

Upcoming Programs

Via Zoom

Jan. 19: **How President Biden is Viewed from Abroad**, [Richard Wilke](#), Pew Research Center. To register, contact junghwak@usc.edu



Feb. 1: **Update on Meridian Programs**, Amb. Stuart Holliday

Mar. 1: **Hill Perspectives on Public Diplomacy in the Biden Administration**

Apr. 5: **The Power of Hip Hop Diplomacy Around the World**, Mark Katz, UNC Chapel Hill

May 3: **Manipulating the Masses: Woodrow Wilson and the Birth of American Propaganda**, John Maxwell Hamilton, LSU

PDAA invites nominations for its 2021 Awards for Achievement in Public Diplomacy. These awards recognize outstanding contributions to the conduct of public diplomacy.

Nominations are welcome from all members of the Foreign Service community, overseas and domestic. Award recipients will receive cash stipends and certificates. The deadline to submit nominations is March 26, 2021.

Nominations may be submitted to awards@publicdiplomacy.org.

Information about past recipients of the awards and how to make financial contributions to support them is available on the [PDAA website](#).²

PDAA Today

Public Diplomacy Association of America

What Lies Ahead for Public Diplomacy? Looking to 2021 and the Opportunities to Celebrate

By **Michael Schneider**

At a critical transition for U.S. leadership at home and abroad, the public diplomacy community – like American society – confronts multiple challenges. Global media express concerns about disunity in the U.S. and the future policies and priorities of the incoming Administration.

There are several important issues and possible turning points to look for in coming months.

PDAA and sister organization PDC are planning a series of events to engage our members in the likely debate over the future of U.S. statecraft and PD in particular.

The New Leadership Team – As President-elect Joe Biden selected his leadership team, a joint working group of PDAA and PDC sent him and the State Department transition team a brief series of recommendations for the future of PD. These are available on the [PDAA website](#). Among the several recommendations is our call for a highly respected and experienced Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. The transition memo strongly urged the Biden team to find someone who is committed to staying on the team for as long as possible. PD has suffered from too many leadership changes over the past 20 years.

Once the new Undersecretary is confirmed by the U.S. Senate, we will seek an opportunity for her or him to brief the PD community. Meanwhile, we will ask a senior adviser to the President-elect to provide insights into the transition overall and the new team's view of the role of public diplomacy.

Global perceptions of the U.S. – Several media outlets have cited the decline in worldwide public support for the U.S. Richard Wilke, Director of global attitudes research at Pew Research Center, will discuss the very latest Pew analysis of global opinion on January 19, the release date of the report.

The Future of U.S. Broadcasting – Headlines for the past half-year have focused attention on the controversial selection of Michael Pack to be CEO of the USAGM (U.S. Agency for Global Media) and his initial moves such as firing four of

the heads of the broadcasting entities included within the USAGM family, (Amanda Bennett, the head of VOA, and her deputy retired before being fired.) Since then, other controversial steps have received growing media coverage and enlivened debate over the proper role and future of U.S. broadcasting entities.

PDAA and PDC will host an analysis of the challenges confronting the USAGM, including its leadership and direction, following Biden Administration decisions on leadership and direction of USAGM.

We are also working on events to commemorate:

Freedom and Protection of Journalists – Increasingly, authoritarian regimes are closing the space for a free press and freedom of expression and association. May 3 marks [World Press Freedom Day](#), the brainchild of the late director of USIA Leonard Marks and observed annually by UNESCO. This spring, we hope to assay the status of media and efforts to protect journalists.

75th anniversary of the Fulbright Program and the 60th anniversary of the Peace Corps – This year marks the anniversaries of two historic initiatives for mutual understanding. The Fulbright Program, begun in 1946 and consolidated under the Fulbright-Hays Act in 1961, has touched people worldwide in all walks of life. Similarly, the Peace Corps has set the example of community service. Volunteers gain invaluable experience of other nations, their language, and culture, and in turn help Americans better understand the world. We will observe these two events and activities to assess their impact and future.

The Congress, State, and PD – A new generation of Congressional leaders is beginning to engage in serious consideration of how to revitalize the Department of State. There are myriad needs, ranging from the hollowing out of the ranks of senior experienced officers, the negative trend in diversity, impact of budget and staffing shortfalls, and other institutional chal-

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PDAA Today



**PDAA President
Joel Anthony Fischman**

“Interestingly, we found little redundancy between the two organizations, none in programming.”

