

Telethon 2009 Raises Hopes for Shushi



The year 2009 marks a turning point for the city of Shushi, symbol of victory for modern-day Armenians and Karabakh's historical center of Armenian culture.

As the centerpiece of the 12th Annual Armenia Fund Telethon, the "Our Shushi" campaign and logo (inspired by the guardian angel on the edifice of Ghazanchetsots Cathedral; see top right photo) rallied Armenia Fund affiliates to generate the significant funds needed to support Shushi's rebirth.

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The Shushi appeal: economic independence through reconstruction.

In the aftermath of war, liberated Shushi and its surrounding villages have long been in urgent need of economic revitalization. While the government of Karabakh had a renewal strategy in place for some time, it clearly could not bear the financial burden that such a colossal reconstruction program demands.

As a result, Armenia Fund signed on to do its share to overhaul Shushi's century-old infrastructure and to erase the scars of war that have disfigured the Shushi landscape and stalled economic progress since the mid-1990s.



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Volunteers, guests and hosts celebrate the final tally of funds raised during Telethon 2009.

“Things that we take for granted every day—clean drinking water, education for our children, medical services, paved streets and adequate housing—are still luxury items in Shushi,” noted Ara Vardanyan, Executive Director of Hayastan All-Armenia Fund, headquartered in Yerevan. “These issues are at the core of Armenia Fund’s Shushi Reconstruction Project.”

An impressive headstart through pre-Telethon fundraising.

In addition to traditional direct mail and email blasts, a number of pre-Telethon events in various locations worldwide helped build the momentum leading up to the Telethon broadcast.

A telephone solicitation campaign conducted by Armenia Fund USA Eastern Region garnered thousands in pledges and donations while the annual Armenia Fund France Phonathon, the “event of the year” for the French-Armenian community, generated \$1.8 million USD, a 10 percent increase over 2008. With over 45,000 Armenian families from across

Europe contacted, 12,400 pledges were generated. The 650-strong volunteer army working the phones is a shining example of the power of dedicated volunteerism and teamwork.

At the same time, the Prime Minister of Nagorno-Karabakh traveled to the U.S. to meet with eastern region Armenian-American communities, all arranged by Armenia Fund USA. Back in Moscow, an Armenia Fund gala event generated \$5.9 million USD from the Russian-Armenian business community.

The global fundraising drive culminated on Thanksgiving Day during the 12-hour nationwide Armenia Fund Telethon, broadcast live from the KCET Hollywood Studios in Los Angeles. The televised event



Phonathon volunteers gather at Armenia Fund USA headquarters in New York City.

was organized and produced by Armenia Fund’s U.S. Western Region affiliate with volunteers taking incoming calls from donors across the country.

Behind the numbers: wider participation, a more diverse donor base.

The final tally of donations and pledges rose to \$15,875,043, the second highest amount since Armenia Fund Telethons began over a decade ago.

This figure also represents the most widespread international participation to date, including: the Russian Federation with \$5.29 million; Armenia and Karabakh with a combined \$1.75 million; the U.S. Western and Eastern Regions with a combined \$1.64 million; Western Europe (France, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Austria) with \$4.13 million; and Great Britain with \$1.64 million. In addition, Australia raised \$100,000; Lebanon, Canada, and Latin America generated even higher six-figure contributions.

Not only was there an increase in donations, but also 20,000 individuals from Armenia joined the ranks of



In Boston, Armenia Fund USA volunteers build Telethon momentum the week before Thanksgiving.



Armenian community leaders meet with Prime Minister of Karabakh and Primate of the Artsakh Diocese in NYC.

first-time contributors. Thanks to an agreement with VivaCell MTS, the largest cellular phone provider in Armenia, donations via SMS text messages were made possible.

Plus, Hayastan All-Armenia Fund partnered with Armenia's postal service HayPost to allow locals throughout Armenia to donate at their branch post office. These new giving channels increased individual donors from Armenia by 53 percent.

