



Friends of Mongolia

Friends of Mongolia

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Welcome to the United States Ambassador Altangerel!
Elchin Said Altangerel, Amerikt Tautai Morilno uu!



Friends of Mongolia issues a warm welcome to Mr. Altangerel Bulgaa, Ambassador of Mongolia to the United States, who just arrived in Washington, DC in January 2013! He is coming to the U.S. from his previous post as Ambassador of Mongolia to the United Kingdom. Mr. Altangerel also has served as Non-Resident Ambassador of Mongolia to the Republics of South Africa, Ireland, and Iceland since May 2008. He has worked at the Mongolian Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 1979, and some of his other prior posts include Afghanistan, Turkey, Lebanon, Bulgaria, Romania, and Uzbekistan.

Ambassador Altangerel has a Ph.D. in International Law from the Kiev National Taras Shevchenko University in Ukraine, and Master degrees in Political Science and International Law from the Moscow Institute of Political Sciences in Russia. He speaks Russian, English, and Spanish in addition to Mongolian.



2012 Naadam and Post-Party in Washington, DC

by Samuel Ludwig

On July 8, 2012, Friends of Mongolia members and returned Peace Corps Volunteers gathered at Barcroft Park in Arlington, Virginia for the DC area's official Mongol Naadam.

The day's festivities included an opening ceremony with traditional songs and dances, greetings from D. Jargalsaikhan, lead singer of the Chinggis Khan Band and "Godfather of Mongolian Rock Music," and a full day of Mongolian wrestling. Although a horse race around the Capital Beltway proved impractical, children competed in foot races and traditional wrestling as well.

DC's Naadam attracted hundreds despite blistering, triple-digit temperatures – weather which did little to dissuade visitors from relishing the freshly fried khuushuur (see photo). Many thanks to the teachers and parents from the Mongolian School of the National Capital Area, who invited FOM members to cool down in their shaded tent area and share in some speed ice

cream eating!

Friends of Mongolia organized an informal, DC post-party on July 28 for anyone unable to make the area's official Naadam. M-16 Denise Wilkins hosted at her lovely home in Mt. Pleasant, and, although there wasn't any backyard wrestling at this gathering, the day was a great success.

25-30 RPCVs and friends attended, ranging from an M-2 and family to recently returned

M20s. The day provided a wonderful opportunity to swap stories, meet some new friends, and, of course, eat. Guests brought culinary contributions, potluck style, and FOM sought out the services of Amraa egch, former chef at the UB Hotel, who made a mouth-watering array of khuushuur, buuz, and tsuivan.

Thanks to everyone who made these gatherings possible, and we'll look forward to doing it again next year!



FOM Members enjoying Naadam festivities in DC



FOM Board member, Jay Liotta, presenting to the students

2012-2013 Scholarship Program *by Maureen Scanlin*

FOM is very proud to announce the recipients of the 2012-13 Friends of Mongolia, Matthew Girvin, and Croft Family Scholarships. This year's applicants included many talented and deserving students, and the scholarship committee conducted a thorough interview and evaluation process in order to make the difficult final choices. All scholarships cover full tuition at the student's choice of university in Mongolia for an academic year, and students are eligible to renew their award to cover the full four years if they are able to maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0. To be eligible for the scholarships, students must be from rural areas and have exceptional academic abilities, as well as a demonstrated financial need. Priority is given to male applicants meeting the criteria, in order to address the reverse gender gap in Mongolia's higher education system. This year, a total of 22 full scholarships were awarded: twelve students were selected to receive the Matthew

Girvin Scholarship, including four returning students; two students received scholarships sponsored by the Croft Family; and an additional eight students received scholarships funded by Friends of Mongolia.

Congratulations to the 2012 – 13 scholarship recipients:
N. Bayarbaatar, J. Tserentogtokh, Kh, Gerelkhuu, S. Khazbek, J. Galbadrakh, Kh. Ulziisaikhan, B. Tsendmaa, E. Narmandakh, J. Saikhanzul, D. Tuvshinzaya, B. Chinzorig, J. Saranchimeg, G. Davaanyam, T. Chinguun, T.