“As the Biden Administration cranks up, we will be paying attention to efforts to build back public diplomacy. The spate of firings at the U.S. Agency for Global Media has led to a state of chaos. Public diplomacy at State, with the possible exception of ECA, suffers from insufficient funding and leadership.”

President's Notes

Happy New Year!

It is easy to say good-bye to 2020. I do not know anyone willing to lament its passing. I, for one, am not looking back.

The Year 2021 will be one of significant opportunity for PDAA.

The Public Diplomacy Coalition Working Group (PDCWG), charged with presenting a proposal for the future of PDAA and the Public Diplomacy Council (PDC), completed an interim report recommending full merger of the two organizations. On December 28, 2020, PDC President Sherry Mueller and I sent that report to our respective boards for their consideration. The report proposes 2021 being a transition year with dedicated working groups developing plans on several aspects of the proposed integration. If both boards accept the proposal, with its recommendations, the transition phase will begin. We will keep you informed and share the proposal once the PDAA Board has approved.

Working with me on the PDCWG were Ambassador Brian Carlson, Tania Chomiak-Salvi, Joe Johnson, Ambassador Greta Morris, and Sherry Mueller. I am indebted to all of them for their thoughtful and reasoned approach to this task. We all came to this process with some fixed notions, then discovered aspects of both organizations we were not fully aware of. We debated and compro-

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mited and found agreement on the major issues.

lenges. We hope to bring a senior Congressional leader or staffer to share ideas for strengthening State, including public diplomacy.

The Origins of 'Modern' Public Diplomacy – John Maxwell Hamilton, professor and former dean of LSU's Manship School of Mass Communication, has written a remarkable history of the origins of modern propaganda in World War I, *Manipulating the Masses: Woodrow Wilson and the Birth of American Propaganda*. Hamilton analyzes the many ways the Wilson Administration sought to influence domestic public opinion

as well as publics abroad. His thorough history illuminates parallels between 'then and now'. He will discuss his book and implications for contemporary U.S. politics May 15.

Annual awards for PD Achievement – Since 1993, PDAA has recognized the extraordinary achievements of those involved in public diplomacy. Foreign and Civil Service and Locally Employed Staff, in the field and in DC, have been recognized for creative responses to significant challenges. A number of the awards recognized adoption of new communication technologies, some recognized heroic action in

other barriers erected over the past few years.

Some of our positions were spelled out in a joint PDAA/PDC memorandum submitted to the Office of the President-Elect on November 29, 2020. This memorandum points to the need for consistent senior leadership in public diplomacy (i.e., an undersecretary who understands public diplomacy and commits to stay on the job). To that I would add the need to build up the professional staff and to strengthen the professional culture of public diplomacy. The memorandum also underscores the need for adequate funding, better coordination of international communication, integrity in international broadcasting, significant expansion of counter-disinformation efforts, and the elimination of barriers to effective ECA programs. Finally, we must do more to engage the American public.

These are not listed in any particular order of priority. Rebuilding the effectiveness of public diplomacy will be a huge task.

Our thanks go to Ambassador Brian Carlson and Michael McCarry, the primary researchers and drafters of this document.

So, as you can see, we have our work cut out for us in 2021. We welcome your input. Feel free to contact me at fischman@comcast.net.

Thank you, all. Stay safe and stay well.

Joel

the face of danger, some recorded the cumulative impact of years of effort, some focused on analytic and planning achievements and their long-term results. All the awards showcased keen intellect, energy, and perseverance. We will host the annual ceremony this spring again despite the constraints against in-person events. Last year we highlighted the remarkable achievements of the award winners in a Zoom program. We will likely do something similar this year. We look forward to the day when we can again host the winners at the annual PDAA brunch.☐

“Zooming” Back to New Delhi, India

By Mike Anderson

2020 will surely go down as the “Year of the Zoom.” The San Jose, CA-based company behind Zoom claims a platform that supports over three trillion “annualized meeting minutes” and regularly sees well over 300 million “daily meeting participants.”

If you are like me and many others in the public diplomacy world, you probably by now are a bit “Zoom fatigued” and increasingly selective about the virtual video events you join. But when an email with a very special Zoom invitation came recently from India, about 7,500 miles away, I just couldn’t say no.

