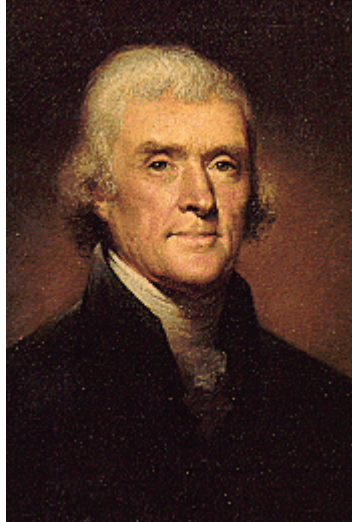


## The 2006 Winners of American Citizens Abroad's



### Thomas Jefferson Award

**AMERICAN CITIZENS ABROAD** (ACA) created the Thomas Jefferson Award in 1993 to commemorate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jefferson's birth. While serving as Ambassador to France during the 1780s, when our government was operating under the Articles of Confederation, Jefferson and his fellow American compatriots worked closely together to develop, promote and protect our rash new experiment in enlightened liberal democracy.

Jefferson, as the principal author of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, had already stated that what motivated this common endeavor was because:

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that **all men are created equal**, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain **unalienable Rights**, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.*

Quite clearly, at least in his mind, there was no suggestion back then that living and working abroad could or should in any way diminish our equality, or our eligibility for the fruits of any of these other self-evident truths. They were universal, not territorial, and so should they still be today.

Following in Jefferson's footsteps, while he was abroad serving in Paris, others among the Founding Fathers finished their drafting of a new Constitution for the United States. This was then ratified and took effect in 1789. In the preamble to this new Constitution, its purpose was once again clearly, simply and most eloquently stated to be:

*We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.*

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Here again, as with Jefferson's earlier commitments, there was no hint of any reservations as to where or how these promises were to apply, nor that any citizen absent from the United States should be treated with any less respect for these same promises as they were to pertain to those living at home within these newly *United States*.

ACA strongly believes that Thomas Jefferson's wisdom, eloquence, and extraordinary service to the United States rightly deserve to be lauded, as we are doing today.

And in dedicating this award to deserving members of the U.S. State Department, we are also sending a second message that we, who live abroad, not only acknowledge their fine individual performances, but even more their manifest dedication to these highest ideals of what our common home country is all about.

ACA instituted this award because we believe that the American community, at home and abroad, has been from the founding days of our republic one large and ubiquitous family. And, as common members and participants in this worldwide endeavor, it is only by truly working together, and in unstinting support of each other, that we can make an optimal contribution to enhancing the strength, health, welfare and prosperity of our country.

Members of the State Department, wherever they serve, play a very important role in ensuring that the ideals and promises of the Founding Fathers continue to have relevance on a daily basis to all of our lives. It is this dedication to the support of the common principles of our worldwide American family that we wish to acknowledge.

This Thomas Jefferson Award, therefore, is our way of saying "thank-you" for a job that has been very well done. We are very grateful for your hard work and dedication, and we are pleased that you have agreed to accept this token of our appreciation.

The spirit of Thomas Jefferson lives on and his legacy helps remind all of us that our solemn commitment to each other to keep the flame of liberty and freedom burning brightly throughout our ubiquitous family should never be taken lightly. By working hand in hand together on a daily basis this becomes a much easier task.

Thank you, and congratulations from the 4 million of us living and working abroad.

### **The recipients we are honoring this year are:**

### **David Abell and Rena Bitter, Co-Winners**

**David W. Abell** is the U.S. Consul General in Baghdad. He joined the Foreign Service in 1987, and has served in Mexico City; Bridgetown, Barbados; Harare, Zimbabwe; Lagos, Nigeria; and Toronto. During his assignments in Washington, DC, David was an instructor for new consular officers, and later headed the Anti-Fraud Training Unit. In Baghdad, David is in charge of the U.S. Embassy section that provides essential services to the private sector U.S. community living and working in Iraq. In addition to the routine tasks of assisting with passports and absentee voting, David is on duty essentially 24 hours a day answering calls for help on a very wide variety of uniquely challenging problems and concerns. This is a hardship post in very dangerous circumstances. David volunteered for this assignment and his willingness to endure these trying conditions manifests the highest degree of patriotism and devotion to his fellow citizens. ACA salutes his courage, his dedication to his country, and his services to his compatriots living and working abroad. David has previously received several awards for his performance. Two of these cited his outstanding work in Harare and Toronto. A third recognized his role in improving the training of new consular officers. David and his wife, Mary, have a son who is currently a Midshipman at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis.