Buyantogtokh, O. Tseveen, B. Odbayar, B. Batzaya, G. Davaadorj, A. Battsoj, B. Ulziikhishig, and B. Khorloo.

On November 22nd, FOM's scholarship coordinator, D. Sarangoo, organized a dinner at Grand Khan Irish Pub in Ulaanbaatar to recognize the scholarship recipients' achievements. Friends of Mongolia Board Member, Jay Liotta, gave a presentation about Friends of Mongolia and the background of

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Scholarship recipients at celebratory dinner



Ger Tov Youth Center by Ariel Wyckoff

The "Ger" Youth Center/Ger Tov was founded by a group of individuals who were dedicated to serving Mongolian children and young people in northern California. It was officially registered in April 2009 as a non-profit, public charitable organization in San Francisco. President and Co-Founder of the Ger Youth Center, Es-Oldokh Brunker (Eska for short) received her Master of Arts in History and Political Science from the Pedagogical University of Irkutsk (Russia) and Master of Arts in Linguistics from Mongolian State University. She was Vice-Principal of Zuunkharaa Junior High School for four years and taught English classes to Mongolian youth at the

prestigious Mongolian Children's Palace for two years. Eska also served as a Mongolian language instructor for the Peace Corps and U.S. Embassy in Ulaanbaatar. In her role as language instructor to these groups of Americans, she was known for utilizing a

"The Mongolian community in the SF Bay Area has increased dramatically in the last ten years to an estimated 6,000 Mongolians."

multimedia approach to learning, creating a Mongolian-English mini-dictionary and accompanying audio tape for students. In 2007, she and her daughter, Urangoo, founded "Bi Mongol" ("I am

Mongolian"), a quarterly newsletter which strives to instill Mongolian-American youths with an appreciation for traditional Mongolian folklore, literature, artwork, and culture. Two years later they expanded "Bi Mongol," making it the official newsletter for the Mongolian School of the Bay Area. Eska continues to be drawn to the work of promoting children's education and brightening their future.

Interview with Eska Brunker of Ger Tov/Ger Youth Center

Thank you so much for agreeing to this interview for Friends of Mongolia!

When I heard about Ger Tov (or "The Ger Center"), I knew our members and supporters would be interested. I would like to talk to you in more detail about this great

community organization that you started for Mongolians living in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Maybe we can start by talking about your background, and how you developed this organization. I know at one point you were a Mongolian language instructor with Peace Corps, because you were my instructor (), but I also know you taught classes at the "Khuukhdiin Ordon," (Children's Palace) in Ulaanbaatar prior to Peace Corps.

Can you talk to us a little bit about some of your work with kids in Mongolia, and for Peace Corps?

My work with kids started in 1994 in Zuunkharaa city, Selenge Province, where I worked as Vice Principal at the primary and secondary schools for four years. I then moved to Ulaanbaatar and taught English language at the prestigious Mongolian Children's Palace for two years. At the same time, I was teaching Mongolian Language to Peace Corps Volunteers and US Embassy staff. During my years working with Americans, I built some wonderful friendships, especially with Charlotte & Phil Riersgard and Melody & you. Charlotte & Phil were the key people to my successful transition from Mongolia to the US. I am very much thankful for all US Peace Corp Volunteers in Mongolia because they have helped to change many people's lives in many positive ways.

When did you move to the San Francisco Bay Area, and how large is the Mongolian Community

there? How long have you been involved in the community?