U.S. Embassy New Delhi Public Affairs Officer (PAO) David Kennedy asked me and two other former PD officers in New Delhi to be surprise guest speakers at the retirement farewell for Unni Menon, the senior press office staffer who was retiring after more than 30 years distinguished service.

Unni joined what was then USIS on March 21, 1988, and officially retired October 31, 2020. As the Information Officer (IO), I hired Unni away from the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency and worked closely with him as IO and then again, 12 years later, as PAO.

Joining me at 7 a.m. from our respective homes in Washington, DC, for the 4:30

p.m.-in-India event were two of Unni’s other former New Delhi supervi-

sors, retired FSO Gordon Duguid, a former IO, and FSO Elizabeth Fitzsimmons, a former AIO. Raj Chennappa, a leading New Delhi editor who had worked often with Unni over the years, also spoke. Each of us told stories of Unni’s dedicated service and unflappability during

countless media events and public affairs challenges throughout his long service.

I recalled Unni’s contribution to the smooth press support provided to President George W. Bush on the occasion of the historic March 1-3, 2006, POTUS visit to New Delhi and Hyderabad, when Bush significantly advanced the strategic relationship by signing the landmark U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement.

The Zoom gods were with us for Unni’s farewell, and the technical quality of the event conducted remotely from the PAO’s residence was of high-quality. Due to Covid social distancing, only a limited number of people could attend the event in-person, but other

friends and colleagues were able to participate through Zoom.

New Delhi is a huge, busy post, so, not surprisingly, Unni’s services

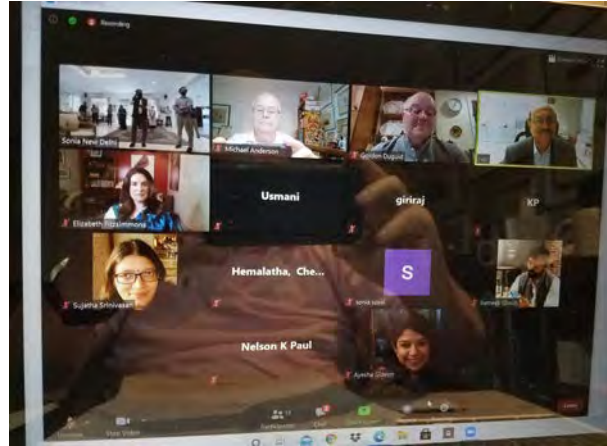
were needed up to the very end of his U.S. Government career. Just hours before the retirement, he and the rest of the press office were working hard to support two VIP Washington visitors, Secretary of State

Michael Pompeo and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, who were in New Delhi for talks to advance the U.S.-India Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership.

In an email following the event, Unni expressed his appreciation: “It’s amazing how you all remembered so many incidents from our past! It made me so nostalgic! I cherish many such memories, and today’s farewell with you all attending was wonderful.”

The event reminded me of two important things. First, the tools of public diplomacy are changing, and an innovation like Zoom can serve as a creative “hybrid” of in-person and virtual communications. But, more importantly, the face-to-face assistance of dedicated local professionals, like Unni, remains essential for successful public diplomacy work.

We may get tired of using Zoom, but we should never get tired of listening to the advice of local Embassy staffers.▣



Unni Menon’s farewell: Mike Anderson and Gordon Duguid are in top row (center) boxes ; and Elizabeth Fitzsimmons in row two (left) box.



Unni Menon and PAO David Kennedy: farewell cake presented at the PAO Residence to the 32-year veteran.

PDAA member and retired FSO Mike Anderson served twice in Embassy New Delhi. He was IO 1987-1990 and PAO 2002-2006.

Mike Anderson tells of “the substantial impact of the PC as a training ground for future FSOs, including PD officers.” He credits the Peace Corps with giving him “a life-defining, career-enhancing experience.”

“I was sent to teach English in Morocco, and it was there that I came to understand that the image most Americans had of their own country – the one I had accepted growing up – wasn’t necessarily shared by the rest of the world. But America had a story to tell, and I wanted to try to help tell it.”
—Bill Wanlund

Peace Corps: A Public Diplomacy Incubator

By Bill Wanlund

As Peace Corps celebrates its 60th anniversary, it is President John Kennedy who usually gets the credit for its conception. But if JFK is considered the father of the Peace Corps, Hubert Humphrey might be its grandfather, for it was he who first floated the idea in 1957 Senate legislation. It gathered little enthusiasm, in part because of opposition by career FSOs horrified at the idea of a ragtag band of largely unsupervised young Americans spread around the world.

