenians, both at home and abroad. We are proud to share with you some of the highlights of our efforts.

Over the past year, the Armenian Fund has focused on projects related to education, health, and infrastructure. In Armenia, we have supported the construction of new schools and the renovation of existing ones. In the diaspora, we have provided scholarships to students pursuing higher education. Our health initiatives have included the distribution of medical supplies and the renovation of hospitals.

We believe in the power of education to transform lives. That’s why we have invested in projects that support education at all levels. From primary schools to universities, our goal is to ensure that all Armenians have access to quality education.

The Armenian Fund has a long history of supporting the arts and culture. Our arts and culture initiatives include funding for theaters, museums, and cultural centers. We believe that the arts are essential to the cultural identity of a nation.

We are grateful to our donors for their continued support. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of Armenians around the world. Thank you for your generosity.

Sincerely,

Chair of the Board

[Signature]
village; and so are the teachers’ kids, who go to the same school.”

Is this because beneficiaries feel proud that such schools, and other projects, were built by the Fund? Baghdassarian does not think so at all. “No,” he says. “their sense of pride has nothing to do with the Fund. It has everything to do with the fact that that school is theirs. It’s their playground, their medical center, their water network. You come from outside, build or renovate something, and hand it over to the local community. The mayor, the police officers, and the community as a whole will baby that new structure because it’s theirs. That’s when work of the Fund is done. It no longer needs to be there.”

“The same can be said of the roads and highways built by the Fund,” Baghdassarian continues. “If, for instance, we hadn’t built the Vardenis-Martakert or Goris-Stepanakert Highway, what do you think would’ve happened during the Four-day War in 2016? We didn’t buy weapons or ammunitions. We built roads. And these roads, which are built to the highest international standards, not only represent strategic importance, but have been breathing new life into hundreds of communities — in terms of farming, agriculture, and tourism. As significantly, these roads are strengthening bonds between the peoples of Armenia and Artsakh. Imagine, most residents of Armenia have never set foot in Artsakh. That’s all changing now.”

Baghdassarian speaks highly of not just the Fund’s reputation for top-notch project quality, but also operational transparency and accountability. “Throughout the history of the Fund,” he says, “rarely has a contractor been able to steal from the organization. That’s because the Fund has such an air-tight project-monitoring and reporting system that there’s simply no wiggle room for theft.”

Baghdassarian says that while such attention to detail results in excellent project quality and inspires beneficiaries, it also must
inspire the Diaspora with a sense of having a stake in the homeland. “That stake has nothing to do with making a profit, and everything to do with our history,” he says. “Often we see videos of young kids in Armenian villages going to school, wearing spotless uniforms. When you build good schools and hospitals, when you provide good water and gas networks, those kids are going to grow up to become scientists, doctors, artists, soldiers.”

“Take Artsakh’s Sayat-Nova Music School, for instance, which was rebuilt by the Fund,” Baghdassarian says. “You visit the school and listen to the children’s performances and you’re just fascinated by their talent. Well, that talent was always there. It was three years ago, when the kids were practicing in a run-down building. But today, there’s a new excitement, and a deeper involvement in the activities of the school, because the kids are now learning in a beautiful, magnificently modern environment. This is where the Fund comes in, and the talent and the spirit, it is the talent and that spirit that przed dictable success.”

“This is why,” Baghdassarian adds, “it’s so important for Diasporans, and especially young Diasporans, to go to the homeland and visit, and to view the structures built by the Fund. Young people from the Diaspora need to witness how the talents and aspirations of their peers in Armenia and Artsakh are coming to life, encouraged by the work of the Fund. If the Fund does not build those schools, does not create those wonderful environments in which our children will grow up, develop, and become our artists and soldiers, become our future, how do you expect our nation to thrive on the world stage?”

When asked if he thinks there’s still much that can be done by the Fund, Baghdassarian replies without hesitation. “Much indeed,” he says. “As a nation, we’re known for not taking action unless the knife reaches the bone. That worries me. I’m convinced that if we join forces and strengthen our homeland, we’ll have nothing to worry about. All we need to do is to trust and have faith in one another. We must wake up and believe that all Armenians are one, despite being dispersed, but if the achievements of Armenia Fund in the past 25 years are any indication, if they show us a glimpse of what we can achieve as one nation, one voice, one spirit, I have every reason to be optimistic about the future.”

