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ARMENIA MARKS GENOCIDE ANNIVERSARY YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – Armenia’s leaders laid flowers at the Tsitsernakabert memorial in Yerevan on April 24 during official commemorations of the 105th anniversary of the Armenian genocide in Ottoman Turkey which were scaled back due to the coronavirus pandemic. (See Anniversary, page 2)

IMF Plans \$280 Million In Emergency Funding For Armenia

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – The International Monetary Fund will likely disburse next month \$280 million in emergency loans designed to help Armenia fight the coronavirus outbreak and mitigate its economic consequences, a senior IMF official said over the weekend.

Yulia Ustyugova, the fund’s resident representative in Yerevan, told RFE/RL’s Armenian service that the IMF is also planning \$140 million in additional funding to Armenia.

The Armenian government announced last week plans to borrow around \$540 million for cushioning the impact of an unfolding economic recession in the country. Finance Minister Atom Janjughazyan said the government needs to offset a major shortfall in its tax revenues and to continue financing coronavirus relief measures. see IMF, page 16

Appreciation:

Ambassador Shougarian’s Deep Impression on US, Armenia

By **Stephen Kurkjian**

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BOSTON – Rouben Shougarian, who in 1993 became newly independent Armenia’s first ambassador to the United States and spent his career as a diplomat, academic, writer, advocate for democratic values and champion of Armenia’s well-being, passed away in Boston on Tuesday, April 21.



Amb. Rouben Shougarian at Boston University

Shougarian, 57, had lived in the Boston area since 2008 with his wife, Lilit Karapetian-Shougarian, a renowned pianist, and three sons Narek Shougarian, Tigran Shougarian and Haik Shougarian. In a statement posted on social media, the family stated: “It is with great sorrow that we announce that our loving father and husband, Ambassador Rouben see APPRECIATION, page 8

Benefactor, Entrepreneur Aso Tavitian Dies

STOCKBRIDGE, Mass. – Aso O. Tavitian passed away on April 21, 2020 after a battle with cancer, with his wife, Isabella Meisinger, at his side.

Tavitian was born in Sofia, Bulgaria. In 1959, after leaving Communist Bulgaria, he arrived in Beirut, Lebanon. After learning English from an Armenian English High School teacher in Beirut, he was accepted at Haigazian College on a full scholarship but couldn’t afford his living expenses and thought he would not be able to pursue his education when an anonymous benefactor altered his life. Tavitian later learned that see TAVITIAN, page 16



Aso Tavitian with former Primate of the Diocese of the US (Eastern) Khajag Barsamian

NEWS IN BRIEF

Trump Again Refrains From Saying ‘Genocide’

WASHINGTON (RFE/RL) – In contrast with landmark resolutions adopted by the US Congress late last year, President Donald Trump again declined on April 24 to describe the 1915 mass killings of Armenians in Ottoman Turkey as genocide.

Just like his predecessors, Trump continued to use instead the Armenian phrase “Meds Yeghern” (Great Crime) in a statement on the 105th anniversary of the genocide.

“Today, we join the global community in memorializing the lives lost during the Meds Yeghern, one of the worst mass atrocities of the 20th century,” read the statement. “Beginning in 1915, 1 and a half million Armenians were deported, massacred, or marched in the final years of the Ottoman Empire.”



“On this day of remembrance, we pay respect to those who suffered and lost their lives, while also renewing our commitment to fostering a more humane and peaceful world,” it said, praising the “strength and resiliency of the Armenian people in the face of tragedy.”

Trump has previously issued virtually identical statements on what the White House calls Armenian Remembrance Day marked on April 24.

The US House of Representatives and Senate recognized the Armenian genocide in separate resolutions passed in October and December respectively.

The Trump administration distanced itself from the resolutions.

The two leading Armenian-American advocacy groups strongly criticized Trump for not following the US lawmakers’ example.

“The Administration’s statement falls short of the national consensus as reflected in the unequivocal affirmation by the Congress of the United States which overwhelmingly adopted H. Res. 296 and S. Res. 150 last fall, as well as by 49 American states,” Bryan Ardouny, the executive director of the Armenian Assembly of America, said in a statement.

“Despite last year’s near-unanimous Congressional recognition of the Armenian Genocide, President Trump has, once again, granted Turkish President Erdogan – an openly anti-American dictator – a veto over honest US remembrance of Turkey’s WWI-era genocide of millions of Armenians and other Christians,” charged Aram Hamparian, the executive director of the Armenian National Committee of America.

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Metro Detroit Comes Together

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CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

LA Community in Wait-and-See Mode

By **Taleen Babayan**
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

LOS ANGELES – The epicenter of the Armenian-American community in the United States adapted across all sectors when California’s “Safer at Home” mandate went into effect in March, ordering citizens to stay at home and non-essential businesses to close as a way to counter the COVID-19 pandemic and flatten the curve of cases. Although the number of infections, approximately 20,000 in Los Angeles county, did not ravage the city as much as anticipated, government leaders are erring on the side of cau-

tion and the organizations, institutions, restaurants and entertainment that are vital elements to the lives of Armenians throughout the metropolis, are still on lockdown as citizens become accustomed to a new way of life.

Following Governor Gavin Newsom’s statewide shutdown that was echoed by Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, the City of Glendale declared a state of emergency on March 19 and ordered all nonessential businesses to close and declared residents to stay at home, according to former Mayor and councilmember Ara Najarian.

“Glendale took specific steps on this matter and closed all city events, playgrounds, pools and hiking trails,” he said. “We increased social services including our senior meal program and we delivered meals to the homeless and obtained temporary lodgings for them in motel rooms.”

Glendale acted fast and made its citizens and sanitation its priority by installing portable bathrooms and handwashing stations throughout the city, waiving fares on all municipal buses, developing a COVID-19 telephone see CORONAVIRUS, page 10



ARMENIA

News From Armenia

COVID-19 Cases in Armenia Still Rising

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) – The novel coronavirus continues rapidly spreading worldwide, including in Armenia, the neighboring countries and the region in general.

The number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Armenia reached 1867 on Tuesday, April 28. A total of 866 patients have recovered from the disease so far, while 30 have died.

The number of cases of coronavirus infection has increased to 511 in Georgia, where six people have died from Covid-19 complications. 5085 people are quarantined, and 558 are watched by doctors across the country.

In Russia, health officials reported the largest one-day increase ever with 6411 new cases, bringing the total number to 93 558. The country has also confirmed 867 deaths so far.

A total of 1717 people have contracted the disease in Azerbaijan, 22 of whom have died as a result.

Iran's death toll from the new coronavirus has increased to 5,877, a health ministry spokesman said, adding that the total number of cases has climbed to 92,584.

In Turkey, Covid-19 has so far claimed 2,900 lives, while 112,261 have tested positive for the disease.

Science Lab Develops Air Sterilizer

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Scientists at the Alikhanian National Science Laboratory headed by Ani Aprahamian have developed an ozone generator which can sterilize areas of up to 140 cubic meters every hour.

“Generally, our lab doesn’t do such work, but because of the coronavirus and the state of emergency we decided to do something. And we concluded that the best thing would be to develop something that would sterilize,” Aprahamian said on April 27.

Aprahamian says she recalled the idea of an ozone generator from a conversation she had with a Diaspora-Armenian doctor, whom she contacted in Armenia and after improving the design they launched the development.

Ozone is harmful to breathe. That is why the generator must be placed in an empty room when switched on.

When Aprahamian’s team developed the prototype, the Ministry of Healthcare of Armenia dispatched specialists to review it, and after approval it requested 20 devices.

Comparing to similar generators made in China, Aprahamian says her team’s development turned out to be “something of an average quality.”

“The cost of materials per unit totaled 42 thousand drams, and we did the work for free,” she said, adding that they can sell a unit somewhere between 60 to 80 thousand drams.

The 20 units were made by Aprahamian’s 8-man team, mostly by hand, in ten days.

“If the production were in a plant, it would’ve been much easier, assembling by hand is a pretty difficult job,” she said.

Protests After Gas, Electricity Cut off

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) – A group of citizens staged a protest outside the Armenian government building on April 28, complaining that their electricity and natural gas supplies were cut off after they failed to pay the utility bills.

“We have gathered here to ask the prime minister who we have elected why he broke his promise,” one of the protesters said, referring to Nikol Pashinyan’s promise that the utility companies will not disconnect the gas and electricity supplies to people failing to pay their bills due to the coronavirus crisis.

Police officers urged the protesters to return to their places of isolation.

“I think it is a very urgent purpose. Under the state of emergency, I have been left without gas and electricity. There are people with children who cannot take part in the [remote] classes due to being left without power,” another man said.

They promised to continue the protests despite police threats of fines.



A military honor guard at the Armenian Genocide Memorial Complex in Yerevan, April 24, 2020.

Armenia Marks Genocide Anniversary

ANNIVERSARY, from page 1

President Armen Sarkissian, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Parliament Speaker Ararat Mirzoyan and Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II, the supreme head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, visited the hilltop memorial separately, observing social distancing rules aimed at stopping the spread of the virus in the country.

Karekin II and several other senior clergymen prayed by its eternal fire for some 1.5 million Armenians who were killed during the Armenian Genocide.

For the first time ever, ordinary Armenians were not allowed to walk to Tsitsernakabert because of a coronavirus-related nationwide lockdown imposed by the Armenian government

last month. Heeding a government appeal, many of them turned off the lights in their homes and lit mobile phone flashlights by their windows for three minutes in memory of the dead on the evening of April 23. Churches across the country tolled their bells in the meantime.

“The Armenian Genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire was a crime not only against our ethnic identity but also against human civilization,” Pashinyan declared in a televised address to the nation broadcast live from Tsitsernakabert.

“More than a century has passed but the consequences of the Genocide have not been eliminated,” he said. “Turkey has not yet apologized for what it did.

That is why we declare that we remember and demand.”

Both Pashinyan and Sarkissian thanked the three-dozen countries, including the United States, France, Germany and Russia, whose parliaments and/or governments have recognized the Armenian genocide. Sarkissian urged more states to do the same.

“We cannot on one hand declare that we are going to fight together against xenophobia, discrimination, intolerance, anti-Semitism, denial and other all-human vices, and on the other hand ‘play diplomacy’ with Turkey on the Armenian Genocide,” the president said in a statement released on Thursday.

Aurora Initiative Announces Humanitarian Candidates on April 24 Webcast

YEREVAN – On April 24, the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative hosted an online discussion to honor those who perished a century ago during the Armenian Genocide and celebrate modern heroes, including those fighting the global outbreak of COVID-19.

In accordance with the symbolic traditions upheld by the Initiative for many years, Aurora revealed the names of 2020 Aurora Humanitarians, chosen by the Aurora Prize Selection Committee for their courage, commitment and impact.

“We’re part of the globe; we’re part of humanity. We’re setting an example that morally righteous nations can remind the humanity occasionally, during terrible times, that we are not alone. We are each other’s keepers. We represent the nation that stands for solidarity and compassion,” noted Vartan Gregorian, co-founder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative and Aurora Prize Selection Committee member.

The online discussion, titled “Aurora. Standing in Solidarity,” moderated by Nicola Stanisch, Aurora’s executive director, brought together Nubar Afeyan, Vartan Gregorian and Ruben Vardanyan, co-founders of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative; Lord Ara Darzi, chair of the Aurora Prize Selection Committee, and Marguerite Barankitse, inaugural Aurora Prize Laureate.

Darzi took the virtual stage to announce the 2020 Aurora Humanitarians: Fartuun Adan and Ilwad Elman, Angélique Namaika, Sophie Beau and Klaus Vogel, Sakena

Yacoobi. “Aurora is about building a broader humanitarian movement and maintaining a cycle of giving and is focused on gratitude in action. By bringing these traditions online today, we are adapting to our current situation, bringing people together, remembering the kindness of humanity and celebrating the work of these heroes,” said Darzi.

On behalf of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide and in gratitude to their saviors, an Aurora Prize Laureate is honored each year with a \$1,000,000 award and a unique opportunity to continue the cycle of giving by supporting the organizations that have inspired their humanitarian action. The 2020 Aurora Humanitarians have nominated the following organizations:

Fartuun Adan and Ilwad Elman – Love Does, Panzi Foundation and Prajwala;

Angélique Namaika – Invisible Children and Caritas Internationalis;

Sophie Beau and Klaus Vogel – SOS MEDITERRANEE;

Sakena Yacoobi – Afghan Institute of Learning, Creating Hope International and Women’s Refugee Commission Inc.

Barankitse brought up all the ways solidarity can strengthen a community and benefit humanity on a global level: “I think that we should stand up together. There are so many people and we can share; we can break this indifference and create compassion. Aurora Prize creates a brotherhood of people who have lost so much. If those survivors can say: ‘OK, I can give back to others,’ then we can also give back to

others.”

Afeyan drew parallels between the inspiration behind the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative and the current crisis: “The human spirit that motivates people to save others is the one that very few of us have experienced but that many Armenians are the beneficiaries of. Today, that same spirit is being thrust upon all the world. There are modern day saviors in every community and there are survivors who can’t understand why this is happening with the virus. And they feel now what Armenians felt a 105 years ago. I can’t but point out that while the perpetrator is different, the effect is much the same.”

Vardanyan highlighted the significance of the date and called for new solutions to come out of the crisis. “What we’re commemorating today is crucial not only for the Armenians but also for the world. We are facing a new challenge now, and it’s all about the key issues – our human values. Looking forward and remembering your past, I think, are the critical messages for today. The pandemic crisis creates a new reality that we have to accept. But while we’re isolated locally, we at the same time remain connected globally. We’re all part of the global picture,” he said.

During the online discussion, the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative also officially announced the opening of the nomination period for the 2021 Aurora Prize and called for putting forward inspiring humanitarians, including those fighting the global outbreak of COVID-19.



INTERNATIONAL

I Stay Home, I Remember

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

FRANKFURT — Every year on April 24, the French Cathedral in Berlin welcomes Armenians and Germans to commemorate the anniversary of the 1915 genocide. I usually travel to the capital for the solemn ceremony. In Frankfurt, the historic Paulskirche is the venue for a parallel ceremony that my husband regularly attends.

Every year, but not this year.

Due to the extraordinary circumstances created by the coronavirus pandemic, tradition had to bow to necessity. But a commemoration did take place. Thanks to the AGBU Germany and the Deutsch-Armenisches Forum, prominent members of the Armenian community, as well as representatives of other victimized communities, were able to join with personalities from German political life and talented Armenian musicians, to pay homage to the memory of those who perished. Under the rubric, “Stay Home and Remember,” the relatively new German chapter of the AGBU and the forum founded in 2015 by CDU/CSU parliamentarian Albert Weiler, provided an online encounter for participants from many countries — all appearing from their home offices, often with banners visible: “I stay home, I remember.”

It is important, AGBU Germany President Nadia Gortzounian said, to remember the genocide not only of the Armenians, but — as genocide is a crime against humanity — of all those who have been or are being threatened. In commemorating the death of the victims, we at the same time honoring the resilience of the survivors.

Thus, Dariyel Damir, representing the Aramaic community in Germany, noted that it is usually on June 15 that they join with Armenians and Greeks, to commemorate massacres of their people in Mardin, Urfa and so many other Ottoman locations. Just two days earlier, they had gathered to remember the more recent persecutions of Christians in war-torn Syria and Iraq; it was seven years ago on that day that two Archbishops had been kidnapped and not seen since. Damir recalled the words of Interior Minister Talaat Pasha a century ago, who explained that the Young Turks aimed to utilize the conditions created by the world war to rid the Ottoman empire of its Christian populations without being disturbed.

Messages came also from representatives of communities persecuted by Nazism. Emran Elmazi, read a message by Romani Rose, chairman of the Central Council of the Sinti and Roma, communities subjected to the worst crimes of Hitler. Traumatized, like the Armenians, they too demand recognition; it is not only a question of justice but also a means of defeating racism in today's world.

Speaking for the Jewish community was Benjamin Fischer, former President of the European Union of Jewish Students, and Henryk M. Broder, journalist and author. Broder, a prominent voice in Germany, highlighted the experiences and traits that Jews and Armenians share. The Armenian Genocide was “a blueprint for the Holocaust,” he said, and he honored both peoples for their indomitable will to survive.