But on October 14, 1960, candidate Kennedy brought the idea back to life when he sketched out his notion of a Peace Corps in extemporaneous 2:00 a.m. campaign remarks at the University of Michigan. Kennedy asked whether his audience of 10,000 students would be willing to “contribute part of [their] life to this country.” And, with the United States deeply in the Cold War, JFK couched his idea in competitive rhetoric, saying it would help show the world that “a free society can compete.” This time the idea took hold.

From its inception, the Peace Corps has been an element of America’s “soft power.” The agency’s enabling legislation—introduced in the Senate by Humphrey in 1961 at by then-

President JFK’s request—specified that the new agency was not only to provide grassroots development assistance, but also to “help promote a better understanding of the American people on the part of the peoples served.”

That sounds like public diplomacy, and indeed, a number of former Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) found they liked that dimension of the job. Peace Corps does not keep records of where PCVs go after their service, but PDAA boasts a few members who were inspired to continue their work overseas.

One is **Mike Anderson**, a PCV in Malaysia 1968-71. He and another future PD officer, Charles Silver, were in the same Peace Corps group. Mike tells of “the substantial impact of the PC as a training ground for future FSOs, including PD officers.” He credits the

selected as a Peace Corps Volunteer to Malaysia. The opportunity to serve overseas and learn about diverse Asian cultures opened his mind and eventually got him interested in the Foreign Service. ([See website for Mike's story](#))

Like Mike, **Charles Silver** also rates his time in PC as “a life-changing experience.” It led him to abandon one career track – in physics – for the Foreign Service. Charles, who’d had no experience outside of the U.S. before his stint as a PC teacher, found a new definition of “foreign.” He writes that he “learned a lot about myself and America from seeing how other people put their lives together.” And, as it happened, he and Mike weren’t the only ones from those Malaysia years who found a career with USIS: On a Southeast Asia Desk Officer visit to the Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, “Mr.

Charles” ran into one of his former students—by then, 26 years later, a senior USIS FSN. ([See website for Charles's story](#))

Joe O’Connell heard Kennedy’s 1961 “Ask not...” Inaugural Address in person and was inspired. Six years later, he was headed for a Peace Corps assignment in the mountains of Co-



Charles Silver, Malaysia, 1977-79, as adviser to the school photography club

lombia. His two-plus years there saw “a few modest successes leavened by some predictable setbacks,” including a city boy’s real-life lesson in

Peace Corps with giving him “a life-defining, career-enhancing experience.” With roots in Minnesota, Mike had never traveled abroad except to nearby Canada until he was

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agronomics. And, he gained a lovely wife and a new way of looking at America and the world. Still, he admits to “a guilty feeling that I had gotten more out of my experience than I put into it” – a not-uncommon sentiment among RPCVs. ([See website for Joe’s story](#))



Robert Schmidt, Malaysia, 1966-69: Recess with second grader Yee Ta Min

Bob Schmidt also took JFK’s words to heart and, in October 1963, five months after graduating from college, began training in Hawaii for a Peace Corps assignment teaching in North Borneo (now Sabah, Malaysia). A budding historian who’d had an eye toward Europe, Bob found that the Peace Corps “punted me towards Asia for most of the rest of my life.” After teaching stints that included Laos, South Vietnam, and Taiwan, he joined USIA in 1985, where assignments included postings in South America and East and South Asia – but not Europe.

([See website for Bob’s story](#))

Dave Miller was a PCV in South Korea in the 1970s and says then-Ambassador Philip Habib and other Embassy staffers encouraged Volunteers to take the Foreign Service exam. Dave thinks that, “eventually over a dozen of us joined the Department of State and USIA, including Ambassadors Kathleen Stephens and Joseph Donovan.” His first two tours were in, yes, Korea, 1976-80, giving him “over seven very eventful years” in the hermit kingdom. His subsequent overseas assignments were all in East Asia — Hong Kong, Taipei, Phnom Penh, and Shanghai. ([See website for Dave’s story](#))

Tom Hull is another who traces his Foreign Service career directly to his Peace Corps experiences, in his case as a teacher in Gbinti, Sierra Leone, in 1968-70. More than three decades later, he returned – this time as the U.S. Ambassador. Tom says his Embassy was able to promote peace, democracy, and human rights thanks to his PC service, which afforded him exceptional credibility and cultural context. After retirement, he was instrumental in getting the Peace Corps to return to Sierra Leone, where operations had been suspended during the civil war of the 1990s. “At that point,” he says, “my Peace Corps and diplomatic service came full circle. My debt to those villagers after 40 years was finally repaid.” ([See website for Tom’s story](#))