Atranik Baghdassarian was born in Beirut, Lebanon. He was educated at Beirut’s Nshan Palanjian Jemaran. Later, the young Bagdhassarian’s life education was forged in the neighborhoods of Buri Hamad and beyond, especially during the Lebanese Civil War. Often working around the clock and risking his own life, he raised funds from wealthy individuals to help address the humanitarian needs of his community. He also made sure that assistance was rushed to all fellow Armenians, irrespective of which neighborhood they lived in or which political party they belonged to.

Baghdassarian went on to serve various leadership roles in Homenetem, Hamazkayin, and local Armenian schools. Also, he contributed, together with his wife, Seta, to the founding of the ARS Center in Lebanon.

Well before the start of the civil war in 1975, Baghdassarian obtained his university education in Lebanon and Europe. After graduating from the Lebanese Agricultural School, he received training from the UN Food and Agricultural Organization, and spent time in Denmark to further specialize in dairy sciences. Starting in 1966, he worked with his father in the family business.

In 1990, Baghdassarian immigrated with his family to California, where he founded Karoun Dairies, Inc. To date, the company has earned over 150 Gold, Silver, and Bronze medals at US and World Cheese championships. As significantly, Karoun Dairies, and Baghdassarian, its CEO, have become synonymous with philanthropic work that encompasses numerous projects, including major initiatives implemented by Armenia Fund in Armenia and Artsakh.

From 2013 to 2016, Baghdassarian served as the president and chairman of Armenia Fund.

![Armenian Fund Executive Director Ara Vardanian (left) and Atranik Baghdassarian at the 2016 Telethon, when Baghdassarian announced his $5 million donation to the Fund.](image-url)
"Pamir has always been a security concern for us, as it borders directly on Afghanistan, China, and other countries."
"Պաշտպանական հիմնարկությունները չի հայտարարվում պատմական համանագիտությունում.
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"Արտասերել համագործակցություն, կարող են զարգացնել պատմական համագործակցություն"}
This part of the basement was used as a makeshift restroom, adding to the unsanitary conditions.

Thanks to Armenia Fund, a clean, modern, heated apartment with running cold and hot water was given to Mihran and family. The joy on their faces is self-explanatory.
TERESE'S HEALING HERBS

It’s hard to find anyone in Gyumri who hasn’t come across Terese, the herb-seller on a street. She has numerous satisfied customers who have been cured of various illnesses after using her healing herbs; a bunch of which sells for the price of water, or 200 drams. If used as instructed, the herbs can be quite effective. But whereas Terese has provided so many people with natural remedies and elixirs, no one has alleviated her own pain.

Terese, 38, is a mother of four. It was her husband, Mihran, who first took an interest in medicinal herbs. Years ago, he discovered a book of folk medicine illustrated with pictures of healing herbs. Today these herbs have become the family’s main source of income. Mihran picks varieties of herbs from nearby mountains. He and Terese meticulously arrange them into neat bunches and she goes on to sell them on the streets. It’s dangerous to trek alone through hills and ravines, particularly since Mihran suffers from a serious pulmonary illness and doctors have determined that he’s medically unfit to work. But the husband-and-wife team never complains, instead lovingly and patiently enumerating the healing properties of this or that medicinal herb or flower to anyone who asks.

The family lives in a tiny room in the basement of a ramshackle former dormitory next to the regional-government building, with no bathroom, restroom, or kitchen. There’s no water in the building. Water is brought from outside, in buckets. Despite these appalling conditions, the blackened, damp walls of the room are decorated with lots of warmth. Inspired by his explorations in the lap of nature, Mihran draws paintings and hangs them on the walls. One of their daughters, Susan, has a talent for handicrafts. Her decorative objects adorn the room. But perhaps Terese’s greatest pride are the various awards and certificates on the walls, earned by their son, Sargis, for his athletic achievements. The youngest child of the family, Sargis is the joy of his sisters, Siran, Salbi, and Susan. Terese and Mihran believe there’s something mysterious and magical in the fact that the names of all their children start with the letter “S.”

“We have neither owned nor lost a home, and are not hopeful that we’ll ever own one,” Terese says, resigned to her fate and without a trace of bitterness. Yet thanks to your support of the Special Telethon which was held jointly by the Fund and Shant TV last year, this family, along with many others, will soon, very soon, have its own home as well as the chance for a new beginning.

There is still much to be done to alleviate the suffering of homeless families in Gyumri. Please give generously to help transform their lives.

OLD ADDRESS: 22 Garegin Njdeh Avenue, a tiny room in the dilapidated basement of a former dormitory.

NEW ADDRESS: Mush 2, Building 6, Apt. 67; a fully renovated and furnished home, featuring all amenities for a comfortable life.
VISIT EVERY REGION OF ARMENIA & ARTSAKH WITH ARMENIA FUND!

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