Remembrance and Reconciliation

The first of three political figures who participated, parliamentarian Michael G. Link, member of the national leadership of the FDP (Liberal Party), under-

lined the importance of recognition of the genocide. Albert H. Weiler recalled the breakthrough on June 2, 2016, when the Bundestag (Parliament) officially and unanimously passed a resolution recognizing the genocide. Regretting that the same has not occurred in Turkey, Weiler expressed optimism, however, that the theme has found its place in political discourse in Turkey, and stressed the need to respect and support those who are courageously campaigning for justice. Without recognition, he stated, there can be no reconciliation or friendship.

Cem Özdemir, of Turkish heritage and a parliamentarian for the Green Party, was among those leading the drive for the Bundestag resolution. Recognition, he said, is important not only for Armenians, but also for Germans, in light of the role Imperial Germany, the Ottoman Empire's wartime ally, played at the time. German diplomats and others knew what was unfolding, but turned a blind eye. In this sense it is important to raise the issue of complicity, and it has been raised. As for the role of Turkey and Turks today, Özdemir said it is not a question of guilt but responsibility, to ensure the same does not happen again, and made reference to the massacre of Kurds in Dersim in 1938. He quoted Hrant Dink, from whom he first learned about the Armenian genocide, on the fact that Turkey had an “official history” and a “true history.”

To illustrate his “vision” of future relations, Özdemir cited the precedents of German-French and German-Polish reconciliation; although the Germans in World War II committed the most atrocious crimes against both, today the borders are open, young people study and work in their neighboring countries. “My vision,” he said, “is that one day the border between Turkey and the Republic of Armenia will be open.” It is the responsibility of the later generation, he concluded, to oppose racist madness; “we owe it to the victims.”

The Deeper Meaning of Survival

The central issue the unique online encounter tackled and most movingly treated was the question: what does it mean to survive? Articulated in words and music, the answer was: survival is more than staying alive; survival means continuing to live on, in one's own meaningful existence, and to provide for the next generation, and those coming thereafter. It means keeping one's own identity alive, and that of one's family and community. It means above all, preserving the history and culture of the people, and developing cultural excellence further.

This message was embedded in the very format of the event, whereby personal remarks and greetings alternated with brief musical offerings, whether on the piano, on the flute or violin, or vocally. The pieces performed were either classical works, by Bach or Chopin (Ronja Tischkov), Komitas (Gurgen Baveyan, Nora Shekyan), Rachmaninoff (Narek Alarverdyan), for example, or new works by contemporary composers, sometimes even compositions by the young performers themselves. Tamar Eskenian presented her 2018 piece, In Memorium, on a traditional Armenian flute. A brief recorded selection of Eduard Bagdasarian, by world class musicians Sergey and Lusine Khachatryan (violin and piano) illustrated the achievements of the cur-

rent generation.

Prof. Elke Hartmann, who teaches Turkology at Hamburg University, developed the concept of cultural survival in a presentation of the Houshamadyan project, which she cofounded in 2010 together with other descendants of genocide survivors. The meaning of April 24, she said, is different for each generation. The Houshamadyan, which is a website, provides the space for a new form of memory, in that it researches Armenian life in the Ottoman Empire prior to the genocide, and, by documenting the loss, brings the villages and towns back to life. She showed how the website works, how someone today might search for information about life in the village where one's ancestors lived. The richly illustrated material comes from individuals who have made available memoirs and photographs of family members and of precious personal items saved from destruction. “Perhaps one might find where one's grandparents or great-grandparents lived and where they went,” she said, adding that such reconstruction of a past threatened with annihilation is of extreme importance especially for the younger generations today.

Vahan Alaverdyan, father of pianist Narek, who had played an etude by Rachmaninoff, addressed the same matter in personal terms. Now, in springtime, he began, when we all rejoice in Nature's awakening, we think back 105 years, when that spring brought not life, but death. It was a death that humanity had not seen before, the death of two-thirds of a people in a short time. Yet through a miracle, there were those who managed through an invincible will to save themselves, to leave Armenia and to spread throughout the world. One of those survivors, a seven-year-old girl, he explained, was his grandmother, the great-grandmother of the young pianist who had just performed. Through her having survived, 38 members of the family came into this world, among them, he and his son. Each generation, he said, has a different task, first to survive, then to remember, to resurrect. In springtime when we celebrate resurrection, for Armenians, it is a celebration of survival and culture, which go hand in hand.

It was precisely the several musical offerings interspersed in the program, masterful performances by members of the youngest generation diaspora Armenians that represented a proud defiance of genocide.

Concluding the commemoration, as always, was a religious service. Bishop Seropé Isakhanyan, Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church in Germany, joined by two clergymen, officiated in an otherwise empty church. Following the service in Armenian, he addressed the virtual participants in German, and elaborated on the message of Easter. In celebrating the resurrection, we celebrate the victory of life over death, he said, comparing the martyrdom of the Armenians in the genocide 105 years ago to the crucifixion, and stressing the importance of the fight for justice, liberty and truth in the shadow of this death. It took many years, he went on, for our ancestors to overcome the trauma, to look to the future with confidence. He said that remembrance and the fight for justice have united millions of Armenians, something that even the terrible Coronavirus pandemic cannot prevent. There is no desire for enmity, he concluded, but a commitment to remembrance and demand for justice.

We stayed home and remembered.

International News

German Parliament Offers April 24 Statement

BERLIN (Armenpress) — Vice President of the German Bundestag Claudia Roth and member of Committee on Foreign Affairs Cem Özdemir issued a joint statement on the occasion of the 105th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

The joint statement, published in *gruene-bundestag.de*, notes that April 24 is a special day in the memories of Armenia, Germany, Turkey and the international community.

“We commemorate the memory of the victims of the genocide against Armenians and other Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire and bow particularly in front of those who demonstrated humanism and were able to save numerous lives. The German Bundestag recorded in a resolution adopted almost unanimously that the genocide against Armenians is part of the history of Turkey and to some extent of Germany. As an ally of the Ottoman Empire today we had to recognize that genocide,” reads the statement.

Roth and Özdemir demand the federal authorities that according to the resolution adopted by the Bundestag, the theme of the Armenian Genocide committed in the Ottoman Empire be included in the German educational programs and be brought to classrooms.

“From our German experience we know how difficult it is to face the dark pages of the history, but we also know how healing that facing can be. We highly appreciate the courageous steps of the civil society of Turkey aimed at facing their history through democratic, scientific and academic approaches,” reads the statement.

Macron Reiterates Commitment to Genocide Recognition

PARIS — French President Emmanuel Macron has sent a letter to Armenian President Armen Sarkissian on the occasion of the 105th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

Macron conveyed his sentiments to President Sarkissian, and the Armenian people.

“On April 24, France commemorates the massacre of 600 Armenian intellectuals in Constantinople, which marked the beginning of the genocide. Today, more than ever, France is committed to protecting the memory of its victims, fighting against denial, and learning a serious lesson from the pages of this tragic story, Macron said in the letter.

“Last year, my country followed my commitment to declare April 24 as Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day. I have decided that, strictly adhering to the instructions dictated by the current health situation, this year the day should also be marked in Paris with a brief ceremony in the presence of members of the French government,” the French President said.

“That legacy, and the shared memory between our two countries, is the basis for such a unique relationship. Today, the world's coronavirus epidemic is forcing us all to face new health, economic and social challenges. We will face these challenges together. And I am convinced that France and Armenia will work together in the international arena for the benefit of more effective multilateralism and newly established solidarity,” Macron stated.

Knesset Member Seeks Recognition of Armenian Genocide

TEL AVIV, Israel (Armenpress) — Yair Lapid, a member of Parliament (Knesset) of Israel, and chairman of the Yesh Atid party, again urged Israel to recognize the Armenian Genocide.

Lapid also tweeted on April 24, “Today is Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day. Just as in previous years, we have proposed a law to recognize the Armenian Genocide. It is our moral responsibility as the Jewish State.”

Lapid made the same post also in Armenian.

Community News

16-Year-Old Killed in Crash amid LA Armenian Genocide Anniversary Caravan

By Brian Day

LOS ANGELES (KTLA.com) – A 16-year-old boy was killed and four other teens were hurt in a rollover crash on the 10 Freeway in Los Angeles' Jefferson Park neighborhood Friday, April 24. Witnesses reported the incident involved a car taking part in a caravan marking the anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, authorities said.

The crash took place about 3:20 p.m. in the eastbound lanes of the 10 Freeway near Crenshaw Boulevard, according to the California Highway Patrol (CHP).

A 16-year-old boy was at the wheel of a 2019 Dodge Charger, with three other 16-year-old boys riding as passengers, when he lost control, according to the CHP.

"For reasons still under investigation, (the driver) failed to maintain control of (the Dodge) and collided into the center divider wall," the CHP said in a written statement. The car flipped onto its roof, throwing one of the passengers from the wreckage.

All four teens were taken to a hospital, where the victim who had been ejected from the car was pronounced dead, officials said.

The driver and two other passengers were being treated for injuries described by the CHP as moderate.

Investigators said they could not independently confirm the witness reports of the Dodge being involved in a caravan commemorating the 105th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

"The cause of this collision and sequence of events are still under investigation by the California Highway Patrol Central Los Angeles Area," according to the CHP statement.

Video posted to social media claiming to show the moments just before the crash show a car swerving back and forth across traffic lanes, with people hanging out of each rear passenger window, before spinning out of control. The video was subsequently deleted.

(With reporting by Alexandria Hernandez)

Financial Woes for Eastern Diocese Hit during Pandemic

NEW YORK – The Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. It appears to be the first of the major institutions of the Armenian-American community to implement temporary furloughs of staff, along with salary reductions.

On Friday, April 24, already an inauspicious day for Armenians, the leadership of the Diocese, including clergy, delegates and parish council chairs, was notified that the Primate and Diocesan Council decided to make salary reductions across the board, beginning with the Primate and including part-time employees, while placing a number of employees on temporary furloughs.

Those furloughed include staff who have served for many decades and now are forced to seek unemployment.

Fr. Krikor Sabounjian, Diocesan Council chairman, wrote that suspending operations in New York resulted in a significant reduction of revenue. It took action, he said, to avoid permanent layoffs and maintain financial stability, and would continue to evaluate the situation and take all necessary steps to serve the needs of the parishes and faithful.

The Mirror has contacted Diocesan officials and will present a follow-up article next week.



Manoogian Manor Nursing Home

Metro Detroit Armenians Band Together during COVID Crisis

DETROIT – The Metro Detroit Armenian community, like the rest of the world, has been dealing with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic for the past month and a half. With a community of some 40,000 Armenians amongst a population of around 4 million inhabitants, Michigan, and in particular the Detroit area, has been hit hard by the pandemic. There have been 37,203 confirmed cases of Covid-19 throughout the state as of Saturday, May 25, and the state and its governor, Gretchen Whitmer, has been making it into the national news.

By Harry A. Kezelian III

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

Fortunately, the Armenian community of Metro Detroit, by taking stringent measures early on, has remained mostly safe from the virus, and few cases or deaths have been reported.

One of the most vulnerable populations in terms of the current pandemic has been the elderly and particularly the residents of nursing homes and assisted living centers. The Manoogian Manor, also known as the Michigan Home for the Armenian Aged, is home to 70 residents, Armenian and non-Armenian, at their center in the Detroit suburb of Livonia. Christine Derdarian, Esq., executive director of the Manor, said she was "very much aware that our residents would be at elevated risk...and we were determined from the onset to do everything in our power to protect residents and staff."

The Manor had one resident who contracted the virus 6 weeks ago, but there has not been another case. Aggressive protocols have been instituted for staff and residents, which have succeeded.

Manoogian Manor has been the beneficiary of generous outreach from the families of residents, the City of Livonia, and the Detroit Armenian community at large, in particular St. John Armenian Church of Greater Detroit located in Southfield. Computer tablets have been purchased and FaceTime meetings set up to keep residents in contact with their families. Many visitors have come and set up chairs outside the windows of their loved ones in order to speak to them. Members of the Manoogian Manor Board, as well as the mayor of Livonia have offered personal protection equipment (PPE) for staff. Several family members of residents have also contributed funds to help honor the staff. The Very Rev. Aren Jebejian, pastor of St. John, as well as assistant pastor Rev. Armash Bagdasarian, have been checking in periodically, and the latter has been visiting the building, where he circles the perimeter from the outside, offering prayers to the residents who attend from their windows.

Derdarian attributed the success and safety of the Manor to the speed with which they responded to the outbreak; lockdown was instituted even before it was demanded by the governor, and the most stringent protocols were adopted, going above and beyond the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control. Derdarian praised the staff as "remarkable, dedicated, and courageous."

The second residence for older members of the Armenian community in Michigan is the St. Sarkis Towers, an independent living apartment building for seniors, located on the grounds of St. Sarkis Armenian Church in Dearborn. There have been a couple of cases of the virus in the Towers, but things are generally fine, said Rev. Hrant Kevorkian of St. Sarkis Church.

"We hired a professional cleaning company to sanitize the hallways, and the church provides for their needs to help them stay in." He added, "we are thankful to St. John's" that they are providing two days of food per week for residents of the Towers. The Armenian Relief Society also provides one day of food, and St. Sarkis Church itself provides another day of food.

see DETROIT, page 11

Djihanian Promotes Business Interests During COVID19 Crisis for US Chamber Of Commerce in Western USA

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

GLENDALE – Vartan Djihanian has been working for the US Chamber of Commerce (<https://www.uschamber.com/>) to advance the cause of member businesses, and now is focusing on COVID-19 related problems. He is manager of the chamber's western region of Congressional and public affairs, one of seven regions of the US, and his jurisdiction encompasses California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah and Hawaii. Djihanian is based in Glendale together with a colleague but, until the COVID-19 pandemic, traveled frequently for his job to meet with local chambers of commerce and business people.

Each state and local area or municipality can have its own chamber of commerce. Thus, for example, there is a Glendale Chamber of Commerce, a California chamber, and of course the US Chamber. All organizations, Djihanian said, are independent from one another. The Glendale chamber has the option of joining the higher-level chambers and pay them dues.

Djihanian serves as the liaison between the California chamber and the US chamber as well as advocating for the business community in his region. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, every six weeks or so he would go to Washington, D.C. to meet with lawmakers and promote the views of his constituency, which he said included lower taxes, smaller government and fewer regulations. Djihanian said, "My main goal is to advocate for the priorities of the US Chamber of Commerce to the members of Congress in my area."

The US Chamber, with its headquarters in Washington, D.C., has 3 million members throughout the country, and is the largest business federation in America. While 95 percent of its members are firms with fewer than 10 employees, Djihanian said that some of the largest businesses in America also see GLENDALE, page 12



Vartan Djihanian honors US Senator Martha McSally (R-AZ) with the US Chamber's Spirit of Enterprise Award at a press conference in Chandler, Arizona



OBITUARIES

Charles Shahe Guleserian

Active in Church, Co-Founder of Armenian Heritage Park

ARLINGTON, Mass. — Charles Shahe Guleserian of Arlington and Cape Cod passed away on April 21, 2020 after a courageous battle with Parkinson's Disease.

He was the beloved husband for 60 years to Joyce Kachadorian Guleserian and father of three sons; Mark Guleserian from Powder Springs Georgia and his companion Deborah Clabough, Gary Guleserian and his wife Elizabeth from Burlington and Matthew Guleserian and his wife Terri from Westwood. He loved and adored his five grandchildren, Samantha, Michael, Isabella and twins Lillian and Gunther.

He was the son of the late Papken and Arshulous Guleserian and was predeceased by his brother Norman from Winchester. He also leaves his brother-in-law Leon Kachadorian from Belmont.

Charles graduated from Belmont schools and was a graduate of Wentworth Institute with a Bachelor of Science in architectural engineering and a graduate of Northeastern University with a Bachelor of Science in structural engineering. Charles owned his own business MGM Contracting named after his three sons. He worked right up until his illness for over 50 years as a commercial real estate developer in Belmont and Cambridge.

He was very active in his community and espe-



cially at St. James Armenian Church in Watertown. He served on the Parish Council for many years and was a Diocesan Delegate for over 23 years, as well as being on the Board of Trustees. On December 2013 he was honored Parishioner of the year. Close to his heart was being the co-founder and co-vice president for the Armenian Heritage Park Foundation at the Rose Kennedy Greenway.

He was a member and past president of the Armenian Council of Executives. He was a member of Knights of Vartan Ararat Lodge No. 1 and Past Commander in 2003. He was named Man of the Year in 2014.