I arrived in the U.S. on September 7th, 2001, to explore the opportunities of the country. I lived and worked in Oakland for a year, and then decided to go back to Mongolia for my daughter, who had been staying with my sister, and bring her back to live with me. We lived in a thirty unit apartment building in Piedmont, which I managed for six years and which

"...part of the uniqueness of our school is that we teach performing arts, thanks to several professional renowned artists who work with us."

provided me with significant experience in property management. During this time, I also worked in a San Francisco property management firm in the accounting department. On October 10, 2010, I married a wonderful gentleman, Bob Brunker, and we are raising our two beautiful daughters - Urangoo, who is currently attending California State University Stanislaus, and Nicole, who is in the fourth grade at our local elementary school. We are blessed to be here and very happy for what we have accomplished in these years.

The Mongolian community in the SF Bay Area has increased

dramatically in the last ten years to an estimated 6,000 Mongolians. I have started getting involved in Mongolian community events since June of 2007 when I organized a song competition at the Children's Day Celebration. One kid sang a Mongolian song, but the other children didn't know any and sang American songs. At that time, I wanted to teach them the traditional songs and poems that I had learned. That evening, when I came home, I shared this idea with my daughter and she was so supportive; the idea developed, and we decided to make a newsletter in Mongolian. That's how the "Bi Mongol" newsletter was published for the first time. I was the editor, my daughter did the lay out design, and another very artistic student, D. Enkhzaya, drew pictures based on Mongolian children's stories. We used to print 200 newsletters quarterly and distributed them for free. Eventually the newsletter became the Bi Mongol School.

How did you get the idea for Ger Tov/Ger Center, and who else is involved with this organization?

How many people currently work or volunteer for Ger Tov?

In 2009, three women and I thought that there was a need to provide a place where the Mongolian children, living away from their country, could be introduced to some Mongolian traditions and culture. With that need in mind, we founded the children's organization, "Ger" Youth Center in SF Bay Area. The

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Featured 2012 Small Grant Award Community Development Projects

by Maureen Scanlin



Fourth and Fifth Grade readers at the "Let's Read" project



"Let's Read" Book Fair

In 2012, Friends of Mongolia awarded several small grants for sustainable community development projects in Mongolia, which were featured in the Spring/Summer 2012 newsletter.

Project activities included creating English resource rooms and trainings on health and safety issues. In this newsletter, we feature two of these projects: "Let's Read" grant awarded

to the Hanhongor 12 Year School in Omnogobi, and the "HIV/STI Life Skills" Project awarded to the Tov Aimag General Hospital in Zuunmod:

"Tov aimag HIV/STI Life Skills Project", Gerald Durkan, Peace Corps, Health Specialist Volunteer, and Tumurchuder Erdene, Tov aimag Hospital, (Awarded: \$500). Proposal

Summary - In the summer of 2012, 20 service providers from the soums of Tov aimag will attend a 3-day training of trainers using the Sexuality: HIV/STI Prevention Manual, increasing their knowledge of HIV/STI prevention and ability to facilitate sessions on this topic using the Life Skills manuals.

Excerpts from the Project Final Report, by Gerald Durkan:

Through this project, the volunteer teachers gained an improved skill base for facilitation and by the end of the training all but two of the participants were able to facilitate practice sessions incorporating all five key aspects of facilitation at level three or higher. All of the participants gained an improved knowledge base (overall about an 11% improvement) concerning HIV/STI's and lesson facilitation; although, there was no significant change in the attitudes section. As such, the first goal of the project was achieved as we were aiming for 80% of the participants to have an increase in knowledge. The second goal of the project is currently under way, as the teachers are currently putting on the lessons for their students until the end of the school year (May).

This project built the capacity of the community through improving the teaching skills and knowledge of HIV/STI's in local volunteer teachers. They attained a higher proficiency in facilitation, which they can then use in their future classes. Furthermore, each of the sites focused on for training was given a HIV/STI education tool kit, with which they can use in facilitating

training sessions well past the project completion date.