Joan McKniff was a PCV in Colombia during a turbulent time in America, beginning in 1963 “when President Kennedy was alive, and [coming] home to Johnson and Vietnam in ’65.” And, she found, her gender was an obstacle to finding employment: In response to Joan’s application to work

overseas with CARE, a representative of the organization called and explained that “they did not hire women for those jobs.” Joan pursued other opportunities; it would be another 20 years before she would join USIA. ([See website for Joan’s story](#))

Michael Boyle graduated from Stanford without a clear idea of what to do next, so in 1967 he followed a friend into the Peace Corps (it also seemed like a good alternative to being drafted). He went to teach English in Leyte Province, the Philippines, where no phones and iffy infrastructure were the order of the day. It was a “seminal experience,” Michael writes, one that inspired his decision to join USIA – after, perhaps inevitably, being drafted after all upon return from the Philippines. Peace Corps “was a huge turning point in my life, and something I have been proud of doing ever since,” he writes. ([See website for Michael’s story](#))

John Dickson’s Peace Corps tour was as an English teacher in Gabon, 1976-79. His first exposure to the work USIS did was at the American Cultural Center in Libreville, whose resources he drew upon for teaching materials (and baseball scores). John says, “You can draw a direct link from Peace Corps to my interest in working in public diplomacy.” ([See website for John’s story](#))

Steve Telkins went to Ghana in 1962, which makes him practically part of Peace Corps’ origin story: His was the second group to go to Ghana (the first country to receive PCVs), during a time of turmoil and change — and hope — in Africa. Steve’s Ghana experience led directly to his subsequent career at USIA,

VOA, and elsewhere. His account of the conditions, frustrations, and rewards of his time in Ghana is a textbook look at Peace Corps’ early years. ([See website for Steve’s story](#))

As for me – **Bill Wanlund** – I’d embarked on an uninspiring career and was taken by the idea of the Peace Corps. I was sent to teach English in Morocco, and it was there that I came to understand that the image most Americans had of their own country – the one I had accepted growing up – wasn’t necessarily shared by the rest of the world. But America had a story to tell, and I wanted to try to help tell it. ([See website for Bill’s story](#))

Bill Wanlund is a member of the Board of Directors of the Public Diplomacy Association of America.



Stephen Telkins: Wearing the adinkra cloth given by Mpraeso staff. The symbols represent proverbs or beliefs created over

What’s your Peace Corps story? We would be pleased to add it to our collection on our PDAA website. Send your story to admin@publicdiplomacy.org.

Links to all stories may be found on the PDAA website.

In Memoriam

Paul Prichard Blackburn III, a USIA career minister, died October 23 at his home in McLean, VA, from mesothelioma. He was 83. Blackburn joined the Foreign Service in 1962, and in his 40-year career advanced from its lowest rank of FSIO-8 Career Reserve Officer to its highest rank of Career Minister. He served 24 of those years in just four countries, China, Japan, Thailand, and Malaysia. In his Washington assignments with USIA, he was an Agency inspector, director of the Office of African Affairs, and deputy associate director for the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. In retirement, Blackburn worked part-time in the State Department's FOIA office. He also volunteered with Virginians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, American Councils for Educational Exchange, and activities of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, especially those related to racial justice. He also avidly researched and documented his family history. ([Read an appreciation of Paul Blackburn](#) by former PDAA President Mike Schneider on the PDAA website.)

Amir Ebrahimi, a Voice of America analyst, died November 10 at a hospital in Bethesda at age 63. Born in Mahabad, Iran, he immigrated to the United States in 1985 and began working at the JW Marriott Hotel in Washington. Fluent in several languages, he taught himself English and later became a maître d' and front desk clerk at the hotel. From 1992 to 1996, he was a political analyst with VOA. He later became a broker for Realty USA in 2011.