He also was president of the Rotary Club of Belmont and received an award for his leadership in raising sums for a hospital in Armenia for testing and prevention of Prostate Cancer in Men.

He was a Mason and Past Master in 1976 for Mount Olivet Lodge in Cambridge. Charles looked forward to the weekends when he could go to his Cape Cod house, relax, work in his yard and especially go fishing on his boat with friends.

Due to the unfortunate circumstances of the Covid-19 crisis funeral services will be private. A celebration of his life will be announced at a later date. In Lieu of Flowers donations in Charles Memory can be made to: St. James Armenian Church, 465 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown, MA. 02472 OR Armenian Heritage Park Foundation, P.O. Box 77, Watertown, MA. 02471.

(The staff of the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* and the Board of the Tekeyan Cultural Association express their condolences to the Guleserian family.)

Florence (Bazarian) Aharonian

Dedicated to Family,
Hair Stylist

WATERTOWN — Florence (Bazarian) Aharonian, 87, of Watertown, died on April 18, in her home surrounded by her family.

Raised in Watertown, she was the daughter of the late Avedis and Arika Bazarian. She was the wife of the late George Aharonian; the mother of Gail Poirier and husband Larry Poirier of



Arlington and son George Aharonian of Watertown and grandmother to Lauren R. Poirier; sister to Harry Bazarian and wife Bonnie of Florida and the late Gus Bazarian. She leaves many loving cousins and friends.

Florence worked for many years as a hair stylist in Watertown as well as the Star Market in Cambridge.

She was a loving and caring person who touched the lives of many.

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and ongoing public safety measures, funeral services will be private. Memorial contributions may be made in her memory to: Susan G. Komen Foundation, PO Box 98060, Washington, DC 20090-8060.

Nazely (Partamian) Sanentz

Dedicated to Armenian
Education

WATERTOWN — Nazely (Partamian) Sanentz, of Watertown, died on April 12, 2020. She was 94.

She was the wife of the late Paren (Kazanjian) Sanentz, mother of Ara-Baruyr, Shahé, and Léna, and grandmother of Arman.

She was born in 1926, in Kessab. She passed away on Easter Sunday 2020, in Boston.

She had dedicated her entire professional career to various diasporan Armenian educational institutions, from Aleppo to Beirut and from Beirut to Boston, as an exemplary teacher, while also contributing to the many cultural programs of the AGBU and Armenian compatriotic unions, thereby earning the love and admiration of her students and the Armenian community at large.

In-lieu-of-flowers donations can be made to the "St. Sahag & St. Mesrob Armenian School," mailed to St. James Armenian Church, 465 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472.



Alice Gelenian

Dedicated to Church, Friends

BELMONT, Mass. — Alice Gelenian of Belmont passed away on April 18, 2020 in her home at the age of 89 due to age-related cardiac issues.



She was raised in Watertown and lived in Belmont for most of her life. She was the daughter of the late Maushegh and

Grace (Shenorik) (Kouyoumjian) Gelenian. She was predeceased by her brother Ara Arthur Gelenian.

She is survived by her sister-in-law Maryann Gelenian of Mansfield. She was a loving aunt to Andrea Gelenian of Mansfield, Sarah and John Abrahamsen of Groton, and their children Bee and Luke Abrahamsen of Groton. She was an aunt to, and predeceased by, her niece Laura Gelenian to whom she helped take great care of during her battle with cancer.

She lived a long, full life, rich with friends, family, hard work, travel, and hobbies. She leaves behind a legacy of love, strength, and generosity. She was happiest at church events enjoying delicious food, the music, and the people she loved. She found peace relaxing on her back porch enjoying a beautiful day.

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and ongoing public safety measures, funeral services will be private. Memorial contributions may be made in her memory to Holy Trinity Church and Saint James Armenian Church.

Koudsy Mikaelian

Writer, Mother

PHILADELPHIA — Koudsy Mikaelian died on April 19, 2020. She was 89.

She was born in Aleppo, Syria, the daughter of Abraham and Makrouhi Basmajian. One of six siblings, she moved to Beirut, Lebanon, where she married her childhood sweetheart, Diran Mikaelian, in 1950.

She graduated from Beirut College for Women with a Bachelor's Degree in Nursing.

In Beirut, Koudsy achieved recognition in the Armenian community, early on, through her volunteerism and literary works.

The family immigrated to the United States in 1970 and settled in the Philadelphia area. Koudsy enjoyed her life in Philadelphia, and was passionate about serving the Armenian community. She regularly attended services and organized events at St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church and St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Apostolic Church of Philadelphia.

Koudsy was a prolific writer in both Armenian and English. For many years, she regularly published articles in *Baikar*, an Armenian language weekly based in Watertown, the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* and the *Armenian Reporter*. She also wrote several books in both Armenian and English.

In her later years, Koudsy began developing Alzheimer's Disease. Her son, Viken, helped her move from Wynnwood, Penn., to a nursing facility in Valley Forge, Penn., where he visited her regularly. Some of her closest friends often visited her, too, especially Rose Bazarbashian.

She was an active member of the Philadelphia chapter of the Tekeyan Cultural Association, serving on the local group's executive board.

In 2018, Viken and his sister, Tamar June, decided to move their mom to Reno, NV, where Tamar resides. This gave Tamar the opportunity to spend more quality time with her mother for the last two years of her life, when she died.

Koudsy was a devoted mother and is survived by her son, Viken, and his wife, Olga; her daughter, Tamar June, and her partner Kevin Marlo; her brother, Vahan Basmajian and his wife,



Sandra; her brother Vasken Basmajian, and his wife Shoghig; and numerous nieces and nephews. She is preceded in death by her husband, Diran Mikaelian, MD.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that contributions be sent to charities that support the Armenian culture, including the Armenian American Museum in Glendale, and the AGBU.

Giragosian

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OBITUARIES

Dr. Aris Aroutiounian

Leading Obstetrician, Dedicated to Family

NEW YORK – Dr. Aris Aroutiounian died on March 31, 2020. He was 70.

He was born on June 13, 1949 in Gyumri (a.k.a. Leninakan), the second largest city in Armenia. Medicine was his calling, and in 1973, after graduating from the Kuban State Medical University in Krasnodar, Russia, he returned to his hometown and began his practice in obstetrics and gynecology at the Regional Maternity Hospital in Gyumri.

Aris continued with specialized training as an Ob/Gyn Fellow from 1977 to 1979 at the Armenian Research Center of Maternity and Child Health Protection, a leading medical and research center in Yerevan.

The two-year Fellowship at the Center marked the beginning of Aris' remarkable medical career. It was also where he first met Dr. Rouzan Karabakhtsian. She was just starting her Ob/Gyn Fellowship training at the Center and would become Aris' wife.

Upon completion of the Fellowship, Dr. Aroutiounian was offered the position of Attending Ob/Gyn Physician at the same institution. He ultimately became head of the Obstetrics Delivery Division at the Center. During that time and throughout his career, Aris developed and mastered unique techniques of an Extraperitoneal Cesarean Section that enabled him to save countless lives of mothers and babies in complicated pregnancies. In 1987, after serving eight years in that position, Dr. Aroutiounian was appointed as Medical Director of Maternity Hospital #2 of the Yerevan State Medical University. This academic hospital specialized in surgical and non-surgical deliveries of complicated and preterm pregnancies. Later that year, after national recognition for his outstanding professional service, Dr. Aroutiounian was also appointed Chief Obstetrician and Gynecologist of Yerevan.

Aris held these crucial medical administrative positions during the devastating years of the 1988 Earthquake in Armenia and Karabakh War between 1988 and 1994. The two events took a heavy toll on Armenian nation. His ded-

ication to his profession and his patients became strikingly apparent when life-saving, urgent surgeries were performed under horrific circumstances without electricity, running water, or necessary medical supplies. The medical professionals who served Armenia during those years were heroes and patriots with a true calling to help their countrymen and women. Aris was among them.

In 1992, Rouzan Karabakhtsian, MD, PhD, made a visit to her cousin in New York, and decided to stay and pursue her medical career in the United States. Aris soon followed, and so did the birth of their son, John Aroutiounian, who arrived the following year. The two young doctors, Aris, 42 and Rouzan, 36, confronted the same obstacles that still exist for emigrating physicians: the necessity to take their medical training all over again. Rouzan wanted to continue and re-establish herself. Aris, having reached the pinnacle of his medical career in Armenia, could have done the same, but did not. All he really wanted was to spend most of his time raising his son John. Aris considered it a luxury to experience fatherhood to the fullest while allowing Rouzan to further her career in practical medicine. So, he entered the second phase of his life, and dedicated it completely and selflessly to his family.

Although it was a struggle at first, the Aroutiounians were incredibly happy.

Wherever she was in training, sometimes as far away as Pittsburgh or Buffalo, Aris and John would always drive to see her for weekend visits. Aris was a constant physical presence in the life of his son – cheering him, comforting him, reading to him, sharing his knowledge and world view with him, and sitting up until all hours while John did homework so he would not feel alone, but loved and protected. Aris cherished every minute of it.

He used his medical credentials to first become a Research Associate at the Institute of Cancer Research, College of Physicians and Surgeons, at Columbia University from 1993 to 1994. It was followed by a similar position at



Dr. Aris Aroutiounian and his late son, John

the Department of Biological Sciences at the Hunter College, City University of New York from 1995 to 2002. While at Hunter, Aris also taught undergraduate courses in Anatomy & Physiology. His students flourished as a result of his extensive background, dedication, and wonderful sense of humor.

From 2002 to 2006, Dr. Aroutiounian became a Senior Pathology Associate at Hackensack University Medical Center in Hackensack, NJ. He continued in the same capacity at the Pathology Department at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, from 2006 to 2011. He then returned to Hackensack Medical Center in 2011 and resumed his former position as Senior Pathology Associate there until March 20, 2020. During his tenure, Aris provided highly specialized pathology services, and also taught and instructed hundreds of pathology residents and fellows who greatly appreciated his talent as a senior colleague and educator.

Rouzan and Aris were blessed to experience 26 years of most incredible, happiest, and magical life with their son John. Their love and

devotion were returned tenfold. John was a loving and passionate human being, grateful and caring son, brilliant student, generous and devoted friend, prolific and deep thinker, and talented writer. His deep and enduring faith in God led him to explore religion in ways that inspired others.

He spoke several languages, and had traveled the world extensively. Although he was a citizen of the world, John was proudly vocal about his Armenian heritage and well versed in the history of its people. In 2008, while in high school, John successfully lobbied the office of the governor of Kentucky, and single-handedly obtained statewide recognition of the Armenian Genocide. It became the 41st state to recognize the Armenian Genocide.

John graduated with distinction from Yale University in 2015 with a double major in History and EP&E (Ethics, Politics & Economics). He was a columnist for Yale Daily News, and founder of the Yale Armenian Network. From 2016 to 2017 he attended Oxford University and earned a Master's Degree in Classical Armenian Studies. He was in his second year at Columbia Law School and a recipient of the prestigious Dolores Zohrab Liebman Fellowship, when he was diagnosed with cancer. He died on May 3, 2019 at the age of 26.

John's death was a devastating blow to everyone who knew and loved him. Aris and Rouzan both experienced profound grief but handled it in different ways. Rouzan was determined to compile John's essays and articles for a book to share his legacy, but Aris could not even bear to look at his photos, or to recall the words and voice of his beloved son. He experienced a deep and unrelenting sadness, and succumbed to respiratory illness on March 31, 2020.

Dr. Aris Aroutiounian will be remembered for his lifetime of dedication and service to the medical communities both in Armenia and the United States.

Izabelle Kandarjian

Interior Decorator, Daughter of Genocide Survivors

NORTH BERGEN, N.J. – Izabelle "Zabel" Haddad Kandarjian, of Cliffside Park, NJ, passed away on April 17, 2020. She was 95.

She was born in April 1925 in Aleppo, Syria. She was the wife of the late Antranig Kandarjian, who died on October 18, 1989. She is survived by her children Bedros, twins Robert and Rose, Lenna Freedman and Vahe. She was the sister of Loutfi Haddad, Susan Ameika who passed on October 24, 2017 and Rosa Cholak who passed in 1999. Loving Grandmother to Alek, Ani, Christian and Bridget, and aunt to



nine nephews and two nieces.

Her parents, Daoud Haddad and Yeranik Nanorian, both from Dikranagerd, Western Armenia (current day Diyarbakir, Turkey) married in 1919 and moved to Aleppo, Syria in 1925. She was the first born child to her parents who had survived the Armenian Genocide, and, like her parents, she was a survivor of many hardships with enormous reservoir of endurance, adaptability and courage. Her father died in 1943 and Zabel, who loved education and was a model student, dropped out of the French Missionary School for Girls to help support her family by

working in custom dressmaking.

Zabel moved with her mother, brother and sister from Aleppo, Syria to Beirut, Lebanon in 1949 due to political and economic instability in Syria.

On January 6, 1952, she married Antranig Kandarjian in Beirut, who, like her parents, was born in Dikranagerd, Turkey.

The Kandarjian family with their five children moved to the US on March 22, 1969 and in 1972 settled in Cliffside Park, NJ. Zabel was a custom dressmaker and interior designer.

She spoke four languages: Armenian (standard and Dikranagertsi dialect), Arabic, English, Turkish and a little French.

She cherished her Armenian roots and heritage, the church and Armenian cooking, and was famous for her Khavourma recipe at the many church bazaars at Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church in Ridgfield, NJ.

She learned how to drive a car at age 50 and would drive to New York City with her husband to buy fabrics and explore the city.

She had a thirst and deep curiosity for world events and read daily the latest news and watched her international news channels; she rarely watched movies saying, "My life has been a movie." She loved spending time with her children, grandchildren, extended family and friends and like many Armenian women of her age and tradition, she was a great cook with a refined palate who showered her love through memorable Armenian dishes.

In Lieu of flowers, those who would like to make a donation, please gift to: Sts. Vartanantz Armenian Church, 461 Bergen Blvd. Ridgfield, New Jersey 07657, in honor of Zabel Kandarjian. A Private Burial was held at George Washington Memorial Park on Wednesday, April 22, 2020. Arrangements by the Konopka Funeral Home, North Bergen, NJ.

Narguis (Chahinian) Kanian

Volunteer, Dedicated to Family

BOSTON – Narguis (Chahinian) Kanian passed away peacefully on April 24th, 2020 at the Armenian Nursing Home in Jamaica Plain after a brave battle with COVID-19.

She was born on May 15, 1937 in Beirut, Lebanon to the late Mardiros and Mayreni (Tatiossian) Shahinian from Roudigin in Western Armenia.

She was the wife of the late Krikor Kanian, who passed away in 2012. She is survived by her daughter, Susie Kanian-Andriole, and her husband, Richard. She was the grandmother of Alec Krikor and Lily Chahine Andriole. She was the dear sister to the late Gulbenk Shahinian, the late Araxi Nalbantian and to younger brother Krikor Chahinian and his wife Nazeli. She is also survived by nieces and nephews Liza, Apo, Vahe, Maral, Zarmig, Talar, Sako, Ishkhan, Mardiros, Silva, Hasmig, and Rina, many great-nieces, great-nephews and cousins whom she loved.

Narguis immigrated to the US in 1971 after marrying her husband Krikor in Beirut. They started out in Watertown but she and her family spent most of their years living in South Boston.

She cared for her beloved grandson for five years and for her precious granddaughter for six months until she was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease in 2010.

She moved in with Susie, Richard and her grandchildren in 2012 in Framingham until her condition deteriorated; she moved into the Armenian Nursing Home in Jamaica Plain in 2017.

Prior to her illness, she spent a lot of time volunteering in the Armenian community. She was a 40+ year member of the Armenian Relief Society (ARS). Her participation began in Beirut and continued on in the U.S. as a member of the "Shushi Chapter." She spent countless hours volunteering for the Armenian Cultural and Center events.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and current public safety measures, services must be private. Memorial contributions may be made in her memory to the Armenian Relief Society "Shushi" Chapter or St. Stephen's Armenian Apostolic Church.





OBITUARIES

Ann Assadourian

Polyglot, Dedicated to Family

NORTH BERGEN, N.J. — Ann Assadourian (née Mendikian), age 89, of North Bergen, NJ, died on Thursday, December 19, 2019.

Born in Washington Heights, New York, to Aram Mendikian, of Kayseri, Turkey, and Rose (Tekeyan), of Izmir, Turkey.

She was raised in Flushing, New York.

She graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Queens College, of Flushing, NY.