There were some surprises and difficulties in putting on the training, but in the end it ended up working out quite well. We originally anticipated receiving funds sometime in the summer, and once we did receive the funds in August, we were shocked to learn that the 180,000 that the health department had said they would set aside for this project had been used for a different health project. Nevertheless, we organized with the local education department to combine with a training that they wanted to put on in November and thereby share some of the costs. We had to pack our training into two quite long days (the 27th and 28th of November), but were able to get an additional six teachers trained. In the end, with a total of 26 teachers, we had one teacher from every soum of Tov aimag present at our training.

Emma Healy, Peace Corps, S. Bold, Hanhongor 12 Year School of Performing Arts, Omnogovi aimag. (Awarded \$500) Proposal Summary - Project funds will be used to purchase books to be used in a "Fun Reading Library" to promote reading and literacy of Mongolian language books and ensure that local students have easy access to Mongolian books. Focus on middle and high school aged children in Hanhongor soum near Dalanzadgad city.

Excerpts from the Hanhongor 12 Year School "Let's Read" Mid/Final Report, by Sadie Munson:

In response to perceived needs at the Hanhongor 12 Year School in Hanhongor, Omnogobi, Emma Healy

(PCV) and Sadie Munson (School English teacher) with the assistance of C. Bold (School director), applied for and received \$500 from the Friends of Mongolia Small Grant Program to start a Mongolian language fun reading library. With the funding from FOM and private donations, a total of \$881.51 was used to purchase 145 books, one bookcase, and to pay for shipping the books to the countryside from Ulaanbaatar. To date the books have been checked out over 800 times by over 100 distinct students and adults, and the library has become a daily gathering place for students looking for something fun to do in their free time. The books are mainly housed in the English classroom and students are allowed to take out one book at a time for up to one week. Students have full access to the books, regular request specific books, and enjoy doing book related projects like writing book reports. The project is an ongoing success and its continued impact will only be limited by the durability of the books and a teacher willing to host the library in their classroom.

The goals of the "Let's Read" project are to: 1) Provide students with easy access to entertaining books in their native language of Mongolian, 2) To expose students to new and different forms of literature, and 3) To offer students a production free time activity. All three goals have been achieved by this project. The books are available to all students within the school as well as school teachers and employees. In total, approximately 220 students in grades 1-11, 20 teachers, and 20 school employees have access to the library. Students are roughly 50% female and 50%

male, while the majority of teachers and employees are female.

To date this project has been very well received by students, teachers, and parents. Between 10 and 30 books are checked out each day and many students check out several books a week. While book loss has been minimal (3 books in the first 5 months) many of the books purchased have not retained their structural integrity and required frequent taping or stapling. This is partly due to children not treating the books as well as they should (something that is trying to be addressed) but mainly it is due to poor publishing standards in Mongolia. Based on the reaction of children to the books I believe that this is an area, that if interested, FOM might wish to pursue on a wider scale. Every school in Mongolia has a library but I would guess that the majority are like the one here: cold, usually closed, and stocked with old and uninteresting books. Students have very few production options of entertainment for their free time and those who live in dorms are especially in need of mental stimulation. By hosting a library in a classroom students are able to take out books throughout the day as well as read books in the classroom when classes are not in session. Also, by purchasing books that students want to read and not just those that they should read, more students who were never interested in books before are reading wide varieties of fiction and non-fiction books. If the idea of fun reading libraries is something that FOM would like to explore in the future I would be interested in working with them on this worthwhile project.

Reading should be encouraged By Sarah Munson, former FOM Officer

The original version of this article was first published in The Mongolist: www.themongolist.com. It was also published in the UB Post in February 2013.

I have been a teacher for several years and have seen a lot in that time, but one can always count on gaining new experiences in Mongolia. Recently I had a first. A teacher at the school I work at told me not to give books to her students, the first graders. Why not, you ask? The reason she gave me was "Because they can't read yet." I am still stunned by that request. It became clear to me at that moment that the importance of making reading an enjoyable activity from a young age is not widely understood in the Mongolian education system.