High-profile participants from around the world and across communities.

In addition to celebrity hosts and a variety of musical and dance performances throughout the broadcast, an impressive roster of high-profile officials and personalities appeared on camera to make their appeals in support of Shushi, including HE Araik



After their live performance on the Telethon, the Shushi Dance Ensemble presented a check for \$2000 in support of their namesake—the City of Shushi.

Harutyunyan, Prime Minister of Nagorno-Karabakh and Archbishop Barkev Martirosyan, Primate of the Artsakh Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

In addition, a host of pre-taped messages were broadcast, featuring President of the Republic of Armenia H.E. Serge Sargsyan, Supreme Patriarch Catholicos of All Armenians HH Karekin II, and Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia HH Aram I. Representatives from the Armenian Evangelical and Catholic communities as well as diasporan Armenian political parties and other community organizations also offered compelling pre-recorded appeals.

VivaCell-MTS was the primary sponsor of the 2009 Telethon, joined by international and Armenia-based co-sponsors including ACBA Credit, Agricole Bank, America Bank, Ardshininvestbank and Haypost.

A unique show of solidarity with the people of Shushi.

The New York based Shushi Dance Ensemble's live performance served as a symbolic gesture of solidarity with Shushi—the original inspiration for the formation of the dance troupe 18 years ago. Ensemble Director Seta Paskalian Kantardjian commented that "our special connection with Shushi and the culture it stands for gives our dancers the special pride of taking part in a history-making mission."

Dancer Gayane Hamparsoumian remarked that "helping others is a beautiful gift and seeing the excitement on everyone's faces, as people generously donated their time and money, was an experience I will never forget."

At the conclusion of Telethon 2009, Ara Vardanyan congratulated donors by saying that they have "made sure that the heroic people of Shushi have a shot at a normal life."

Raffi Festekjian, Chairman of Armenia Fund USA East Coast Affiliate, put it this way: "A life of dignity with the satisfaction that comes from economic self-sufficiency is the best reward for the sacrifices so many have made in the name of national independence."

A final report of the Telethon 2009 will be made available in a few months, as pledges are redeemed and late donations are added to the database.

Now and then, one person's creative passion translates into an opportunity for many others to live out passions of their own. That's exactly what will happen when the doors to a new cultural center opens in 2010 in the town of Artik, located in the province of Shirak, Armenia.

Last August, the construction of the cultural center broke ground, thanks to the generosity of famous Parisian-Armenian artist Varaz Samuelian (1917-1996). According to his last will and testament, Mr. Samuelian wished to have a conservatory for music and art built in Armenia. He named Armenia Fund as the beneficiary to carry out his vision. Armenia Fund U.S. Western region will be responsible for the construction of the complex that, for a change, will serve communities outside Yerevan.

A painter and sculptor, Mr. Samuelian traveled in the same circles as William Saroyan and other luminaries who flocked to Paris between the two great wars. Among his many sculptures is a monument to William Saroyan, erected in Fresno, CA. The artist also is noted for his images celebrating the Armenian homeland and its historical giants. He also kept ties with a quaint town in Armenia, which he would visit to regenerate his creative spirit.

By early December 2009, the structural work on the building was completed and the construction of the exhibition space, community hall and classrooms is now under way, on schedule for completion in a few months. The center, to be named in Varaz Samuelian's honor, will be constructed with the pink tufa stone that originates in Armenia and is found in the Artik region.

The exhibition and community halls will be located on the ground floor; classes for music and art, computer and chess tournaments, on the second floor; and Mr. Samuelian's permanent art collection on view throughout the building.

In the meantime, many miles away to the south, 7000 students from the town of Kotchoghod, Armenia, which overlaps with Ridge Route, Karabakh, will benefit from the generosity of Vergine Atamian.