She was an exceptional academic who spoke six languages, including Armenian, Turkish, Spanish, French, Portuguese and English.

She married Dr. Fred Assadourian in 1954. Their two-month honeymoon in Europe was just the first of their many adventures throughout the world. In addition to travel, they both shared a passion for, and were actively involved

in Armenian causes and the Armenian Church.

She was a dedicated parishioner and member of the Women's Guild of Holy Cross Armenian Church, of Union City, NJ.

She also was a steadfast assistant to her husband in the editing and reviewing of Armenian books and publications. She poured love and attention into everything she did, whether advocating for Armenian causes, nurturing her family or friendships, or attending to her garden.

She will be forever and lovingly remembered for her quick mind, inquisitive nature, inexhaustible patience, her astute insight and wisdom, her endearing sense of humor and love for a play on words, her gentle heart, her ever supportive and encouraging ways, her particular gift for welcoming and engaging each and every caller and visitor

to her home with special attention and enthusiasm, making all feel uniquely appreciated, her sense of fun and slightly mischievous inclinations, her enjoyment of entertaining longtime friends at late night bridge games, her love of classical music, nature and small animals, her warm and vibrant smile, typically colored in lively coral, and her favorite things: sunflowers, cardinals, and the color yellow.

She was the wife of the late Dr. Fred Assadourian; mother of Gary and his wife, Ana, Brian and his wife, Lisa; grandmother to their son, Aram and sister of the late Margaret Mendikian.

The family received friends and extended family on Monday, December 23, 2019, at St. Leon's Armenian Apostolic Church, Fairlawn, NJ. Interment followed at Cedar Grove Cemetery, Flushing, NY. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to St. Leon's Armenian Church, Fairlawn, NJ, or Holy Cross Armenian Church, Union City, NJ.



John Topalian

Army Veteran

BOSTON — John Topalian, age 90, of Dorchester, Milton and Hingham, Mass., died on April 16.

Born in Dorchester, Mass. on July 22, 1929, he was a graduate of English High School, Boston University, a Master's degree and a PhD candidate at New York University.

He was the son of the late Levon and Makrouhi (Muncherian) Topalian from Marash, Turkey who were survivors of the Armenian Genocide.

John was predeceased by his wife Patricia Ann Gallagher.

John served in the US Army, stationed in Japan as a military police officer. John served in the Middle East with the State Department working for the National Security Administration.

He was the father of Laura (Topalian) Ahlstrom, the late John Ahlstrom of New York and Leon and Kimberly (Smith) Topalian of North Carolina. He was the grandfather of Jonathan, Hannah, Isabella and Sophia Topalian of North Carolina and of Patricia, Gabriel, and Liam Ahlstrom of New York. He was the brother of Nora (Topalian) Soderquist and the late Carl T. Soderquist. He was the uncle of Cara and Dr. George Halebian, Taleen and Sonya. He also leaves his brother-in-law Robert and Faythe Gallagher and the late Willard, Edward and Francis Gallagher. He was the uncle to many



nieces and nephews as well as loved by many cousins, extended family and dear friends.

The family also wishes to extend their deep appreciation to Michael McDonough for his loving care and devotion in being John's caretaker for the past five years.

John was laid to rest at Milton Cemetery. Due to the impact of COVID-19, a Celebration of Life will be announced at a later date. The family requests donations to be made to the Armenian Memorial Church, 32 Bigelow Avenue, Watertown, MA 02472. Also, mail to Honor Flight New England, PO Box 16287, Hooksett, NH 03106 in memory of John Topalian or online HonorFlightNewEngland.org. Please indicate John Topalian's memory in the notes section online.

Varoujan Badrikian

Born in Syria

WALTHAM, Mass. — Varoujan Badrikian of Waltham passed away on April 22, 2020.

He was the husband of Enna (Pilavdjian) Badrikian; father of Vicken Badrikian and Shant Badrikian and his wife Tanya; grandfather ("Babik") of Ariana and Karina Badrikian. He was the son of Hripsime Badrikian and son in law of Rosine Pilavdjian; brother of Sarkis Badrikian and his wife Yeghsapet and family, the late Mousegh Badrikian and his wife Mayda and family, and the late Zohrab Badrikian and his wife Aida and family; brother-in-law of Khoren and Maro Jamgotchian and family, Roupen and Rita Panian and family, Hrair and Arpi Avakian and family, and Sarkis and Seta Ourfalian and family. He also



leaves many nieces, nephews and great-nieces and great-nephews.

He was born in Syria on August 19, 1947. He moved to the United States in 1973 where he worked as a mechanic until his retirement in late 2018. Varouj loved to travel with his wife, watch sports with his family, take care of his growing garden, and pick tomatoes with his granddaughters.

In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School, 47 Nichols Avenue, Watertown, MA 02472.

The family will have a service and celebration of life at a future date when it is safe to do so.



Donations

The Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada gratefully acknowledges the following donations to the Krikor and Makrouhi Kuredjian Educational Fund.

Edmond Y. Azadian \$100

Van and Priscilla Krikorian \$100

Hagop Vartivarian \$100

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Ambassador Shougarian's Deep Impression on US, Armenia

APPRECIATION, from page 1

Shougarian, PhD, passed away peacefully this morning in Boston, Massachusetts after suffering a stroke last week."

Since coming to the United States, Shougarian served as the academic force for the program at Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy that trained hundreds of Armenian civil servants in public policy and administration. But as important, he became a leading voice – pragmatic as well as idealistic – for the Armenian-American diaspora as well as a succession of Armenian administrations on the multiple challenges facing the fledgling democracy.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said in a statement that Shougarian, whom he knew well and admired, "embodied the best features of an Armenian intellectual, with a broad worldview, an active civic attitude, patriotism and firmness in his beliefs."

Added Armenia's Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, "Armenia has lost one of its best and brightest," in an interview. "Rouben's composure and judgement were so important in forging Armenia's relationship with the United States. He set a very high standard at a time when Armenia was going through some of its darkest hours."

Mnatsakanyan said Shougarian traveled often back to Armenia and maintained his interest and concerns about the health and political well-being of Armenian citizens. He said he was heartened by 2018's Velvet Revolution in which citizen protests led to the Pashinyan's ascension as head of the government. His last contact with Shougarian had come in on April 8, Mnatsakanyan said, during a video conference in which they had discussed with other officials how Armenia was responding to the Coronavirus crisis.

Varuzhan Nersesyan, Armenia's current ambassador to the United States, was also on that video call with Mnatsakanyan, and said Shougarian's "institutional memory" was valuable in



Ambassador Rouben Shougarian

first Ambassador to the United States. On being officially introduced at the White House, President Clinton, then in his 40s, said to Shougarian that it was "nice to see someone younger than me" coming to work in Washington.

Shougarian's unexpected death elicited statements of sadness as well as appreciation from numerous Armenian-American leaders and organizations that had gotten to know Shougarian well since he settled in the United States in 2008. Among them the Armenian Assembly of America, whose president, Carolyn Mugar, said: "Rouben Shougarian was among Armenia's pioneer diplomats who served the very young Republic of Armenia with great skill and distinctive professionalism. A devoted son of Armenia, he subsequently applied his knowledge and experience in training Armenia's next generation of public servants by directing the Tavitian Scholars Program in Public Policy and Administration at the Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy shaping the values for Armenia that all future generations can be proud of."

"Ambassador Shougarian was an insightful analyst of Armenia and Artsakh and the region," remarked Marc A. Mamigonian, director of academic affairs at the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research. "He was a man of genuine integrity who brought incredible knowledge grounded in his experience and his studies. He was able to be both an objective observer and critic while also deeply committed to Armenia's well-being and freedom."

In addition to his achievements as a diplomat and in academe, Shougarian published numerous articles on conflict resolution, regional cooperation and the new geopolitical identity of the Black Sea/South Caucasus region. Dr. Shougarian also authored three books: *West of Eden, East of the Chessboard* (2010); *The Politics of Immaculate Misconception: The Ides of the Post-Secular Age* (2013) and *Does Armenia Need Foreign Policy? (2016; Second Edition, 2019).*

Born in Moscow, Shougarian moved to Armenia with his family in 1966 and received undergraduate and graduate degrees in world history and international relations from universities in Yerevan in the 1980s. When Armenia gained its independence from the Soviet Union in September 1991, his foreign policy training earned him a position as an adviser to the parliament's foreign relations committee. Within months, he was elevated to the role of spokesman for the government of Ter-Petrossian's government.

In 1993, Ter-Petrossian named Shougarian as Armenia's first ambassador to the US. His intelligence and warmth served him and Armenia well in Washington's diplomatic circles. He served as ambassador to the U.S. for six years, returning to Yerevan in 1999 to take on the position as Armenia's deputy foreign minister, where he remained until 2005 when he was appointed to be Armenia's ambassador to Italy, Spain and Portugal.

But his long-standing belief that Armenia needed to stay committed to democratic values and standards cost him those positions. Concerned by the lack of fairness and openness that characterized Armenia's national elections in 2008, Shougarian and three other Armenian diplomats issued a public appeal on February 23.

The statement expressed the signatories' "feeling of responsibility before the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian people" and their "profound respect for the right of Armenian citizens to choose at free elections," as well their "support to our

compatriots who have risen to struggle for freedom, protection of the right to a fair election and establishment of true democracy in Armenia." They appealed to all parties, and "especially to the representatives of all the structures in the country responsible for the maintenance of public order and peace to avoid the temptation of using force as a solution to these problems."

The statement was disseminated in Armenia, including at a rally in Yerevan where it was read out loud by the man who is now Armenia's prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan.

In an interview, one of the four signatories to this statement, Ambassador Armen Baibourtian, now consul general of Armenia in Los Angeles, explained that it was not intended as a political statement and was motivated by a desire to prevent violence. Baibourtian said that Shougarian was the driving force behind the statement because he felt a strong sense of responsibility towards the Armenian people and that "democracy doesn't have an alternative."

All four signatories were dismissed from their positions and expelled from the Foreign Ministry; the violent crackdown they had hoped to prevent unfolded on March 1, 2008. Shougarian was also stripped of his ambassador title in the dismissal, but friends recalled that he had called them in a happy mood more than a year ago and told them that his rank had been restored by the government.

In an interview, Baibourtian credited Shougarian for establishing while ambassador an enduring constructive relationship between Armenia and the US government. "He was there at the beginning and was the architect in establishing the cordial and pragmatic relationship that is based on trust that exists between the two countries," Baibourtian said.

Following his dismissal from the diplomatic corps and his uncertain future status, a number of concerned Armenian-Americans including Carolyn Mugar and Dr. Joyce Barsam, a trustee of Tufts University, sought a solution. The result was Shougarian's hiring by Tufts' Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and assuming a crucial role with the Tavitian Scholars program which annually brings members of Armenia's government for a 6-month program in Public Policy and Administration. (In a cruel twist, Aso O. Tavitian, the Armenian-American businessman and philanthropist who has funded the Armenian scholars program, also passed away suddenly last week.)

Barsam credited Shougarian with expanding the program from its initial focus on future diplomats to training civil servants throughout the Armenian government. "He was the backbone of our program, and the students were drawn to him," Barsam said. "He had a deep knowledge of history, diplomacy, literature and music. And he was the personification of integrity and honesty." She said at last count more than 330 Armenian civil servants had graduated from the program.

Lilit, his wife, said that while her late husband had helped shape the history of Armenia's democracy, he had recently told her that he now saw the key importance of being an educator. "It was important task for him to help his students in thinking more broadly, independently and creatively," she said. "He will be missed a lot but his work and legacy will live on in people's lives and hearts."

Anna Ohanyan, professor of political science and international relations at Stonehill College, remarked that "his work with the Tavitian program has been of critical importance to Armenia's state-building. Training successive groups of professionals, he has made enormous contribution to strengthening the institutions of Armenia's nascent statehood. As such, his work in this program, along with his years of diplomatic service, were nothing short of state building for Armenia and its people."

(Stephen Kurkjian, an award-winning reporter and editor for the *Boston Globe*, spoke to Ambassador Shougarian's Fletcher's class on three occasions in recent years about the role of a free press in a democracy.)



Ambassador Rouben Shougarian meeting Spain's King Juan Carlos

recalling how the two countries had worked together with previous health crises.

In a statement, Nersesyan said of Shougarian: "He was among the first who at a very young age became engaged in the state-building processes in post-independence Armenia, and unreservedly dedicated himself to its strengthening and development. As Armenia's first Ambassador to the United States, he made invaluable contributions to shaping the foundations of Armenian-American relations, setting a high standard of excellence for all future diplomats."

Michael Lemmon, who served as US ambassador to Armenia between 1998 and 2001, greatly admired Shougarian's intellect and integrity in working to repair the relationship between the two countries after an effort to negotiate a settlement with Azerbaijan on Nagorno-Karabagh foundered. In addition, Lemmon credited Shougarian with fostering a pragmatic Armenian foreign policy of "complementarity" with the West and Russia, and "advancing the vision of a 'new Armenia' that is secure, democratic, prosperous, at peace and fully integrated into regional and international processes and institutions."

Dr. Gerard J. Libaridian, historian and a senior advisor to the first President of independent Armenia Levon Ter-Petrossian, stated that Shougarian was "a statesman by nature" and "an integral part of the decision-making process" who "contributed substantially to the expansion and deepening of relations between the two countries."

Shougarian was only 30 when he was named as Armenia's



COMMUNITY NEWS

Chess in Los Angeles Goes Virtual in the COVID-19 Era

The Saga of the American Chess Academy

GLENDALE – Armenians have played chess since medieval times and the game is considered a national pastime. It is not a surprise that Armenians are active in the game in the Los Angeles area. One of the main institutions teaching chess there

is called American Chess Academy. It was founded in 2008 in Glendale as a nonprofit organization by Armen Ambartsoumian, a former first head coach of the national

By Aram Arkun
Mirror-Spectator Staff

chess team of the Republic of Armenia and a FIDE (International Chess Federation) Senior Trainer, and it has many Armenian coaches.

Over the years, the academy expanded, opening seven branches in the Los Angeles area in places like Pasadena, Burbank, North Hollywood, Van Nuys, Simi Valley and Calabasas, Thousand Oaks. A branch in Reseda eventually was closed. Ambartsoumian said that perhaps 70-80 percent of the students in Glendale were Armenian, 70 percent in North Hollywood, and 50 percent in Pasadena, but the more one went to the west the fewer Armenians.

The largest club, in Glendale, had somewhere between 130 and 150 students this year prior to the COVID-19 crisis.

Ambartsoumian said, “We had two goals. First was to introduce the game of chess to students, and through games, conduct an educational program and teach children to think. Second was sports success, since we have well known and respected trainers and good results.” The clubs produced many



Armen Ambartsoumian

champions and became well known in the US. The youngest American grandmaster, Samuel Sevian, was a former student at the academy.

Ambartsoumian said they would organize five or six tournaments a year, with at least 200 people participating in each one. In addition to the students studying in classes or taking private coaching at the clubs or branches, the academy provided after-school programs at 17 schools for more than 400 children conducted by 14 or 15 coaches. These were six-week programs in general, but every school was different.

There was one private school, the Laurence School, which itself paid for the lessons. Most of the schools were public ones at which the parents paid monthly tuition to the school, which would then pay the academy. Among the list of schools participating in the past are two Armenian ones, St. Gregory Alfred and Marguerite Hovsepian School in Pasadena, which had lessons for four years till 2019, and the Armenian Sisters Academy in Montrose.

There were summer chess camps at which champions were invited like Levon Aronian, one of the highest rated players in history, who won the FIDE World Cup twice.

Coronavirus Strikes

“In one day, everything collapsed,” Ambartsoumian exclaimed. “This was a great blow. We did not know what to do.” The academy chapters had to be shut down in mid-March. Seeing children being taught via Zoom in schools, the academy decided to try this for its branches. Ambartsoumian said that he was charging six dollars, an extremely low rate per class, to



Chess class in 2017 at the Glendale chapter of the American Chess Academy

enroll as many people as possible and not lose the children they had.

The afterschool programs could not be continued. The students there were not as dedicated to the game, and the more serious ones in any case already would come to the academy's clubs.

Tatev Abrahamyan, coach at the Glendale branch, said that as the tournaments she was going to play in have been cancelled, her main focus is online teaching now. Abrahamyan was born in Armenia but came to the US in 2001 and was coached by Ambartsoumian. She tied for first place in the US Women's Chess Championship in 2004, 2011 and 2014, was a member of the US Women's Olympic team since 2008 and a bronze medalist in the 2008 Olympiad. She is one of the highest ranked female chess players in the US.