Mongolians have a tradition of greatly valuing books and respecting literature, poetry, and erudition. Unfortunately, this respect seems to put reading on too high a pedestal and, perversely, manifests itself in the form of programs that discourage the idea of reading as a fun or leisurely educational activity.

Kindergarten and elementary school teachers do not read out loud to their students, and therefore do not encourage reading from an early age. And although there is class time mandated for guided reading among students in higher grades, it seems to me that the books are selected to bore even dedicated readers like myself.

Our school has a library with several hundred books, but it is sadly under-utilized. It is rarely open, it is housed

in a very cold room in an old building next to the school, and it primarily consists of moldy books in Russian or equally impenetrable tomes in English dedicated to topics such as graduate level biochemistry.

Interesting books that teachers do keep in their rooms are often viewed as status symbols and are kept behind glass doors or in locked cabinets to keep them safe from the wear and tear of students' hands. In the few cases when teachers do wish to supply their students with books for reading, they find it difficult to assign entire classes the same book because books are very expensive.

I place a very high value on reading and believe that instilling a love of reading is one of the most important ways a teacher can influence students in terms of long term educational success. This belief is based on the findings of research by education experts such as J. T. Guthrie and A. Wigfield who have shown that when students become engaged readers, they thereby give themselves learning opportunities that are equivalent to many years of education.

Recognizing the importance of encouraging reading, I established a small library in my classroom. With a grant from a non-profit organization called Friends of Mongolia, and donations from

family members and friends, I have been able to build a collection of over 150 Mongolian language novels, comics, history, adventure, and reference books. I may be an English teacher, but I am pragmatic enough to recognize that no student is going to try to read a book in a foreign language until they enjoy reading in their native language. Therefore, in addition to teaching English, I act as a part time librarian, checking out 30 to 40 books a day. My bookshelves may be constantly disorganized and the books may need to be taped back together regularly due to wear and tear, but seeing how excited kids get when they find a coveted copy of "Super Friends: Dinosaur City" on the shelves makes it worthwhile. My library patrons are in grades 2 to 11 and include both boys and girls, "good" students and "bad", and an ever increasing number of serial readers who can be spotted walking through the halls absorbed in a book.

Of course, in accordance with the request from the first grade teacher, children in Grade 1 cannot borrow books from my classroom library. This worries me, as there are many benefits to be gained by early exposure to books. For example, studies by educationalists (such as those by E. Washbrook and J. Waldfogel) show that children who are read to when they are very

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2012 Friends of Mongolia Donations Drive for Kids *by Ariel Wyckoff*

Friends of Mongolia (FOM) would once again like to thank all the generous supporters of this past winter's holiday donation drive of clothes, toys, and books for children in Mongolia! This effort seems to grow exponentially every year, and we received boxes from all over the U.S. and Canada. Thank you! We cannot do it without generous members and supporters like you.

This was the fourth year that we have run this drive and the second one where we have partnered with the Mongolian Cultural Center/Mongol Soyeliin Tov. We also received a significant number of donations collected by the Mongolian Community Association of the Washington, DC Area (WAMCA). Of course, this drive was also promoted and publicized by our friends at the North America - Mongolia Business Council and the Mongolia Society. This year all of our boxes are currently on their way to a non-profit children's care center in Choibalsan called "Anna Home: All for Children" run by Mr. Boldsaikhan, and supported by currently serving Peace Corps Volunteer, Koty Erdmann.

Midway through this drive, we had an unexpected stroke of luck. A good-hearted business owner named Vickie Reilly offered to ship our books through her excellent shipping company, Reilly International, all the way to Mongolia free of cost! Thanks Vickie!! In

total, we collected more than 300 books, a few dozen pairs of shoes of all sizes for boys and girls, lots of backpacks and warm coats, even new and never worn mittens, gloves, scarves, boots, and sweaters for children. We also received a surprisingly large number of school supplies, including crayons, notebooks, pens, and pencils; and it would be beyond my abilities to recount the number of toys, dolls, and games.