Evan Fotos died November 21 at age 98 at his residence in Istanbul from Covid-19. He joined USIA in October 1956 and subsequently served in various public diplomacy positions in Iran, Syria, India, Italy, Turkey, and Zaire. Fotos received a meritorious honor award in 1961. Following his tour as deputy chief cultural affairs officer for India, he began a special one-year assignment to attend the Army War College in Carlisle, PA. Interspersed with tours abroad, Fotos served in Washington as personnel chief for the Far East region, special assistant to the USIA deputy director, and a deputy examiner with the Board of Examiners for the Foreign Service. Upon retiring from the Foreign Service, he taught American government and American business history as an adjunct professor at Washington's Benjamin Franklin University (now a part of George Washington University).

Bruce Herschensohn, a former director of motion pictures and television at USIA, passed away in California December 1. He was 88. Born in Milwaukee, Herschensohn served in the U.S. Air Force and later worked for RKO Radio Pictures. In 1964 Herschensohn wrote

and directed for USIA the documentary *John F. Kennedy: Years of Lightning, Day of Drums*. Our colleague Leonard Baldyga remembers that when he showed the documentary in Poznan, Poles came by the busload from surrounding cities to view it, and that the mayor and his apparatchiks had tears in their eyes after the screening. During the Nixon Administration, Herschensohn was appointed director of USIA's motion pictures and television branch. During his tenure, the Agency received numerous awards for its film and television productions, including an Academy Award. Herschensohn later unsuccessfully sought the Republican nomination for a U.S. Senate seat from California twice, losing in the party primary in 1986 and in the general election in 1992. After that, he returned to teaching, delivering commentary, and working as a Distinguished Fellow at the Claremont Institute in Upland, CA.

George Duncan Meek, Voice of America broadcaster, died at age 84 on December 3 from Parkinson's disease and Covid-19. Meek worked for 20 years at the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States in Washington before joining the Voice in America in the 1980s. He wrote the first news and feature programming for the Caribbean, and traveled extensively in the region in the 1980s as VOA's Miami bureau chief. From 1995 to 1999 he was VOA's South America correspondent based in Rio de Janeiro. After retiring in 2000, Meek led a very active life as a volunteer for many organizations. A long-distance hiker, he hiked sections comprising the entire 2,100-mile Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine between 1994 and 2000, as well as the Florida National Scenic Trail between 2003 and 2011.

John Pouris died June 6 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, where he had served as Branch PAO in the early 1980s. He was 93. Born in New York, he served in the Navy from 1946 to 1948. Pouris joined USIA in 1961, serving as the Binational Center (BNC) director in Santos, Brazil, from 1961 to 1967. He then went to Rio de Janeiro as press officer in 1967. Other assignments included Iran, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Nigeria, and Washington, where he was a research evaluation specialist.

John B. (Jack) Schmid, 86, died peacefully at his home in Charlottesville, VA, on September 30. In 1962, Schmid accepted a job with the Department of Commerce/U.S. Information Agency international exhibits program, where he worked until 1967, designing large exhibition pavilions in numerous countries around the world, including many in Africa and Eastern Europe. He left government for the private sector, eventually founding his own private consulting firm, but returned to USIA in 1983. From 1986 until his retirement in 2000, he worked at NASA headquarters in

Washington as that agency's exhibits manager. Among Schmid's awards were the Presidential Design Award, NASA Exceptional Performance Award, and the Westinghouse Design Excellence Award. Upon retirement, he and his wife Beth moved to Charlottesville, where for nearly 14 years he volunteered every Thursday at Habitat for Humanity. As a long-time runner, he continued his passion for running into his 80s, placing in his age group in most races.

George Scholz, 68, passed away peacefully September 16. He was a graduate of Lawrence University and Southern Illinois University. Scholz served as both a Peace Corps Volunteer and a USIA and State Department regional English language officer. He served in Indonesia twice and in Malaysia, Egypt, South Africa, and South Korea. He retired in 2011.

Martin Adam Secrest, VOA broadcaster and accomplished musician and engineer, passed away unexpectedly at home August 15 in Arlington, VA, at age 63. Secrest was born in Washington, DC, and spent most of his early years in Chevy Chase, MD. After graduating from Kenyon College, he began a career in radio. Secrest worked at radio stations in Monticello, NY, and Washington, DC, including many years at WMAL, where he was a producer and engineer. He enjoyed the chance to watch up close the Washington Capitals play while he worked a side-gig on the WTOP broadcast of the hockey games. Secrest finished his career as an executive producer in television at the VOA news center. Aside from family, his most beloved treasure was music in all forms. An accomplished electric guitarist, Secrest played regularly in local bars and also enjoyed building, repairing, and modifying guitars, often performing with guitars he had built.