Abrahamyan said that at the end of March, it was unclear how long the academy would have to stay closed but many students might not come back as time would pass. Therefore, the coaches began emailing all of the parents to see if there was interest in resuming online, and on April 3 the first lesson began.

The students were split into five groups by their chess ratings, Abrahamyan said. Zoom was used for lessons and various chess websites or programs were used for demonstrations. She would share her screen, with a chessboard, and give a lecture. Audio was on but not video, to avoid distractions.

There are two sessions per week for each group. Abrahamyan organizes tournaments among the students on a website and observes.

Abrahamyan said that there were some advantages to this setup compared to physical lessons. She said, “It gives me more control than you have in a classroom...The students are generally respectful. Though sometimes they speak out of turn, that always happens.”

Another difference is in the structure of the lessons. The classroom lessons, Abrahamyan said, were one hour long, including 40-45 minutes playtime with corrections and 15 minutes of lecture, and for the advanced group, one and a half hours long, including one hour of playtime. The online version is more lecture, with less playtime, as this is harder to do.

Abrahamyan said she hoped that the students will play more on their own to make up for these constraints. She also said she noticed that some are more engaged now, as they do not have their friends around to provide distractions and fool around as much.

Abrahamyan estimated that perhaps half or a bit less of the students at the Glendale chapter have continued online. Perhaps, she said, some of the parents are waiting to see if things will turn back to normal soon, while others are struggling financially.

The Long-term Outlook

While Zoom classes may help, Ambartsoumian still was concerned. He said, “When there are no tournaments, and we not see each other, it is like other sports like basketball or football. When there are no competitions, it will die. It would take a lot of work to turn this into an interesting system.”

Abrahamyan said that it is very different playing online. It is hard to focus as much and the same tension of playing in a physical tournament is not there. Interestingly, the quick play or shorter time per game open tournaments held online at present also are problematic because of the possibilities of players cheating. Prestigious tournaments in the past were not usually

held open or online and generally are with classic time control (lasting 5-6 hours per game).

At present, the academy uses various third-party websites to assist in online lessons, but Ambartsoumian said that if the COVID-19 situation continues for a long time, it would be necessary to make more expenditures on their own website. It would not make sense to do this if the situation would end in a month or two, he said.

If it did end, with the practicing of social distancing continu-



Tatev Abrahamyan (photo Eric Rosen)

ing, Ambartsoumian said the academy would try to reopen physically too. He said, “We can do it the way restaurants are doing it, only using a small percentage of their full capacity.”

The future appears unclear for chess because of the uncertainty about how society will manage the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The American Chess Academy is discussing the situation with some of the schools with more active programs and making proposals for May.

Ambartsoumian said, “If this lasts a long time, with the uncertainty and most parents having lost their incomes, I don't know how it will end.” Those who are having trouble paying rent will not be able to send their children for chess lessons.

One bright side is that Ambartsoumian said it is becoming more practical to give chess lessons to students living outside of California now. Abrahamyan noted that several people from different parts of the country have contacted her for lessons.

For more information on the American Chess Academy, see its website, <http://www.achessacademy.org/> or Facebook site, <https://www.facebook.com/American-Chess-Academy-166005496743079/>.



COMMUNITY NEWS

Los Angeles Community in Wait-and-See Mode

CORONAVIRUS, from page 1

hotline where residents could report abuses of city orders or request special assistance, ordering all residents to wear a face covering outside the home and implementing an eviction moratorium and a freeze on all rent increases. In addition, the City Council focused on educating residents by sending out mailers informing them of the COVID-19 orders, enacting automated calls to all households and preparing informational videos about the coronavirus in Armenian, Spanish and English.

"The residents of Glendale have adapted fairly well although it has taken weeks for many to wear face coverings in stores and now outside of their homes," said Najarian.

One source of frustration have been reports that residents continue to hold celebrations and get-togethers with family and friends, congregate outside, and open up stores for business, which violate the emergency orders set forth by the city.

"As our stay at home enters the second month, it's clear that people are becoming impatient and want to return to a normal life sooner than the medical authorities and governments will allow," said Najarian. Like many around the country, residents are questioning and challenging the mandate, with some saying it's too much and others expressing it's not enough.

"Placing orders that are often done with little warning or time for debate draws the ire of many residents," he said. "What they don't understand is that as leaders we have to act quickly and we do not always have the luxury of time."

Najarian is aware that the emergency orders fall on the front line of elected officials, including the City Council and mayor and they are well aware of the public input that is discussed online and over the telephone, text and email, in addition to conversations at stores and City Council meetings.

"Clearly these times call for courageous leadership and I appreciate that I am in this position at this time of crisis to lead Glendale to a safer future," said Najarian. Further updates can be found on the City of Glendale's website <https://www.glendaleca.gov/>.

Employees of non-essential businesses, such as the beauty services sector, now find ample time on their hands as they await instructions on when they can return to work. Many are using their wide-open days to pursue projects they had put on the back-burner, including Glendale hair stylist Tamara Arakelyan. While her days were usually spent styling, cutting and coloring the hair of local women in the heart of the city at Fantastic Sam, located by the trendy Americana outdoor mall, Tamara found herself without her daily routine when the salon shut down on March 16. Instead of lamenting the closure, she found a new way to create and put her hands to good use by fulfilling her longtime interest in fashion and jewelry.

"I wanted to stay productive during my time off work so I started sewing bags with fine leather and making bracelets," said Tamara who set up a website for her designs (tamselegance.wixsite.com). "I miss my job but I'm improving on my skills everyday and putting in the effort to create my own line of products and see what else I can accomplish."

Schools Go Online

With the pandemic came school closures as the state of California halted in-person instruction to help stem the spread of COVID-19. A number of Los Angeles-based Armenian private schools quickly adjusted to the suspension of classes, including the AGBU Manoogian-Demirdjian Armenian School in Canoga Park (<https://www.agbumds.org/>). In a short amount of time, the staff handled the transition from in-person learning to remote instruction for its 700 students, from K-12, under the leadership of Principal Arpi Avanesian and her dedicated team.

"Once we got the stay at home orders, we knew time was of the essence," said Avanesian. The closure went into effect on March 13, giving her only a few days to help train teachers and students on the virtual classroom experience, order resources from Amazon and provide laptops and document cameras to whoever

was in need.

"It was definitely a learning curve and we had some bumps in the road but luckily we have a great IT service provider and a good group of educators who sprung into action," said Avanesian, who individually targeted the needs of the elementary, middle school and high school students. "We wanted to maintain the same school day structure online so when the kids came back it was a seamless transition for them."

She conceded at times there were glitches with the wifi and technology from Google Meets, Zoom, Seesaw and other such platforms, but they kept communication lines open with parents and "readjusted based on feedback from families and students and we balanced out what we felt was appropriate."

While high school students were more independent in terms of logging into the virtual classroom, the elementary-aged students had a different experience since their needs placed more pressure on parents who had to help their children log on and sit with them through classes.

"The elementary students have also felt more uneasy and have been asking why they are home from school as they grow accustomed to online learning," said Avanesian, who acknowledged that students miss the dynamic with their teachers and classmates. "In response, the teachers went the extra mile and recorded and posted their lessons so students have it for reference anytime."

All of the school's staff continue to go beyond expectations, the nurse checks up individually on each student and teachers offer one-on-one tutoring through Zoom, virtual office hours and compiling extra resources.

"We noticed competition runs very deep in our blood as Armenians and many parents were requesting additional work so we created online resource folders for those who wanted to complete extra assignments," said Avanesian.

For AGBU-MDS's preschool, instruction had to be removed since a significant part of the day is socializing, playing with friends and receiving care from teachers, according to Avanesian, who noted that tuition was suspended for preschool families but the Board maintained everyone on payroll and preschool staff continue to teach and reach out to the littlest ones with fun daily activities through Zoom and social media platforms.

Avanesian, who has been the principal at AGBU-MDS for the last five years, also made an effort to find roles for each staff and administration member whose on-campus roles didn't necessarily translate to the virtual experience, such as cafeteria workers and on-campus counselors. She tasked them with important assignments, including tracking down student participation in classrooms and increasing communication with parents. The cafeteria staff's abilities are now being used to package boxes for AGBU Global's "AGBU Cares Campaign." Other social services including donating food to Armenian families affected by COVID-19 and making care packages in an attempt to help the greater Armenian and Los Angeles area citizens as a whole.

While there have naturally been drawbacks over the last couple of months, including the cancellation of fundraising opportunities usually scheduled for the Spring and the possible postponement of graduation, Avanesian is staying positive and doing her best to provide an alternate experience for the graduating class.

"Most of our seniors have been at our school for over 14 years, since preschool, and this isn't how we want to usher them out so we are figuring out what to do," she said. "We are all sad and uncertain during this time, and we want to be together, but I have to make sure the educators, students and administration have what they need and that they feel supported."

Western Diocese Programs

The Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America maintains its integral roles as a religious, cultural and humanitarian organization and is delivering much-needed assistance to the most vulnerable populations of the community by supporting various initiatives in the Diaspora and in the homeland. Through the efforts of Archbishop Hovnan

Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese, \$100,000 was raised and transferred to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin to support humanitarian programs in Armenia to help those affected by the pandemic.

During a time of high-demand for COVID-19 antibody blood testing, the Western Diocese has mobilized a drive-up testing center site in the parking lot of St. Leon Armenian Cathedral, in collaboration with HOT Clinic, to set up a mobile serology testing clinic.

"Having antibodies to COVID-19 is key in getting people back to a normal version of reality," said Edward Zaghikian, operations manager of HOT Clinic, who estimates test results within 10 minutes. "If we have enough of the public with the IgG antibodies, we will have heard immunity and can get back to our lives."

By offering the service as a drive-up testing site, staff and patients are protected during the process. Hundreds have already taken advantage of the conveniently located site in Burbank and HOT Clinic has secured enough testing kits to fulfill patient requests.

"The response has been extremely positive from participants," said Zaghikian, who said patients can book their appointments online at www.hotclinic.com. "Patients are very grateful for this type of service and we try to make the process as easy possible by providing quick results as well as minimizing wait times."

Although church doors remain closed at the Western Diocese (<https://www.wdca.com/>) and all in-person liturgical services and cultural programming is on pause, social media has been a significant mode of communication with the faithful. Thanks to a state-of-the-art studio located in-house at the Cathedral, videos, podcasts and other technological programming are available online as free resources to anyone around the globe and are also broadcast on a weekly basis on USArmenia and PanArmenian TV television stations.

"When the pandemic forced us to close the doors of our churches, we were able to bring the churches to the homes of our faithful through the use of social media," said Diran Avagyan, program director and assistant to the primate. "Having all the necessary tools to act, we live-streamed the church services, including the Holy Week and Easter and on a weekly basis recorded messages of encouragement and other materials for spiritual nourishment, including devotional messages and spiritual reflections by the Diocesan Primate and other clergy."

The Primate's Easter messages, recorded in both Armenian and English, were a highlight for the community, where over 200,000 viewers tuned in on Facebook. The Western Diocese has also prepared and released special video editions specifically for children. Through the Zoom platform, Saturday and Sunday schools remain functional as well as meetings, Bible study sessions, ACYO and Nerouj discussions.

In a recent show of solidarity, priests around the Western Diocese organized virtual candle-lighting ceremonies and welcomed prayer requests. Parishes are remaining active by keeping in contact with their faithful individually and organizing food preparation and delivery for the elderly and less fortunate.

April 24 Commemorations

Another casualty of the pandemic was the chance for Armenians around the world to unite and commemorate the 105th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. For the last 55 years, the Armenian-American community in Los Angeles gathers on April 24 to follow a decades-old tradition that includes a requiem service at the Armenian Genocide Martyrs Monument in Montebello, the March in Little Armenia and the protest demonstrations in front of the Los Angeles Turkish Consulate. Due to this year's stay at home orders, the Armenian Genocide Committee, United Armenian Council of Los Angeles and the United Young Armenians, in coordination with major area organizations, including the Western Diocese and the Armenian Assembly of America, memorialized the past while giving back by organizing a humanitarian fundraiser to support Feeding America and honor the Near East Relief's aid to Armenians during the genocide, which helped save over 130,000

Armenian orphans.

Mihran Toumajan, Western Region Director of the Armenian Assembly of America, said the organization has long been part of commemorative programming in Los Angeles and this year's Feeding America initiative, launched on April 17 via Facebook's fundraising platform, was a valuable way to contribute during the pandemic.

"Initially our aim was to secure funding to provide 1.5 million meals, in memory of the 1.5 million Armenian lives lost during the genocide," said Toumajan. "When we exceeded our aim on Monday, April 20, we shifted gears and set our sights on raising 3 million meals."

They again surpassed their goal and within a week, 3.3 million meals were donated by contributors. Toumajan expressed thanks to Feeding America, a nationwide nonprofit organization with over 200 food banks and several food pantries located across America, for partnering up with their coalition. He also praised the Tony Robbins Foundation that matched what was raised dollar for dollar.

"The 'Feeding America' initiative is a manifestation of Armenian Americans' efforts to 'pay it forward,' and show their gratitude to the American people and to Near East Relief, who raised over \$116 million between 1915 and 1930," said Toumajan. "They directed the funds to save the lives of millions of genocide survivors, Armenians, Assyrians, Syrians, Greeks and others, dispersed across the Middle East or having found refuge within the borders of the first Republic of Armenia between 1918 and 1921."

Restaurants Out of Bounds

The Los Angeles community is ripe with highly praised and critically favored restaurants of Armenian and Middle Eastern cuisine, where the appeal lies in the cozy atmosphere reminiscent of home. Large groups are known to sit family style in close quarters and share meals and conversation, but since the pandemic, restaurants have been forced to close their ambiance-filled doors and focus on take-out and delivery. While some eateries decided to forego take-out and delivery orders because of the unpredictable climate of the months ahead, one well-known family-owned chain, Zankou Chicken, a staple in the California food scene since the 1980s, remains open. Though the crisis has affected the day-to-day operations, the multiple restaurants throughout the state continue to serve their customers while implementing new guidelines for their loyal customers and workers on the frontline.

"We are thankful that we are still open and now offering Uber Eats and Grub Hub," said Dikran Iskenderian, Director of Marketing for Zankou (<https://zankouchicken.com/>). "We are also working hard to keep our employees safe by providing masks, hand sanitizers and anything else they may need. We are thankful to our customers and prayerful that our community gets back to normal safely and soon."

In the San Fernando Valley, the popular Furnsaj Bakery & Restaurant, famous for its variety of flatbreads, is a favored spot for Armenians and is also driven by take-out and delivery (www.furnsaj.com). At the outset, the restaurant decided to pursue its operations and focus on enhancing deliveries and take-out orders, such as free delivery options effective May 15.

"We are staying positive in the eye of the storm and continue to serve our customers while abiding by the Mayor's and city ordinance," said Mel Succar, who owns the Lebanese-Armenian cafe with his brother and chef Charlie Succar. "We love our community and decided from day one to stay open and maintain our service-oriented dedication to our customers."

In Need of Laughs

In times of despair, the world finds solace in the arts and entertainment, particularly comedy, which provides an upbeat outlet from the consequences of a crisis. Two Los Angeles-based actresses, Mary Basmadjian and Helen Kalognomos, have teamed up to unite their signature personas of the Hayastantzi Vartoush Tota and the Barskahye Clodette, to film brief satirical and comedy-filled sketches and videos

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Metro Detroit Armenians Band Together during COVID Crisis

DETROIT, from page 4

Closed Schools

Like all schools during the crisis, the AGBU Alex and Marie Manoogian School in Southfield, has also been impacted. The school is the only K-12 Armenian day school in the US outside of California.

The Principal of the Lower School, Sonia Kalfayan, shared that, naturally, the school has been forced to adopt Distance Learning. A "Continuity of Learning" plan was established and Google Classroom is being utilized. Lesson plans are emailed to families and students. There is a Zoom schedule for the entire school, including preschool. Teachers are also setting up tutorial sessions for kids that need extra help.

Things are going well, Kalfayan said, though the transition was difficult at first, as this was a new platform for everyone. All parents have been reached by phone, and they have been appreciative of the school's efforts. Jebejian has reached out to the school with St. John's "Sirov Jash" program, and the school is helping anyone that they know who needs help, especially first responder families. This is a big concern as there are a number of parents from the school who are in the medical field, doctors, nurses, or otherwise, and are acting as first responders. The school is doing what it can to show appreciation for what the first responders are doing for the broader community and society.