All items were ready for shipment the week of January 15, and we've sent out twenty 24"x18"x24" boxes filled with all the items listed above. However, we do also have a very active FOM member who is currently collecting even more items that she will ship out on her own, most likely in March or April.

We'll post an update on this project, with photos, in our summer newsletter to show you the kids' reactions to receiving all the gifts.



FOM Small Grant Community Development Projects in Huvsgul Aimag, Hatgal Soum

by *Maureen Scanlin*

In 2012, Friends of Mongolia received small grant proposals from English teachers Serdamba and Gantsetseg of the Huvsgul aimag, Hatgal soum 12-year school. The Hatgal 12-year school has about 700 students and 70 teachers and staff. FOM's Board of Directors enthusiastically approved the funding of two grants to the Hatgal school, currently in progress, to support the creation of a school library and new garbage bin:

School Library Project: Serdamba and Gantsetseg's proposal identified a need to rehabilitate an existing but run-down school building (see the "before" photo below) to create a comfortable, designated library space full of English books. For a total budget of \$1,000, FOM grant funding provides building repair, paint, new windows, chairs, desks, and bookshelves made and installed by a local carpenter. The FOM grant also leverages a



generous donation of 1,000 books from the BOOKBRIDGE Foundation (bookbridge.org), by providing transportation for these books from UB to Hatgal. The library will serve as a year-round resource to all of the school's students and teachers. As Serdamba explains, "All the

books too." As a result of this community-supported project, the library now has 1,500 English books, and is up and running as a joint effort between the school's library staff and English department.

School trash box improvement project: As most of FOM's members are aware, a major problem in Mongolia is garbage disposal, and the Hatgal school has set out to address this challenge. As Serdamba noted in his grant proposal, "The current garbage box is smaller and old, so when we throw away lots of garbage there, it is not enough to keep them in it. Also when it is windy, the plastic bags and bottles and other garbage go everywhere in the school fence." Recognizing the environmental and public health concerns this creates for the school's students and staff and the local community, Gantsetseg and Serdamba set out to



New Garbage Box in Hatgal

school year our English library will work at our school for the teachers and students. In summer when it comes a school summer vacation, I will bring our English library as a Mobile library to the Herders' students who live in the countryside. That time I will also add some Mongolian literature novels and books to my Library, so children will read some Mongolian

build a bigger garbage box. For \$400, a small grant from Friends of Mongolia provided locally sourced raw materials and trained carpenters to build a raised garbage box for the school. With Serdamba and Gantsetseg overseeing the work, a new and improved garbage bin was built within weeks of receiving funding, and the school is monitoring the



use of the space to make sure it is being used by the school community.

Capacity Building: The evaluation criteria of these grants included the grantees' successful history of

project management and implementation: Serdamba has worked with organizations to bring more seeds and other funding into the community, and Gantsetseg led a past grant for a school garden and greenhouse; in

addition, Gantsetseg and Serdamba were both counterparts to Peace Corps Volunteers and have experience working with foreign organizations. FOM's Board of Directors has worked closely with grantees through every step the process, in developing comprehensive and sustainable grant proposals and budgets, carefully tracking and documenting project spending, and monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on project implementation. Through this collaboration, the grant awards further serve to increase the capacity of the grantees to design and establish additional sustainable development projects in the future. Congratulations and thank you to Serdamba and Gantsetseg for all your hard work!

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young (i.e. exposed to books and the written word before they can read), have higher vocabulary rates than children of the same age who are not read to. Children also need exposure to books well before they can read so that they can learn the very basics of handling books, turning pages, holding conversations about pictures, and, last but not least, learning how to read. Not giving books to children who can't read yet is like not speaking to a child because they can't speak yet. As Jacqueline Kennedy once said, "There are many little ways to enlarge your child's world. Love of books is the best of all." I just take for granted that a teacher should encourage

the act of reading in a child of any age, and I was surprised and disappointed to learn my colleague had a different perspective.