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**Rena Bitter** is the Consular Chief in Amman, Jordan. She joined the Foreign Service in 1994, and has previously served in Mexico City; Bogota, Colombia; and London. She worked for a year directly with the British Foreign Office before becoming the Chief of the Nonimmigrant Visa Unit at the American Embassy in London. During an assignment in Washington, she served as a Special Assistant to former Secretary of State Colin Powell. In her current capacity in Amman, Rena has a double responsibility. She not only provides a full range of assistance to American citizens living and working in Jordan, but also provides vital backup and support to David Abell and his colleagues at the U.S. Embassy in Iraq. She and David form a powerful team working closely together to respond to the needs of U.S. citizens in very trying circumstances. Rena has also previously received awards for outstanding performance. Two of these cited her leadership of London's Nonimmigrant Visa Unit, which is the largest visa processing post in Europe. A third noted her contributions to the office of the Secretary of State. As testimony to her courage and dedication, one of her supervisors wrote a few years ago: "If my grandkids were to find themselves in trouble, I would hope it would be Rena, or someone like her who would be available" to help them.



## AMERICAN CITIZENS ABROAD

Twenty-nine years ago, a group of U.S. citizens living and working in Geneva, Switzerland, decided to create this new organization to promote and protect the rights and interests of the overseas American community. We have grown considerably since then, and our members now live in more than 95 countries. We prepare reports for the press, for the Executive Branch of the U.S. Government and for the U.S. Congress. Our efforts have been instrumental in bringing about changes in U.S. laws and regulations that have made it easier and less onerous for Americans to live abroad. These efforts have also had a direct impact on the lives of all Americans, including those who live and work back home in the United States.

Our work is an on-going contribution to seeking to achieve and maintain a level playing field for all Americans in trade, human rights, social and economic prosperity. We thereby also help contribute to the strength and security of our country and all of its inhabitants.

For more information, please contact us at:

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## Previous Winners of the ACA Thomas Jefferson Award

1994 - 2005

*The distinguished individuals who  
have received this award in previous years are:*

### **1994: Douglas Rohn**

***Douglas Rohn***, Joint Administrative Officer of the U.S. Embassy in Yaounde, Cameroon, was chosen because of his willingness to help U.S. citizens residing in the area. He took his present post in 1991 and has been involved with the Boy Scouts, the American Club Board of Directors, the School Board and the Year 2000 Strategic Planning Committee of the American School in Yaounde.

### **1995: Helen Bridget Burkart and Gerald Whitman, Co-Winners**

***Helen Bridget Burkart*** was nominated by nine organizations in Saudi Arabia for efforts to strengthen contacts among 15,000 Americans in the region. She was successful in maintaining a high level of morale among the military and all Americans in the area. An accomplished public speaker, she has addressed over 2000 persons: the American Society for Industrial Security, the American Business Association, the Boy Scouts of America and dozens of women's groups.

***Gerald Whitman*** A Foreign Service Officer since 1973, Gerry Whitman was selected for his initiative in forming the Umbrella Group of U.S. Organizations in Montevideo, Uruguay. This group has improved communications with U.S. citizens residing in Uruguay and facilitated coordination among U.S. affiliated organizations based in Montevideo. He successfully got U.S. firms to donate money so that a local school could establish a computer laboratory, and his Umbrella Group got the Peace Corps involved in a cleanup project in connection with activities in Uruguay, making Earth Day's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

### **1996: Ingrid Barzel and David Buentello, Co-Winners**

***Ingrid Barzel*** is the Consular Specialist at the Tel Aviv Embassy, whose nomination was received shortly after the previous year's bombing campaign in Israel that claimed a number of American victims. Ms. Barzel repeatedly furnished an almost ubiquitous response to these

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crises, working tirelessly to be where the victims needed assistance and information while giving effective and compassionate support to the survivors and next-of-kin.