Popular local caterer of Armenian cuisine, Gary Reizian, proprietor of Uptown Catering in Keego Harbor, has even sent baskets of food items on behalf of the AGBU Manoogian School to these first responder families. Most importantly, while the state of Michigan had until April 26 to restart public school programs, the AGBU Manoogian School (which is operated as a public charter school under Michigan law), restarted their Distance Learning two weeks early, and so in this case as well, the Armenian community's response to coronavirus has been to take action early and decisively.

Houses of Worship

The Metro Detroit area is home to four Armenian houses of worship: St. John Armenian Church (Diocesan); St. Sarkis Armenian Church (Prelacy); the Armenian Congregational Church of Greater Detroit; and St. Vartan Armenian Catholic Church, all of which are currently streaming their Sunday morning and other services online, as well as participating in community outreach.

Thanks to the unified front displayed by both Echmiadzin and Antelias, all Armenian

Apostolic Churches have been on lockdown, parishioners forbidden from gathering, and badarak offered by a priest with a few deacons and singers. Holy Communion is only being consumed by the celebrant priest. St. John's and St. Sarkis are no exceptions to this.

An outreach program was implemented immediately at St. John's, with the centerpiece being the "Sirov Jash" program. The food is prepared in the St. John's industrial kitchen by catering director Paul Yousoufian and an assistant. The meals are then delivered to the doorsteps of the recipients without any physical contact between the recipient and the person making the delivery. There is also the option for someone to come to the church and pick up a meal for an elderly relative or friend. Youth Coordinator Lisa Mardigian, who is a full time employee of the church, has stepped up to the role of running the Sirov Jash program along with the two members of the clergy. Half a dozen volunteers have joined them as delivery people.

Another ministry of St. John's in the time of coronavirus are the "Wellness Calls" being made to the most vulnerable parishioners of the church - people who are shut-ins, have no Internet, and no family that looks in on them. Volunteers coordinated by the church are making telephone calls to this group, which numbers "at least twenty" individuals. Fr. Armash has been keeping in contact with the members of the Women's Guild.

"This whole pandemic has changed the way we do our ministry here at St. John Armenian Church," said Jebejian. He has been also been doing some "drive-by prayers," calling parishioners and checking in on them by driving in front of their house, saying hello and offering a prayer and blessing from his car.

Many church ministries are now being operated by way of Zoom conferences. The "Little Saints" program meets every Saturday morning rather than the previous once a month. The two pastors, and the locally-based Diocesan Youth Director Jennifer Morris have been meeting with about 30 small children 4 and under with their parents. Parish Council, Women's Guild, and ACYOA Juniors and Seniors, and groups of students away at college have also been meeting on Zoom. ACYOA Day, which occurs on Palm Sunday, was celebrated by a Junior-Senior Zoom meeting where Senior members Celene Philip and Lerna Lacinian described their experiences participating in the ACYOA's national volunteer Habitat for Humanity trip which took place in Atlanta in February, before Covid-19 became a national concern.

The pastor of St. Sarkis Armenian Church, Rev. Fr. Hrant Kevorkian, also shared his parish's situation. The church is continuing to offer prayers behind closed doors. All services are livestreamed, and Kevorkian has been offering special services on Monday evening (a prayer service for those infected and those going into work), Wednesday morning, and Friday evening. The Sunday School is offering Bible story time every day at 3 pm, with livestreamed readings for the children by Haigan Tcholakian. An outreach program has been started by volunteers raising funds, helping the elderly by doing deliveries or picking up groceries, and buying essentials for families in need. Bible study and prayer sessions with college students is continuing over Zoom, while all church employees are working from home.

The recently re-invigorated Armenian Congregational Church of Greater Detroit, led by Pastor Hagop Haroutunian, has benefitted greatly from the fact that a completely new and modern website was built a few months prior.

Director of Youth and Young Adult Outreach, Michael Banerian, said online accessibility of Sunday services, bible studies and prayer groups was already being discussed by the church when the pandemic broke out. Unlike Apostolic services which are livestreamed, the services are pre-recorded for high quality on the audio-visual side, and Banerian, working with the pastor, has been able to add some changes that would have been harder to do in person. More contemporary music and more contemporary approaches to how the sermon is conducted, such as mood music behind the sermons, have been explored.

Banerian feels that this provided an opportunity to explore some changes in the Sunday service that may have met with resistance from older parishioners if they were implemented during normal times, when everyone was at church in person. The church experiences moderate attendance on Sundays normally, and the views they are getting on streaming services show a much higher rate of participation. There is also a larger amount of people in the Bible Study and Prayer Group. Sunday School lessons, run by Leslie Banerian, are also now online with videos and weekly lessons for Elementary and Upper Elementary groups. The Prayer Group in particular has been acting as a "counseling session" for the fact that people are drained by the Covid-19 situation, quarantine, etc. Parishioners, who are shut in, and some of

whom have lost their jobs, are starting to appreciate the interpersonal resources of the community more. The young adults Bible Study led by Katherine Banerian has also become more popular and is now meeting once a week rather than every other week.

All the churches have been working together at this time, including the small congregation of St. Vartan Armenian Catholic Church, led by the Very Rev. Andon Atamian. He reports there are no cases in his community. He thanks God and attributes this to the fact that everyone is following the law and remaining home. Badarak is being held on Sunday with one or two people assisting the priest, and is also being livestreamed.

Genocide Commemoration

Detroit's four Armenian churches have for many years been doing a United Commemoration of the Armenian Genocide on April 24. This year, the commemoration was held at St. John's and was limited to the clergy and master-singer Deacon Rubik Mailian of St. John's. The service of intercessory prayers to the sanctified Martyrs of the Armenian Genocide was led with prayers by Kevorkian of St. Sarkis and a homily was offered by guest clergyman, Fr. Imad AlBanna of the Sts. Peter and Paul Syriac Orthodox Church in Southfield, a sister church in communion with the Armenian Apostolic. Atamian, on doctor's orders, was unable to attend due to his age. Kevorkian in his prayers asked the martyrs for their intercession with God on our behalf in regard to the current crisis.

Other organizations have been reaching out to those stuck at home. The Tekeyan Cultural Association has reached out with educational resources in connection with April 24, while the Detroit chapter of the AGBU Young Professionals led by Naera Haghazarian has participated in the AGBU YP worldwide network's entertaining Zoom conferences, intended to give stressed out young people working from home some respite from their situation. ACYOA members in the area have also participated in the National ACYOA's diocesan-wide spirituality discussion groups via Zoom, with the encouragement of diocesan youth director Morris.

Although the members of the Detroit Armenian community are at this point exhausted by this ordeal, they continue to remain strong to their values, as individuals, members of their respective churches and organizations, and as a community which has shown time and time again its ability to stick together and help one another as members of the Greater Detroit Armenian family.

Los Angeles Community in Wait-and-See Mode

from previous page

on topics ranging from the coronavirus to matchmaking to chicken and pilaf recipes. As creative professionals, Basmadjian and Kalognomos have dedicated more time to creating digital content and becoming an even more active presence on social media viewing platforms since live performances have been postponed for the time being.

As a make-up artist regularly on set for films and television shows, such as HBO's "Curb Your Enthusiasm," Kalognomos went on hiatus when productions shut down in Hollywood due to the pandemic. To nurture her artistic edge, she slipped back into her Clodette character, which mirrors her Armenian-Persian upbringing.

"Clodette was inspired by many women I've known or seen in my life," said Kalognomos. "I love her interactions with her friends and family, and that nothing has really changed for her since the pandemic started. For Clodette it's just another day."

Quarantined at home along with much of the rest of the world, Kalognomos found herself with few distractions and increased her video production over the last month, filming and editing her clips and making sure to subtitle her Armenian language videos so everyone can follow along.

"If it's not about the pandemic they're about



Helen Kalognomos

sound bites I've had in my head for years," said Kalognomos who shares her videos on Instagram @kalognomos. "Humor is such a big part of how I deal with life so the videos are helping distract me from the stress of our current situation. The

introvert in me is happy being home with lots of time to make them."

A fixture on the Armenian comedy circuit, Basmadjian, who is a stand-up comedian, actress and producer, makes regular appearances in Los Angeles area comedy clubs like Flappers in Burbank and The Ice House in Pasadena. She's particularly known for her character Vartoush Tota, a busybody Armenian aunt who emulates the accents and gestures of an off-the-boat immigrant. When fused with Kalognomos's Clodette,

a clash of Armenian cultures and camaraderie results in pure laughter.

"Now that everyone is at home and worried about everything going on, I'm more likely to make videos addressing the general concerns through the voice of Vartoush Tota," said Basmadjian, who has developed the beloved character for over 6 years. "She was influenced by many characters I met throughout my life and she vibes with Clodette because of how different they are from one another."

Basmadjian finds herself spending more time in front of the camera these days, which took some time for her to modify her mindset.

"It does feel weird not to be on stage," said Basmadjian, whose material and booking information can be found on www.marybasmadjian-comedy.com and @marybasmadjian on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. "I miss the audience, the energy and the build up."

She notes that some comics have started doing shows on the virtual platform Zoom but she's not sure if she'll dive into that territory yet as "the stand-up world is still split up" on the idea.

What she has been focusing her efforts on are personalized video messages for fans who are celebrating birthdays or anniversaries while in quarantine. Dressing up in character as Vartoush Tota or Piso, a superficial and vapid



Mary Basmadjian

Armenian young woman, Basmadjian uplifts those on their special days.

"I've been getting great feedback from the public and it's helping people who are stuck at home on what are supposed to be happy and celebratory occasions," said Basmadjian. "It makes me feel good that I can make people laugh during such a difficult time."



COMMUNITY NEWS

Washington State's Holy Resurrection Armenian Apostolic Church Desecrated

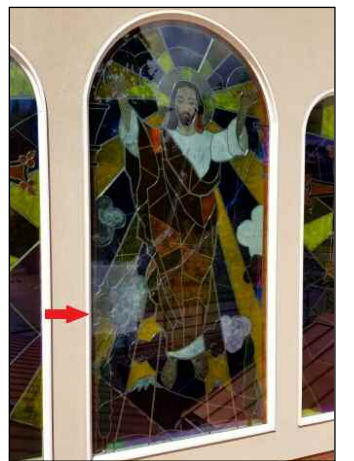
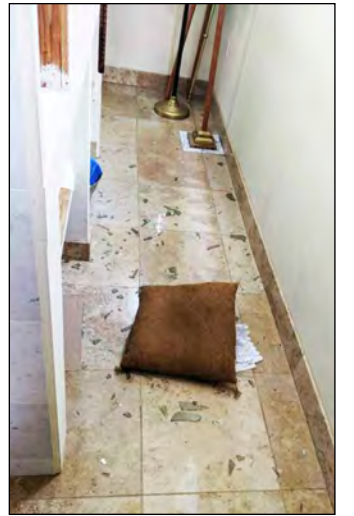
REDMOND, Wash. — The Armenian community in Washington State is devastated by an incident that took place on the campus of Holy Resurrection Armenian Apostolic Church late last week. During this already difficult time, when much of the world is in quarantine, and Christians around the world celebrated Easter in isolation, the community was shocked to find the church desecrated.

Specifically, on Sunday morning, April 19, when the pastor walked into the church, he discovered the glass window behind the altar shattered by a brick, which lay on the altar, surrounded by glass shards. After investigating the perimeter of the church, he also found that a stained-glass window portraying Jesus Christ was also broken, with two large rocks lying next to the window. To make matters worse, it appears that the brick used to break the altar window was taken from a memorial wall on the church's grounds dedicated to the victims of the Armenian Genocide of 1915, which is commemorated by Armenians around the world on April 24, later the same week. A police report was filed after Sunday online mass. The Redmond Police Department is investigating this hate incident. There should be no place for such hate incidents or hate crimes in our community, and especially to any house of worship.

The Armenian community consists of over three thousand families in the greater Seattle area, many of whom live in Redmond. Holy Resurrection Armenian Apostolic Church is the only Armenian church in Washington State, and acts as the epicenter of the community. The church is flanked by a community center, used for social gatherings, as well as for Armenian language and Sunday school classes offered to the youth. This hate incident is not only difficult for the church to sustain from a financial perspective, but also spiritually challenging for our community.

(The above information was released by Fr. Vazgen Boyajyan, pastor, and the parish council of Holy Resurrection Armenian Apostolic Church, Redmond.)

When asked by the *Mirror-Spectator* whether there might be any groups or individuals who are being considered suspects, on April 24 Nairy Boyajyan responded on behalf of the church as follows: "In regards to the vandalism, we don't know who would do such a thing because we haven't received any threats nor had issues with any groups of people. We don't know who did this, but are working with police to find whoever is responsible. As a community, we get along with everyone and never had any issues, disputes nor disagreements with anyone in or outside of the community."



Djihanian Promotes Business Interests During COVID19 Crisis Western USA

GLENDALE, from page 4

are included. It spends the most money on political lobbying of all groups in the United States, greatly exceeding the second-place National Association of Realtors (<https://www.opensecrets.org/federal-lobbying/top-spenders?cycle=2019>).

With the advent of the new coronavirus, Djihanian said, "We are working extremely hard to help small businesses weather the storm as we get through the next few months." There are around 28 million small businesses in the US which create 2/3 of all jobs, he said. To help these firms, the US Chamber was working on the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES), the 2.2 trillion-dollar stimulus bill which passed in Congress a few weeks ago to help businesses of every size and most industries. There are two programs connected to this act which Djihanian and the US Chamber have been advocating for in particular.

The first one is called the Paycheck Protection Program. Djihanian said that he participates in Zoom calls with chambers of commerce around the country many times a day, including with those in Southern California, and the participants all repeat that their businesses are in dire straits right now. The program ran out of money a week ago, before some businesses even had time to submit their applications, so Djihanian and his colleagues in the US Chamber are trying to get Congressional members to replenish those funds. It is a 350-billion-dollar loan program but if used properly for payroll and certain other business expenses, it will be forgiven for the borrowers and thus turn into a grant.

The second program is the preexisting Small Business Administration's Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program (EIDL), which CARES expanded. It is supposed to offer loans up to 2 million dollars at favorable rates as well as ten-

thousand-dollar emergency grants. This loan program also has run into a lot of hiccups, Djihanian said, and ran out of money like the Paycheck Protection Program, so the US Chamber is advocating additional funding for it also. For more information, see https://www.uschamber.com/sites/default/files/uscc_covid19_sb-economic-injury-disaster-loans.pdf.

The House and Senate passed a new \$484 billion dollar coronavirus relief package which was signed by President Donald Trump on April 24. It included \$310 billion of new funding for the Paycheck Protection Program and \$10 billion for EIDL.

The US Chamber of Commerce Foundation itself has a program to help small-scale employers in economically vulnerable communities during the COVID-19 crisis with \$5,000 grants through the help of its corporate and philanthropic partners (<https://www.savesmallbusiness.com/>). Unfortunately, this program too has run out of funding due to the great demand.

Armenian Businesses

Djihanian said that while he did not have specific statistics on the Armenian business community in Southern California, he knew that Armenians are clearly affected by the coronavirus shutdown. He said that in general, immigrants play an oversized role in commerce, with nearly two-thirds of all "main street" businesses in the Los Angeles metropolitan area owned by immigrant entrepreneurs, according to a January 2015 survey (<https://www.ascoa.org/sites/default/files/ImmigrantBusinessReport.pdf>).

More specifically, he said, "Armenians traditionally are risktakers and entrepreneurship seems like a natural place for many of us to go. Sometimes immigrants when they first arrive do not have transferrable skills or degrees. They don't have a network to be able to find a job, so they create their own businesses and end up

employing a lot more people... In our area, from Sarkis Pastry to Service Titan, Glendale's Armenian-owned businesses supercharge job creation and economic growth."

Djihanian called for Armenian businessmen and women to become more politically active. He said, "I would love to encourage Armenian-American small business owners to join their local chamber of commerce, join the chamber's government affairs committee, advocate to Congress, attend town hall meetings, volunteer and donate to political campaigns, and most importantly, develop relationships with their elected officials because that is the greatest form of advocacy that they can have. They can talk directly to them about the issues that matter most to their community."

