

Rotarians forge bond between Afghan and U.S. cities

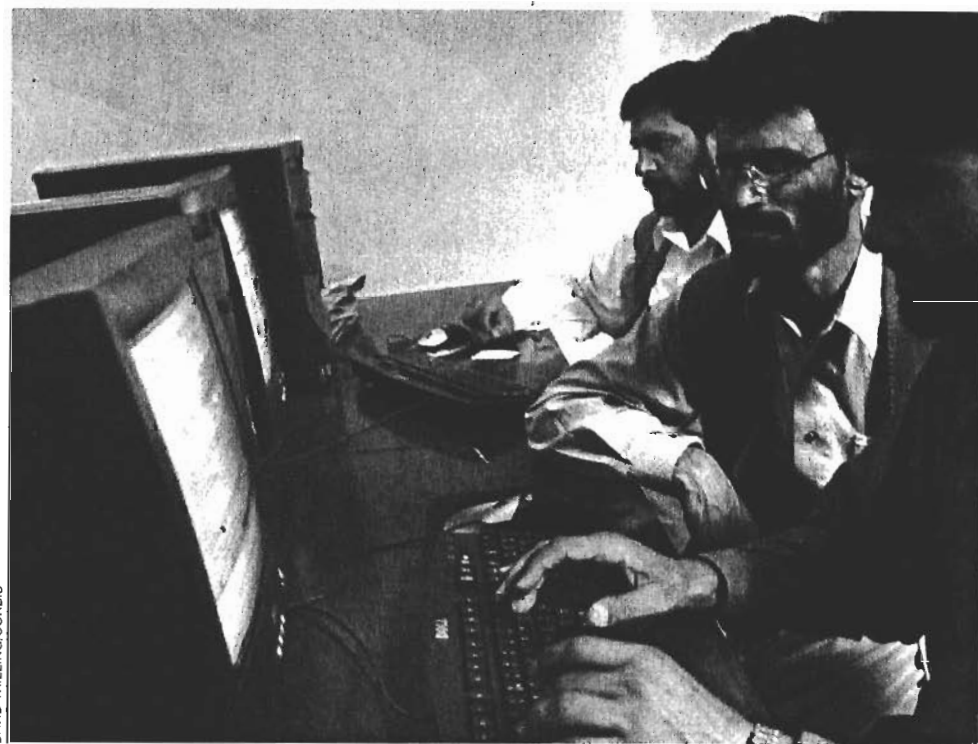
Rotarians have been closely involved with development efforts in Afghanistan for the past 20 years, starting with polio eradication efforts and more recently bringing humanitarian aid to hundreds of thousands of Afghans who fled the war against the Taliban in 2001 and helping to resettle refugees returning to the country. And Rotary made its official return to Afghanistan last year with the chartering of the Rotary Club of Kabul.

Now, fresh from supporting projects such as health care provision and the building and rehabilitation of educational institutions in postwar Afghanistan, some U.S. Rotarians have added to their list of achievements helping Jalalabad, Afghanistan, and San Diego become sister cities.

Jalalabad is the capital of Nangarhar Province and is situated near the Khyber Pass. The population of Nangarhar is three million; Jalalabad itself has several hundred thousand residents.

"This is one of the final steps in an internationally successful and personally rewarding effort," says Steve Brown of the Rotary Club of La Jolla Golden Triangle, who has led several humanitarian missions to Afghanistan, one of which was featured in a photo essay in *The Rotarian* in August. "It's important for people from different cultures, and from different parts of the world, to meet and understand each other. Linking San Diego and Jalalabad offers opportunities at this critical time in history."

In 2002 Brown and Flouran Wali, a local Afghan American, explored establishing a school in Jalalabad as a result of fellow Rotarian Fary Moini's work with Afghan refugees in Peshawar, Pakistan.



DAVID TRILLING/CORBIS

Moini learned of the refugees' desire for a school in Jalalabad, the home where many would return following the end of war in 2001.

In November 2002, Brown, Moini, and Wali traveled to Jalalabad. They were warmly received by government officials and citizens and were encouraged to develop the school. They also learned of needs at Nangarhar University, with its 3,000 students and 250 faculty members.

James Ritchie, a San Diego County resident and friend of Jalalabad Mayor Abdul Razzaq Arsalai, initiated the idea of a sister city pairing. Brown and Ritchie approached San Diego Mayor Dick Murphy, who wrote a letter of invitation to the Jalalabad mayor. Arsalai responded enthusiastically. Committees in both cities formed in fall 2003 to develop the program.

Brown, Moini, San Diego State University professor Steve Spencer, and Farid

Saydee, a leader in the local Afghan American community, returned to Jalalabad in March 2004 and met with Arsalai and his sister city committee. Brown reported back to the San Diego International Sister Cities Corporation (an offshoot of the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit group Sister Cities International), which approved a resolution for the relationship to develop. Following the unanimous recommendation of San Diego's International Affairs Board, the matter came to the San Diego City Council for final approval on 28 June.

"Our sister city program is intended to promote peace and prosperity through interaction and understanding between cultures," Murphy says. "This new relationship with Jalalabad offers us an excellent opportunity to pursue those worthy goals." — VUKONI LUPA-LASAGA

Students in Jalalabad prepare for the future with help from Rotarians.