I am also a little disappointed each time our school director presents another laptop or a wide screen television to a teacher in our school as part of a government or international aid sponsored program. I appreciate the intent behind these improvements to the school's equipment (even though we rarely have electricity during the school day), but what I would love to see is those in charge of the school system and their international partners actually taking a step or two back and focusing on supplying every

teacher and classroom with entertaining books, and fostering a professional culture in which love of reading, even in first graders, is considered an essential component of a first rate, high quality educational system. Not only are books and a reading culture proven ways to promote better educational outcomes, but books have the added bonus that they do not require electricity.

The author thanks Friends of Mongolia (www.friendsofmongolia.org) for its support.

Please keep an eye out for our 2013 Small Grant Awards Solicitation, to be announced in the Spring of 2013!

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reason we decided to name the organization "Ger Center" is that, as you know, ger is the Mongolian word meaning dwelling or home. Traditionally, Mongolian children were born in gers, which is where all cultural activities and schooling began.

Currently the organization is

programs. Many Mongolians in the Bay Area and all of the parents of our students support the organization very much, helping "Ger" Youth Center with its rapid growth year after year.

I know part of the mission relates to the Mongolian School you run for kids on the weekend. Is it different teaching children of

folk dance, horsehead fiddle, shanz and chess (we also call it "Bi Mongol School"). Currently the school has 65 students in 13 classes. This program's main goals are:

1. To introduce, inherit and preserve the traditional Mongolian culture, history, language and the uniqueness of the heritage;
2. To teach youth to preserve the



governed by a four-member Board of Directors: N.Enkhmaa, Treasurer; D.Doogii, Secretary; the Consul P. Baasankhuu, Director; I am the President/CEO. We hire professional Mongolian teachers and artists to conduct our educational and cultural

Mongolian parents in the United States, compared to Mongolian kids back in Mongolia? And what would you say some of the biggest differences are?

"Ger" Youth Center's educational program, Bi Mongol, holds classes in Mongolian language, traditional

land of our origin and maintain Mongolian ethnic pride among the younger generations growing up in the United States.

Teaching kids in the US is a bit different than teaching kids in Mongolia. To name a few

differences - in Mongolia, a teacher's word is the "law," no matter what. All kids have to obey their teachers completely, no questions asked. But in the US, kids are free to express their feelings. Second, in Mongolia it's mandatory to learn Mongolian language and history, but here, kids are coming to the Mongolian School voluntarily in addition to their normal classes and other responsibilities. Third, in Mongolia, kids go to school every day for five to six hours, but they come to this school just once a week. Fourth, even though the kids are learning their mother language (Mongolian) at our school in the US, their everyday interactions are mostly in English. Our students, parents and teachers put so much effort and dedication into these activities to make our school successful, so I would like to thank everyone who makes this possible.

Teaching kids is hard work, especially if it's an addition to a full-time job. Why is it important for these children to be involved with Ger Tov, and to maintain this link to Mongolia?

You are right; maybe you know this because you taught in Ereentsav, Dornod. But teaching is a very rewarding job, especially to children. They are so adorable and open hearted. Our philosophy is that everyone must know their mother language. The main reason for preserving our language and culture among our children is that Mongolian families often live in the US for eight or ten years and then, when their kids are

at the age to start school, they move back to Mongolia. So their children face another new environment without knowing the language. It becomes a real challenge for them, and because of that, some of them are ashamed and stressed out.

Secondly, part of the uniqueness of our school is that we teach performing arts, thanks to several professional renowned artists who

"...teaching is a very rewarding job, especially to children. They are so adorable and open hearted. Our philosophy is that everyone must know their mother language."

work with us. As you know, many public and private schools have had to cut their arts and music programs here. They focus on math, reading and high test scores only. But involvement in the arts has been linked to a wide range of academic achievements: gains in math, reading, critical thinking, and verbal skills. Participation in the performing arts also improves motivation, concentration, confidence, and teamwork. For these reasons, we run these programs.