**David Buentello** As Chief of the American Citizens Services Branch of the Consular Section of the US Embassy in Manila, David Buentello demonstrated deep personal commitment in assisting Americans facing illness, legal or financial problems, or threats to their safety. He handled negotiations with local officials trying to free four American citizens kidnapped by extremists in the Mindanao region, and worked toward a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

### 1997: Michael Polt and David Lyon, Co-Winners

**Michael Polt** As the Deputy Chief of Mission of the American Embassy in Bern, Michael Polt was chosen for his untiring efforts towards finding an innovative solution which allowed Geneva-area citizens to maintain a consular presence. He is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service of the US with twenty years of experience in the Department of State and diplomatic posts in both Europe and Latin America.

**David Lyon** was chosen for his efforts in instituting a corporate visa program with the local American Chamber of Commerce. Since 1988, he has been a career member of the Senior Foreign Service. He holds both the career rank and diplomatic title of Minister-Counselor. Overseas Americans universally appreciate his work.

### 1998: Richard N. Gardner and Sarah Metzger, Co-Winners

**Richard N. Gardner**, former U.S. Ambassador to Spain, was chosen for his extensive efforts to reach out to members of the American community and ensure that the U.S. Government was responsive to their needs. He accepted President Clinton's offer of the Madrid post while serving as a Professor of Law at Columbia, where he held the Chair in Law and International Organizations.

**Sarah Metzger** As head of the Adoption Unit, Sarah Metzger has made a lasting impact on the American Community living in and visiting China. She supervised a staff of four and processed more than 3,500 visas annually. She joined the Foreign Service in 1991 and served as a Consular Officer in Manila in the Philippines from 1992-1994.

### 1999: Strobe Talbott

**Strobe Talbott** was Deputy Secretary of State since 1994 after serving one year as Ambassador-at-Large and Special Adviser to the Secretary of State for the New Independent States. He was chosen for successfully converting U.S. Embassies and Consulates into sounding boards for the expression of American concerns, offering Americans abroad a much higher level of visibility among Washington policy makers.

### 2001: Stephen A. Edson and Charles Ray, Co-Winners

**Stephen Edson** was honored for the exemplary manner in which he served the U.S. expatriate community during the enormous political and social upheavals that took place during his tenure in Indonesia. The transition to democracy in 1999 was not free of violence, and in response, Mr. Edson initiated constant and comprehensive security threat assessments to protect the lives and interests of U.S. citizens. He worked closely with the security committee of the local American Chamber of Commerce, the Overseas Security Advisory Council, and individual citizens, and orchestrated the evacuations of residents and tourists in Ambon, when violence struck that area without warning in 1999. In October of 2000, he secured the release of an American tourist arrested and charged with espionage for having photographed a security operation. After local press accounts appeared concerning the "American spy", Mr. Edson defused a potentially explosive situation by quietly intervening, successfully negotiating the tourist's safe transfer out of the province. He

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traveled extensively throughout the Indonesian archipelago, responding to specific threats as well as general dangers.

**Charles Ray** was honored for his services on behalf of Americans living and working in Vietnam. When Charles Ray arrived in Ho Chi Minh City in May 1998, there was only a handful of staff manning a temporary office. He creatively supervised the expansion of the Consulate to a staff now numbering over 200, one of the largest U.S. diplomatic and consular operations in the world today. For a full range of issues from local contract disputes, to customs valuation issues and carefully crafted ceremonial events, Charles Ray went the extra mile to ensure the best possible business environment for individuals entrepreneurs, American firms and their Vietnamese partners. His services to the private sector are particularly appreciated as an extremely accessible and flexible partner. He also was an effective and successful advocate for the drafting and negotiating of the US-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement, about which many Vietnamese had expressed some serious reservations.

### 2005: Robert Fretz

**Robert Fretz** was honored for his services as the U.S. Consul General based in Barbados, with an area of responsibility extending from the British Virgin Islands in the north to St. Vincent to the south. During his tenure, he is credited with completely revamping the consulate with utmost kindness and consideration to his clients. As one of his co-workers testified: *“No difficulty is too great for him, he handles all challenges with kindness and humor, never seeming to tire or get grumpy. He is a wonderful representative of the United States.”*