The US Chamber of Commerce is trying to publicize the various ways the US government is helping businesses through the media and webinars with local chambers of commerce. Djihanian said, "I myself have done additional outreach to the Armenian community, working with the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), social media, and local chambers of commerce in the Glendale area."

Djihanian's Background

Djihanian is well prepared through his prior career in politics for both his broader tasks for the US Chamber of Commerce as well as for working with the local Armenian business community. He has worked closely with the Armenian Assembly of America and ANCA on issues like Armenian Genocide recognition in the past.

When he was in Glendale working for local congressman Jim Rogan, back in August 2000, Djihanian said he helped organize the meeting at the former's behest of Speaker Dennis Hastert and Glendale Armenian community leaders. Hastert had pledged at that meeting to bring the Armenian Genocide resolution to the House floor for a vote, and Rogan had strongly

supported that.

Unfortunately, at the last minute, Speaker Hastert withdrew the resolution. Djihanian said, "Even though we were extremely disappointed that the resolution did not end up coming to the House floor for a vote, the effort by Congressman Rogan helped raise further awareness about the Armenian Genocide and brought us one step closer to gaining Congressional approval of the Armenian Genocide resolution."

Djihanian was born in Lebanon but came to the US when he was around 2. He grew up in Glendale, he said, and became involved in a mock trial afterschool program when he was at Toll Middle School. The culmination was to present a case in front of a real-life judge. He lost the case, but the judge was running for state legislature and Djihanian, 13-years-old, volunteered for his campaign.

This early start in politics continued when the former judge, Jim Rogan, ran for Congress and won. In high school, Djihanian was appointed by Newt Gingrich as a Congressional page (<https://www.latimes.com/socal/glendale-news-press/news/tn-gnp-xpm-1999-12-30-export51564-story.html>), and after graduation from UCLA worked for a number of members of Congress in Washington. During election years, he managed political campaigns in different parts of the country, most recently as the communications director for Tommy Thompson's Senate campaign.

Djihanian said that he noticed that many members of Congress did not know how to even look at a balance sheet, and that led him to want to go to business school to learn more about economics and finance. He went back to UCLA, and after graduating from the Anderson School of Management there, found a position at the US Chamber of Commerce. Djihanian said with his current position, "I get to work at the intersection of politics and business."



COMMUNITY NEWS

Karl Lagasse: ‘Our Ancestry Plays a Role Even if We Are Unaware’

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/PARIS – French painter, sculptor and photographer of Armenian descent Karl Lagasse began his artistic journey with his collages when he was 7 years old. French sculptor



Karl Lagasse

César Baldaccini inspired Karl to continue developing his work. In 2003 Lagasse prepared his first exposition in Paris. His first solo show, presenting his “Building” sculptures, was in 2006 in Brussels. Two years later, at the Theatre Espace Pierre Cardin in Paris, Lagasse showed paintings and sculptures with added elements of

videography and photography.

In Deauville in 2012, Lagasse offered the city his bronze “Cryptogram One” with a message of peace and love, which has been installed at the entrance of the city. In 2012, he created a

monumental sculpture for the 65th Festival of Cannes in cooperation with Corbis. Since 2017, Lagasse has been the creator of the trophy for the American Film Festival in Deauville. Winners of the American Film Festival trophy include Johnny Depp, Sarah Jessica Parker, Morgan Freeman, Elle Fanning, Kate Beckinsale, Darren Aronofsky, Jason Clarke, Jeff Goldblum, Laura Dern, Michelle Rodriguez, Pierce Brosnan, Robert Pattinson, Sophie Turner and Woody Harrelson.

In 2009, Artprice named Karl Lagasse as one of the top 10 sculptors under 30 in the world. In 2012 the New York publishers Faramah selected Lagasse for their book, For Which It Stands: Americana in Contemporary Art, in which he is represented as one of the 50 best contemporary artists who found inspiration through traditional American icons.

During the 2016 Art Paris Art Fair, the President of the France personally congratulated Lagasse for the success of his 2-meter bronze “One Dollar” sculpture displayed at the Grand Palais.

Dear Karl, in 2009 you came into prominence with your “One Dollar” sculptures. Let me start our interview with a joke – how many dollars bring your “One Dollars?”

I am humbled to be able to make a living with just a \$1. I started out with the idea because I was intrigued with the notion of making art

from just a dollar. But really, what captured my attention was the phrase on the back of the bill, “In God We Trust.” I was awestruck that such an admirable expression, so far from what I supposed commercial trade to be, would be seen on a bill. This led to me exploring more of what it would mean to have the dollar as an art piece.

You successfully cooperated with film festivals – Cannes and Deauville. What can a sculptor offer to contemporary film world?

I know my skill as a sculptor has been heightened with exposure to the film world. All art forms are tightly woven together whether it is film, music, painting, sculpture, music, poetry, dance, architecture. It is hard for one to thrive without the assistance of another art form. A sculptor has the ability to quite literally set the scene, be it for film or other occasions. I have collaborated with Maserati on several occasions, one of which, I created an installation called “A Piece of Heaven on Earth.”

Your works bear a message of peace, which is urgent for our troubled times. Do you believe in having a special mission and the influence of art on the world?

Absolutely! We, all of us, possess gifts. My gift is in artistry. The more I have grown as a person and artist the more I’ve seen the importance of sending out into the world positive messages. I choose to share my gifts with the world in a positive way, if only to shed a little

light in the darkness. We can have a great impact for the good if we all just give a little of our gifts.

Please tell us about your parents.

I have been influenced by many great artists, my parents included. I choose the things I admire in their characters and I implement them not only in my professional life but personal as well. Thanks to my parents, I was able to see that art can be more than just pleasure, but also a profession. I might not have chosen to be an artist if I hadn’t been already exposed to the notion.

Although you deal with painting, collages and photography, you consider yourself more sculptor. Maybe working with stones comes from your Armenian genes?

It does feel as if I was always meant to do what I am doing in sculpting. Our ancestry plays a role even if we are unaware. The path I’m on in life was laid out for me long before I came into being. The journey that led me to where I am today, started in Armenia with my ancestors. There might have been even another sculptor in the mix. I feel the importance of the steps taken by those that came before me, as do I feel the importance of the steps I take for the generations to come.

Have you any idea where your Armenian ancestors came from and is anything Armenian in your personality and art?

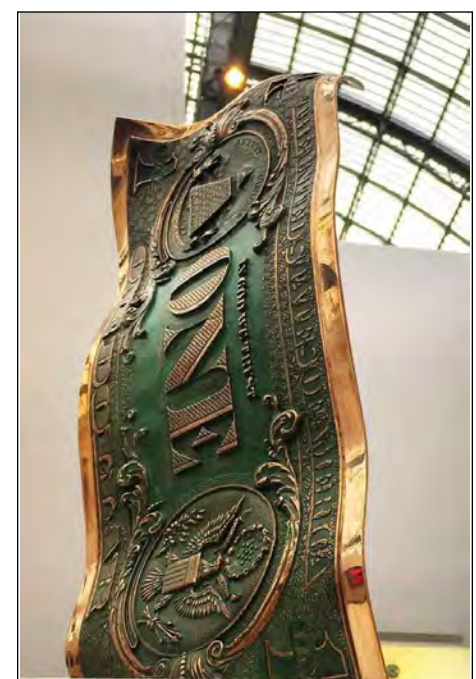
One of my kids has a birthmark thanks to his Armenian ancestry. It is endearing. I am sure there are a lot of Armenian traits that I possess that I am not even aware. I have been to Armenia in search of answers to many questions, but I still have much to learn.

The art field is quite active and interesting in Armenia and the Diaspora. Do you have any Armenian inspirations?

I must say that music is very inspiring and important in helping me create. This is how I met my wife, who is a singer. I enjoy the Armenian singer Liz Sarian among many others. I would love to visit more and discover more of the art scene.

“One Dollar” is a kind of symbol of American dream. What about creating “Armenian Dram” – as a symbol of Armenian statehood and desire for increasing of Armenia’s economy?

The symbolism within the “One Dollar” is universal that is another reason why I chose it. I believe it represents us all. Strength, freedom, and the self-made man are just some of the powerful messages I wish to communicate to the



The “One Dollar” sculpture

world as a whole. Honestly, I would love to be the artistic mind behind the creation of a real currency. If I could do this for Armenia, that would be an honor.

In 2014 you traveled to Armenia. Do you think about returning with a special project?

I have many projects in the near future and some of them will impact the Armenian people directly. I immediately fell in love with the country and its people. I felt very alive and inspired during my last visit. I will bring my family the next time I come and look forward to my return very soon.

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Armenia and Russia on a Collision Course

By Edmond Y. Azadian

As Armenia was engulfed in internal squabbles, a Russian bomb was lobbed into the political forum which mushroomed to cover the entire horizon.

Since the middle of March, the entire state apparatus, with its ministers and parliament members, was mobilized to criticize His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, for a single sentence in which he asked for house arrest for former President Robert Kocharyan, instead of prison, in light of the danger of COVID-19.

The controversy had hardly died down when the same establishment, aided and abetted by a friendly press, had found another piece of trivia to turn into a huge political controversy: a studio technician had left a mike live 15 minutes before the prime minister's planned nationwide address last week. Recriminations were made and resignations demanded.

Unfortunately, that kind of mobilization of forces against minor issues reveals nervousness by the administration. One begins to wonder if the new government believes itself to be so weak that it is shaken by such trivial problems.

Those issues should fade into the background as Sergey Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, detonated a much larger bomb for Armenians to worry about. The attack came as a surprise but

Putin visited Armenia to attend an alliance conference, he took time in his tight schedule to visit Bella Kocharyan, the former president's wife. Authorities in Armenia were not oblivious to the gesture but they kept Kocharyan in his jail cell, refusing to consider his presumption of innocence before the trial and its subsequent verdict.

This was either an arrogant political affront to Russia's president or it was commissioned by outside quarters to intimidate Russia's president.

This unfolding case, accompanied by an anti-Russian chorus comprising government ministers, members of parliament and a plethora of news outlets friendly to the government, did not leave observers in Moscow indifferent.

On the Armenian front, the anti-Russian campaign conducted by such prominent commentators such as Levon Shirinyan, Hakob Patalyan, movie director and president of the European Party Tigran Khzmalyan and a number of government officials writing under assumed names.

Mr. Lavrov's other bomb was more frightful and damaging. He stated that the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan had been negotiating on a document which calls for a) a phased solution to the Karabakh conflict, b) that the first step has to be the partial evacuation of Armenian forces from territories around Karabakh and c) no changes could be made to the format of negotiations proposed by one party.

This last item refers to Armenia's plea to involve representa-



in fact, had been in the making for a long time.

Lavrov's public statement puts Armenian-Russian relations into a new perspective instantaneously.

On April 21, Lavrov lobbed two consecutive salvos at Yerevan. The first was a response to Yerevan on Moscow's decision to raise gas prices, and the second was a blunt statement on the solution to the Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh) impasse, which turns on its head all the negotiations, expectations and methods that the Armenian side has entertained and relied on.

Years ago Armenia signed a lopsided deal with Russia to buy gas. Moscow determines the price of gas delivered to Armenia and the latter has to accept it, since it has no alternative. What is unusual is that demand is at its lowest point now. Had it been a moment where there is a high demand on energy, Moscow could at least have a fig leaf to justify its decision. However, there is a glut of gas and oil and prices are plummeting globally. Therefore, the price increase indicates a political punitive message.

This is not the first time that Moscow has used its energy resources for a political end. We have witnessed this in Ukraine and elsewhere in Europe.

This time around, Russia did not need that fig leaf, as Mr. Lavrov's response was accompanied by a reprimand that when Russia delivered gas to Armenia and Belarus below market price, considering them strategic allies, there was no complaint. And then, he went on to lambaste Armenia's launching a criminal law suit against Gazprom and the South Caucasus Railway, both Russian companies that operate in Armenia.

The signals indicating tensions had been given much earlier when President Vladimir Putin sent birthday messages to Kocharyan when the latter was behind bars. And when Mr.

tives of Karabakh as a third party at the negotiation table.

A comment is appropriate here: Russia has acted as a ballast as the co-chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, not necessarily to favor Armenia, but to have control of the situation. Now that Moscow has let loose, the other two chairs, US and France, will be on the same side, tilting towards Azerbaijan.

When a NATO member (Turkey), and a virtual NATO member (Israel), have set up shop on Azerbaijan's territory, it is not difficult to imagine that France and the US will side with Azerbaijan. And now that Russia has decided to teach a lesson to Armenia, the wishes of the two other chairs has been fulfilled.

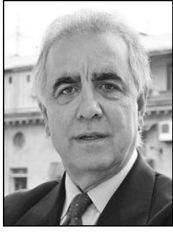
The Russian foreign minister was referring to the Madrid Principles which call for stage-by-stage solutions. Armenians have been adamantly opposed to those principles, because they don't address the status issue at the outset.

Reacting to Lavrov's statement, one Karabakh leader, Ashod Ghoulyan, said that the stage-by-stage solution can be considered, depending which stage comes first. Under Mr. Lavrov's proposal, ceding territory without a counter measure will only leave the Armenian positions vulnerable. As territorial concessions will leave the Armenian position weakened, we cannot rule out Azerbaijani aggression to use that weakness. As such, no sooner had Mr. Lavrov made his statement than an Azerbaijani drone was shot down over Karabakh territory.

On the other hand, a mysterious chain of events was unleashed to attack Azeri Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov, paving the way for Hikmet Hajiyev, the foreign affairs advisor to President Ilham Aliyev. Mr. Hajiyev's first continued on next page



COMMENTARY



My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

Trump Does not Have the Guts to Call it 'Armenian Genocide'

On April 24, 2020, President Donald Trump issued another one of his denialist statements on the Armenian Genocide, calling it "Armenian Remembrance Day." This is the fourth year in a row that as president he has issued the same evasive statement which uses every euphemism for genocide except the one word that truly characterizes the mass crime that Ottoman Turkey committed against Armenians 1915-1923. Hopefully, with the coming presidential elections on Nov. 3, 2020, this will be his last year as President and his last such statement!

Someone close to President Trump has to tell him that his annual meaningless statements on April 24 are not winning him any points with the Armenian-American community. On the contrary, he is offending them by issuing the same denialist statement year after year. He should be told that if he cannot tell the truth, he should not say anything at all. He is in fact offending the Armenian-American community. President Ronald Reagan, a much more popular president than Trump, issued a Presidential Proclamation on April 22, 1981, acknowledging the Armenian Genocide. So, we do not need President Trump's euphemistic words on the Armenian Genocide!

Instead of Genocide, here are the words that President Trump used in this year's April 24 statement: "Armenian Remembrance Day," "the lives lost during the Meds Yeghern," "one of the worst atrocities of the 20th century," "1 and a half million Armenians were deported, massacred, or marched to their deaths in the final years of the Ottoman Empire," "those who suffered and lost their lives," "tragedy," "painful history," and "those who suffered and perished." Most troubling was President Trump's use of the Armenian term "Meds Yeghern," which means "Great Crime," but is meaningless for most Americans. Yet, there are politically naive Armenians who are fooled by this term, thinking that President Trump is acknowledging the Armenian Genocide. If that was the case, he would have used the term Armenian

Genocide. The only reason he used Meds Yeghern is to avoid saying Armenian Genocide. Meds Yeghern was used by Armenians before Raphael Lemkin coined the term Armenian Genocide in the 1940's. Meds Yeghern is merely a description of what happened to Armenians in 1915, while genocide is a term of international law that has legal consequences. The two are not the same at all.

President Trump continued his four-year long evasive position on the Armenian Genocide despite the fact that last fall both the House and Senate overwhelmingly adopted a resolution acknowledging the Armenian Genocide against the wishes of the White House. Regrettably, Turkophile Trump is not about to go against the wishes of Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Trump's beloved friend and anti-American dictator.

Justifiably, both Armenian-American organizations in Washington, D.C., criticized President Trump for his unwelcome April 24 statement. The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), in a statement titled, "President Trump Tightens Turkey's Grip over White House Policy on the Armenian Genocide," sharply condemned the President by calling him, "the last remaining American enforcer of Ankara's gag-rule against honest U.S. remembrance of this crime." ANCA's Executive Director Aram Hamparian stated: "Armenian Genocide denial is a policy manufactured in Ankara, exported to America, and enforced in Washington by President Trump. Once again, President Trump copied and pasted the transparently euphemistic, patently offensive April 24th evasions issued by Barack Obama and his other predecessors – essentially isolating his Administration as the last major American co-conspirator in Turkey's obstruction of justice for the Armenian Genocide.... Having promised an America First presidency, President Trump has pursued a Turkey First policy on the Armenian Genocide."