Shannon Rae Swanson passed away from a rare form of metastatic liver cancer on Nov. 27, surrounded by loved ones at the family farm outside Livingston, CA. She was 55. Swanson worked almost 20 years for the Department of State, where she designed and implemented public diplomacy programs around the world and traveled extensively throughout the Middle East, Africa, and South America. She had a particular interest and expertise in women's issues, environmental issues, and science diplomacy. A standout among her many departmental contributions was the 50th anniversary celebration of the first moon landing, featuring Apollo 11 astronauts Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins. Colleagues remember her as a dear friend who commiserated over work challenges, modeled sanity, and shared a love for cats, the Washington Nationals baseball team, and happy hours. When in Washington she spent as many days as possible at the ballpark cheering on her Nats.♠

Claude Porsella is Member News Editor.

Nov. 3 Board Meeting

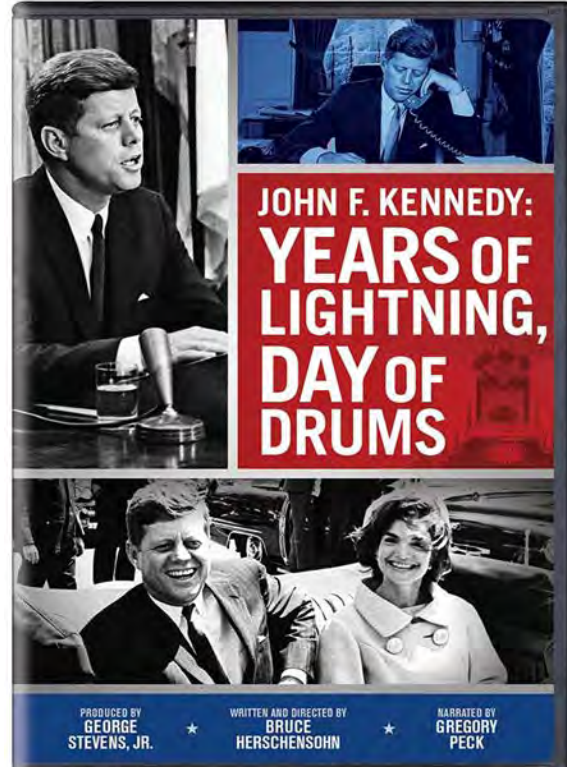
Two items – enhanced program cooperation between PDAA and the Public Diplomacy Council and a decision whether to proceed with the annual PDAA awards in 2021 – were among the major points of discussion at the board’s November 3 meeting, held virtually via Zoom.

The question of PDAA and PDC co-sponsorship of programs was discussed at length. In response to Joel Fischman’s query whether it made sense to combine the program committee of each organization, board members felt that in the era of virtual Zoom programming, it did. Joel said that the issue could be revisited when in-person programs are again possible. Greta Morris added that working jointly would allow the two organizations to avoid duplication of speakers and topics, as well as scheduling conflicts. Joel noted that PDC has allowed PDAA the use of its webinar capability, and in turn, PDAA invites PDC members to participate in our Zoom programs.

Prior to the board meeting, members of the awards committee had voted to postpone the annual PDAA awards for

excellence in public diplomacy because of the pandemic’s impact on overseas posts’ capability to conduct programming. However, the issue was revisited at the board meeting when Mary Jeffers suggested modifying the awards to focus on digital programming. It was also pointed out that the PDAA awards serve to remind State that public diplomacy is important, especially at present when it is somewhat in the background. Joel said that the awards can highlight how public diplomacy is working under the current difficult circumstances. Following the discussion, a majority of the board voted to continue the award in 2021, a decision subsequently endorsed by all current members of the awards committee.

A final note of interest was Joel’s announcement that PDAA and PDC were drafting a joint memorandum to the incoming Administration about the importance of reinvigorating public diplomacy.☞



Bruce Herschensohn, whose passing is noted in the obituaries on the preceding page, directed the USIA film.

PDAA membership for 2021: Check your mailing label for renewal status

If your mailing label says [2020], it is time to renew your membership for 2021.

Membership type, please check one:

- DC-MD-VA local membership (\$50 annually): _____ New _____ Renewal
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Please complete the form below and mail your check, payable to PDAA, or pay online at pdaa.publicdiplomacy.org.

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PDAA Today

Editor: Michael Korff

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