What other sorts of things do you do for the Mongolian Community in the Bay Area? What have been some of your most notable or

successful events? (For example, "Children's Day" or "Shine Jiliin Bayar.")

"Ger" Youth Center organizes an annual festival, "Treasures of Mongolia," which highlights Mongolian children, language and culture. This is our main fundraising event. We also celebrate Mothers' Day, Children's Day, and New Year celebrations every year. Our children organize a donation drive to Mongolian schools and orphanages. We would like to thank our sponsors and volunteers for their great efforts which help make our organization's growth successful.

How many supporters would you say that you have for Ger Tov? And are some of them from the non-Mongolian community in the SF Bay Area?

I would say we have a few hundred supporters. Every event is carried out successfully due to help from volunteers and supporters. Our main donors are N. Gantuya and O. Soko. We also partner with other non-Mongolian communities that support arts and cultural programs such as Dance Group in San Francisco, Oakland Asian Cultural Center, and many other groups throughout the Bay Area with which our students perform. Thanks to Dance Group, a "Ger" Youth Center representative participated at the Dance USA conference for the first time this year.

Is Ger Tov connected to other Mongolian or Asian-American organizations in the Bay Area, or

other parts of the United States?

The “Ger” Youth Center has been partnering with the Oakland Asian Cultural Center since we started Bi Mongol School. They provide a facility for our programs and events. In addition, the Ger Center organizes events with other Mongolian organizations including the Bay Area Mongolian Community Association, Mongolian Women’s Association, Street Level Health Program in the Bay Area, and Friends of Mongolia, which is one of our biggest sponsors that donated \$500 for Bi Mongol newsletter in 2008. That was a big help. Thank you!

What could our Friends of Mongolia members do to support Ger Tov, if they are so inclined? Is there a website they can donate to, or a particular project they could support?

We would be very happy if you take a look at how wonderful our children are and what we are

doing for children in the Bay Area at our website, www.gercenter.org. We would appreciate very much if you would like to contribute financially and/or help with professional skills and knowledge. Every little bit helps.

Is there anything else, you’d want to tell any of our Friends of Mongolia members or supporters?

I am pretty familiar with FOM programs, so I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all FOM members for all the great work you do for Mongolians and support for the development of every Mongolian.

Thank you so much for doing this interview with me, and I hope all goes well with Ger Tov for the future!

New State Desk Officer for Mongolia *by Al La Porta*

After two years of sympathetic support for FOM, the Department of State desk officer for Mongolia, John Gorkowski, has been transferred to South America. He was replaced last September by Denise Shen, who comes to the job with great credentials. Friends of Mongolia gives her a warm welcome.

Denise most recently served as a political officer in Kabul, and previously served as a consular officer in Beijing and Nairobi. Prior to joining the Foreign Service in 2007, Denise worked in the telecommunications and management consulting sectors. She hails from Los Angeles, and did her Bachelors degree at Wellesley College and Masters at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

We hope to welcome Denise soon at an FOM gathering.

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the FOM, Matthew Girvin, and Croft Family Scholarships, and the students were then presented with certificates. After the presentation, the students had dinner, got to know each other, and shared their backgrounds and interests. The students discussed organizing on-going events throughout the year, and provided ideas for topics of interest to them.

Sarangoo has since organized a

series of lectures for the students, on topics including human resources and writing an academic essay, which have been very well attended and enthusiastically received by the students. The scholarship recipients have also created a Facebook group where they can share information on upcoming lectures and events, discussion topics, and academic opportunities with each other.

Friends of Mongolia would like to extend our warm and sincere

appreciation to all those who contributed to this year’s scholarships! A special thanks goes out to the Girvin and Croft families for their very generous support, and to the scholarship committee, including the scholarship coordinator, D. Sarangoo, UNICEF representative D. Khurelmaa, and B. Zolzaya, N. Buyanjargal, and C. Enkhjargal from the Zorig Foundation for all your hard work!