Her late brother and sister, Markar and Marie, had bequeathed their estate to her. She, in turn, decided to donate the entire estate to Armenia Fund France for the benefit of children and their parents in need of a decent school.

The three siblings were born before 1920 in the village of Ouchad, near the city of Smyrna and later emigrated to France.

Accordingly, Armenia Fund France was the likely recipient of the generous donation and will oversee the project from start to finish. The funds will cover the construction of a school building as well the purchase of new furnishings and other classroom amenities that aid learning.

As a result of such thoughtful generosity, the memory of Vergine, as well as Markar and Marie, will be forever linked with the education and welfare of rural Armenian youth.

If you are interested in leaving an indelible imprint on the future of the Armenian homeland with a bequest to Armenia Fund, please contact Irina Lazarian, Executive Director, Armenia Fund USA Eastern Region. Other legacy giving options are also available.



Beneficiaries of the new school, established with funds that Vergine Atamian inherited from her late brother and sister, honor all three siblings in a special ceremony.

While education is a high priority for most nations, it's no secret that Armenia and Karabakh place exceptionally high value on schools and education.

Yet it may come as a surprise that while Armenia Fund is committed to reconstructing and updating schools, it also is providing a learning experience for diasporans—supporters seeking to better understand the opportunities and challenges facing the people of Armenia and Karabakh.

The concept is an Armenia Fund “Discovery Tour” designed to expose diasporans to many facets of Armenian life—from the great national treasures of cities and towns to local customs and traditions of remote villages. Along the way, the group makes excursions to Armenia Fund project sites, some completed, others as works in progress.

“It's a well-rounded itinerary that lets donors see for themselves how Armenia Fund programs are making a real difference in the lives of the people,” tour guide Suren explains.

“It also makes it easier for donors to select specific projects they would like to support or make informed suggestions for future projects,” adds Armenia Fund France Chairman, Bedros Terzian. The French affiliate made the maiden Discovery Tour last year with 37 participants from all across France.

I support because...

January, 2010

“Ever since I can remember, my mother shared the stories of my Grandmother Seranosh, a survivor of the Armenian Genocide. They were first-hand depictions of the horrific chain of events that took place in 1915. She described how, for months, she marched and marched, hoping to survive another day. These accounts helped me appreciate the extent of the human spirit to transcend against all odds. Will power like this has made it possible for future generations of Armenians to.

Now, it is our turn to help the people of Karabakh, whose spirit for survival inspires us all. It is time for these families to experience the fruits of their great sacrifices. Armenia Fund is prepared to provide a helping hand.

Armenians have inhabited the Karabakh region since Roman times. Yet today they face a crossroads. If we don't help these families grow their economy with agriculture development and small business ventures,

Visiting Armenia Fund education projects is a special highlight. Participants meet with students and parents to learn how the school projects are impacting their future. In turn, communities are able to personally thank participants for their interest and support. “Once you can attach a face and a name to a project,” says Irina Lazarian, Executive Director of Armenia Fund USA, “it's all the more gratifying for donor and recipient alike.”

The Discovery Tours also bring together supporters from all corners of Armenia Fund worldwide. Their shared experience helps create lasting bonds among likeminded people committed to rebuilding their ancestral homeland. To find out more about Armenia Fund Discovery Tour 2010, please call (212) 689-5307.



French affiliate donors meet with students and parents of a beneficiary school.

then I am afraid that, one again, there will be a mass exodus of Armenians from this cherished land.

I believe we have a duty to help the less fortunate in order for them to remain grounded economically and able to call their ancestral lands home. Our ancestors, such as my grandmother, would be proud to know that we stood up for Shushi when it needed our support.

I hope that my involvement will in some way help these families grow and prosper, fueled by their indomitable spirit and the practical resources that only an experienced organization like Armenia Fund can deliver.”

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Armenia Fund USA, Inc. is a 501(c) (3) tax-exempt organization (Fed ID #13-3696515)

Donor Acknowledgement (through December 31, 2009)

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