The Armenian Assembly of America also criticized President Trump in a press release: "President Donald Trump's April 24th statement on the 105th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide misses the mark, fosters denial, and does not reflect America's proud record of genocide affirmation.... The Administration's departure from the norms of human rights, established over a century ago, diminishes the standing of the U.S. government in the world community. It remains for the Administration to unequivocally affirm the Armenian Genocide."

On the other hand, Democratic Presidential candidate Joe Biden issued a statement on April 24, titled: "Statement by Vice President Joe Biden on Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day." Candidate Biden said all the right things in his statement, except for two key points:

1) He also used the Armenian term Meds Yeghern, following in the footsteps of President Barack Obama. Fortunately, he also used the term Armenian Genocide which President Trump did not do.

2) Amazingly, never once in his lengthy statement Mr. Biden mentions the name of the country that perpetrated the Genocide. He mentions neither the Ottoman Empire nor Turkey. This is a very serious issue that goes far beyond mere negligence. It must be an intentional avoidance for political purposes which raises the concern that if Biden is this sensitive about Turkey now as a candidate, how sensitive would he be if elected President?

Of course, many Armenian-Americans will not forget that as President Obama's Vice President, Biden did not try to convince the President to keep his multiple promises on the Armenian Genocide, unless he did it quietly behind closed doors. In his defense, Vice Presidents do not decide policy; Presidents do. I agree with all those who do not trust promises made during presidential campaigns which are forgotten soon after assuming the presidency, since the Armenian-American community was deceived many times during previous presidential campaigns by candidates from both parties. At least in the case of President Trump he did not make any campaign promises on the Armenian Genocide, but he did not recognize it either.

In conclusion, President Trump and his predecessors since President Reagan have no valid reason to be concerned about Turkey's negative reaction to US recognition of the Armenian Genocide. As we saw last fall, after the House and Senate adopted resolutions on the Armenian Genocide, there was hardly any reaction from the Turkish government, except for a brief and mild expression of its unhappiness which was soon forgotten. Therefore, the obsessive fear of a harsh reaction from Turkey is pure fantasy and not a valid concern!

Those who think I am criticizing President Trump for partisan political reasons, I would like to remind everyone that I have written many articles harshly critical of President Bill Clinton and President Barack Obama, both Democrats.

Update on April 24 Virtual March

As a follow-up to my last week's note urging everyone to join the April24.HyeID.org's virtual march, I am pleased to report that over 340,000 Armenians and others from around the world clicked on the link demanding justice for Turkey's Genocide of 1.5 million Armenians in 1915. This initiative was organized by the HyeID non-profit organization that will announce shortly its initiative of setting up a network that will enable Armenians worldwide to elect local Armenian representatives from throughout the Diaspora who will form the Diaspora Armenian Parliament.

Armenia and Russia on a Collision Course

from previous page

reaction to those developments was to issue his own ultimatum that given Armenia's intransigence; there remains no alternative but a military one. It is interesting that while these co-chairs were negotiating on the principle that there can be no military solution to the conflict, there was complete silence to the Azeri statement.

Throughout all the negotiations, no matter what format was proposed by the co-chairs, Azerbaijan persistently held to one single position: To allow a special level of autonomy for Artsakh under Baku's rule. President Aliyev went even further, claiming Armenia itself as "historic Azerbaijani territory," again with no reaction from the co-chairs.

Azerbaijan has not agreed to any other solution, neither publicly nor during the negotiations. Therefore, weakening the Armenian position will strengthen Baku's hand to become even more belligerent.

Here below is Mr. Lavrov's statement. Referring to documents on the negotiation table, Lavrov said, "Those documents imply progress in the settlement on the basis of a phased approach. I believe the first stage is the solution of the most pressing problems, the liberation of a number of areas around Nagorno Karabakh and unblocking of transport, economy and other communications."

Once the Armenian forces move out of those territories, Azerbaijan's population will return, no one knows if armed or unarmed. And yet, the status issue will be up in the air with the potential danger of co-chairing countries colluding with Baku to forcing the Armenian side to be left to the tender mercies of Azeri authorities.

Armenia's Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan responded with a statement, which leaves many critical issues unanswered.

Mr. Mnatsakanyan stated: "The top priority for the Armenian side is security. As for the territory that Mr. Lavrov mentioned, it is among other things, a security belt and a defensive line. In no way could Armenians even imagine endangering the security of the people of Nagorno Karabakh."

Noticeably absent in its statement is the issue of the

future status of Karabakh.

As we can see, Moscow has landed a two-pronged attack on Armenia to weaken the country's economy and to place a big question mark on the strategic alliance of the two countries. Referring to the alliance, Mr. Lavrov stated, "Yerevan too should demonstrate its commitment to the Russian-Armenian alliance by dropping 'inappropriate' criminal proceedings against major Russian companies."

But the mood in Armenia is oblivious to the gravity of the situation. Indeed, one of the most popular commentators in Armenia, Levon Shirinyan, is asking the Armenian government to "nationalize" the Russian companies.

The other threat is more serious as it refers to Karabakh.

The Armenian side is putting too much emphasis on the Russian military base in Gyumri. It is no secret that Russia's military presence in Armenia goes far beyond guaranteeing Armenia's security, by projecting the Russian forces throughout the Middle East. But observing Russia's behavior or the military presence issue, we can safely assume that Russia can survive without that base. With the current technology of warfare, Russia can find alternatives; it launched air raids over Syria from Iranian territory and hit missile targets in Syria from its naval forces in the Caspian Sea. Also, when Georgia asked for the removal of the Russian base in Javakhk, Moscow complied even before the expiration of the treaty. The same thing happened when Azerbaijan asked for the removal of a listening post from its territory.

In light of this record, the comment of a government official hiding behind the assumed name of Aram Amadouni sounds hollow as he states, "If Russia loses its base in Armenia, it will lose the Caucasus."

The situation should not have gotten to this point. We have a confrontation on our hands. Armenia and Russia are on a collision course. Somebody in this young and proud government has to be able to stop this dangerous course in its tracks and chart a wiser one.

Reflections on the 105th Anniversary Of the Genocide

By Serena Hajjar

Today, Armenians worldwide commemorate the 105th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, the first genocide of the 20th century. As we honor the memory of the 1.5 million Armenians annihilated at the hands of the Ottoman Empire, I was inspired to reflect on what it means to be an Armenian in the Diaspora.

Being Armenian is something that permeates every aspect of my being. "Armenian-ness" exists not simply in the foods I eat. It is embedded in the thoughts I think, the words I see, the music I hear, and the world I touch. There is no sound sweeter than that of my mother tongue, no melody that pulls at my heart strings like one by Arno Babajanian.

"Armenian-ness" is not just a costume I can selectively don and shed at my convenience. It is a sacred element of my past and an inescapable part of my future.

Indeed, being Armenian today is nothing less than a privilege, a testament to my ancestors' survival. With this tremendous privilege comes a remarkable amount of responsibility - a duty to honor our brave forefathers and vibrant culture by living my heritage every day: speaking the language, remembering the history, and, eventually, baptizing my future children in "Armenian-ness," as my parents lovingly did for me.

It is an undeniable fact that the Genocide remains a deep and painful trauma in our history, a wound which will fester as long as its existence continues to be denied and erased by nations around the world. Nevertheless, being Armenian does not begin - and most certainly does not end - with the Genocide. To think otherwise would be an insult to our prolific culture and tenacious survivors.

We have repeatedly proven throughout our ancient history that for every attempt by an outside force to extinguish our fire, our spirit burns a bit brighter. Imagine how splendidly it burns today, 105 years later, as we all unite to proudly proclaim our "Armenian-ness."

(Serena Hajjar is graduating from the University of Pennsylvania in May. She was a former intern at the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*.)



Searching For Silver Linings

GYUMRI, Armenia - When my colleague and I called Katrin for a video-chat check-in, the 10-year-old floored us.

"This quarantine has helped me improve my relationship with my little brother," she told us matter-of-factly.

By Sarah Stites

Katrin is one of the 120 children who attend Emili Aregak, the social therapeutic center for kids with disabilities in Gyumri, Armenia, where I work. She loves to speak Russian, is usually sporting two braids, and has cerebral palsy.

Many of our kids who use wheelchairs rarely leave the house, due to the inaccessible stairs, sidewalks and transportation in our community. But Katrin's mom has always prioritized integration. She pushes hard to make sure Katrin enjoys a life similar to those of others her age.

While this time at home has been difficult for Katrin, she has been an example to me as she searches for the bright side and thinks of others less fortunate than she.

The car Katrin's dad had been using for his taxi service broke down some time ago and he didn't have the funds needed to fix it. He rented another, and then Coronavirus struck and the taxi industry took a hit. Until our center brought food and hygiene items, the family didn't know how it would weather the storm on the small disability and welfare checks they receive.

Fast forward to me. If things got really bad, I could leave

Gyumri and return to my hometown near Washington, D.C. As it is, 95 percent of my job duties have been moved online, so the transition to remote work has been only a bother, not a crisis. I still earn my paycheck, and with no dependents, I live comfortably on the few hundred dollars/month I make here. That is more than can be said for the majority of residents.

In 1988, Gyumri and its surrounding region was decimated by an earthquake that razed more than twenty factories and killed 25,000 people. The city has never recovered. When I ride the marshrutka (minibus) to work each day, I pass several rubble strewn buildings and domiks, "temporary" homes made of shipping containers in which some families are still living more than 30 years after the quake. Since 1988, the economy has profoundly suffered. Before the pandemic, the unemployment rate hovered over 18 percent; now, it's climbing higher, and affecting families like Katrin's and Grigor's*.

Ten-year-old Grigor has elfishly mischievous eyes, a sunny smile and Down Syndrome. He too attends our center for socialization activities and lunch, and like Katrin's, his family operates on a tight budget. For Grigor's father, cleaning a graveyard plot was the last in a string of seasonal, low-pay jobs. His earnings? \$6. Usually, the family buys food on credit and pays their local market upon receiving some government support at the end of the month. But now that many families are in tight straits, the store manager has been forced to turn them away. Grigor's family is well acquainted with living on bread alone. If our center hadn't come through to help them, they'd be doing so now.

When I read about the \$1,200 I'd be receiving from the U.S. government, it seemed so unjust in the light of these children's stories. But then, like Katrin, I found the silver lining. I have been given a unique opportunity to bless others, so I'll donate half of that money to Emili Aregak, a nonprofit I trust to help the families I know and love. I'll give the

other half to Aregak Bakery & Café, Armenia's first café to employ people with disabilities. Right now, they're running a campaign called "Our Daily Bread" to bake and send free loaves to the most vulnerable among us. They need all the help they can get.

Of course, many of you who are reading this are also in desperate straits. I'm glad that there is a check coming your way. I also know that many of you, like me, are blessed to be working from home. If you are financially able, would you consid-



Grigor participating in music therapy at Emili Aregak

er giving all or a portion of your \$1200 to a worthy nonprofit which will allocate it to the most vulnerable - kids like Katrin and Grigor?

Let us pray for a swift end to this global catastrophe. In the meantime, may you simultaneously search for the silver linings and remember those suffering more intensely than you.

(A native of the Washington, D.C. metro area, Sarah Stites is an alumna of Birthright Armenia. She currently works as the communications and fundraising officer at Emili Aregak, a project of Armenian Caritas in Gyumri.)

Benefactor, Entrepreneur Aso Tavitian Dies

TAVITIAN, from page 1
his English teacher of minimal means made his education possible.

This act of generosity and kindness is one that he never forgot. Throughout his life's journey, Tavitian was a model of integrity and decency. He approached every part of life with intellectual rigor but also with enthusiasm and a generosity of spirit. He was passionate about the arts and his heritage. He was loved and respected by all who knew him.

Tavitian attended Columbia University and graduated in 1965 with a Master of Science degree in nuclear engineering and in 1969, he co-founded Syncsort Inc. and was its CEO from 1975 until April of 2008 and continued to be involved with Syncsort at the Board level until 2015.

In 1995, he established and funded the

Tavitian Foundation where his generosity and passions flourished. Always keeping his heritage close to his heart, he strived to strengthen the governance of the Republic of Armenia as well as providing educational opportunities for individuals of Armenian ethnicity. Tavitian supported research on issues of significance for a globalized world and his love of the arts.

His Foundation's work on strengthening the governance of the Republic of Armenia includes the organization of a series of six-month special training programs for mid-level employees in various Armenian ministries and governmental institutions. These programs have been designed in conjunction with the faculty of the Tufts University Fletcher School of Law and International Diplomacy and are taught at Fletcher. The pride in his work could not be more evident than when attending the student graduations. There have been close to 350 graduates of this program, Tavitian Scholars.

Tavitian's efforts were by the government of Armenia through the awarding of the Order of Honor on October 7, 2017 as well as the Prime Minister's Medal in 2012. Tavitian was awarded Honorary Doctorates from Tufts University and Yerevan State University.

(To see a feature about Tavitian by correspondent Florence Avakian, visit <https://mirrorspectator.com/2017/11/02/aso-tavitian-life-full-grace-giving/>)

Tavitian was a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, the Board of Trustees of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Board of Trustees of the Frick Museum in New York, NY and the Board of Trustees of the Clark Museum in Williamstown, Mass.

He is survived by his wife, Isabella Meisinger; his stepdaughter, Natalie Barnett (Forrest Barnett); granddaughter, Annika; cousins, Anahid Tatcheva, Anahid Hatzigeorgiou (Aristotle Hatzigeorgiou); his godsons, Aris Hatzigeorgiou and Athan Hatzigeorgiou; cousins Philippe Ohanessian (Sylvia Ohanessian) and Jean Philippe

Ohanessian. He was predeceased by his parents, Ohanes Garabed Tavitian and Armeno Mavi Tavitian and brother, Henry O. Tavitian and his first wife, Arlene Tavitian.

In a lengthy appreciation, former Primate of the Diocese of Armenian Church of the US (Eastern), a longtime friend, said, "In Aso Tavitian's person I saw a great example how an Armenian today needs to be. He was patriotic but also religious. In his mind Nation and Church are united. He understood very well the role of the Armenian Church in the past, today and in the future. He was always ready to help and support Armenia and the Armenian Church. His very close and warm relationship with His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians has been great demonstration that besides the personal feelings towards Vehapar he was also a strong supporter of the Armenian Church hand its center, he Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin.

I saw my beloved good friend Aso during last November, at his town house in New York when I was accompanying His Holiness Karekin Catholicos for a meeting there with some other Armenian leaders. The discussion was "the Armenian Church in the 21st century". This very timely and important project was led by Aso responding to Vehapar's request. He was leading this project very passionately, because he was aligned with Vehapar to see a much better organized Armenian Church in this 21st century.

"We used to speak with each other on the phone regularly. About six months ago he

called me giving the sad news that the doctors diagnosed him with cancer. He sounded optimistic and positive.

"Three days before his passing when I was speaking with Aso I reminded him the Easter celebration at St. Vartan Cathedral in 2011, when he became the godfather of the release of 12 doves on the plaza of the Cathedral following the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. The release of the doves on Easter Sunday has been the great symbol of Christ's Resurrection and through which the gift of eternal life given to us by God. Aso with a joyful voice responded to my reminder saying 'Srpszan, we will do it again.' I am sure Aso's deep conviction of the



Aso Tavitian with religious leaders

life's eternity and that spiritual connection and the loving, caring and sincere relationship remains always eternal."

A private service was held for immediate family members and a memorial service will be planned at a future date.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to The American Red Cross towards the Coronavirus Outbreak fund <https://www.redcross.org/>. To send remembrances to his family go to www.finnertyandstevens.com

IMF Plans \$280 Million in Emergency Funding For Armenia

IMF, from page 1

Ustyugova said that IMF officials have recommended the \$280 million disbursement to the fund's executive board, which should approve it in the second half of May. She said the sum includes a \$248 million "stand-by arrangement" which was allocated to Armenia in May 2019 and has not been used by the latter until now.

"Also, the [Armenian] authorities have requested additional financial help from the IMF to help pay for the economic support program and necessary healthcare expenditures in the current environment," said Ustyugova.

The Armenian government has promised a wide range of coronavirus-related compensatory measures, including cash payments to a large part of the population, financial assistance to businesses and loan subsidies for farmers.