Sabre Foundation

Fall Update 2007

Sabre Foundation Ships 35,000 New Books and CD-ROMs to Iraqi Universities in New Program

Since the establishment of Sabre's Book Donation Program in the late 1980s, the Foundation has gained a reputation for getting educational materials into "difficult" places. Examples include the Sabre programs in Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Liberia and Somalia. The most recently established initiative, however, poses exceptional challenges, as Sabre strives to enhance the libraries and classrooms of universities in Iraq (particularly in the Kurdistan Region). The situation facing these institutions is comprehensively outlined in "Iraqi Libraries and Archives in Peril: Survival in a Time of Invasion, Chaos, and Civil Conflict, A Report," researched and written by Jeff Spurr, Sabre Advisory Committee Member and Islamic and Middle East Specialist, Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University. (This report will soon be available online at the IraqCrisis website hosted by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.)

Sabre Foundation's work in Iraq began with a grant from the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), which tasked Sabre with providing collections of books in three subject areas — constitutional design, multi-ethnic/multi-religious countries, and truth and reconciliation processes — to Iraqi university libraries.

(Continued on Page 2)

What's Inside

Special Insert – New Programs in Latin America, Lebanon and Palestine; American Corners
Sabre People ........................................ 4

(Continued on Page 3)
Iraqi Universities (Continued)

Sabre initially envisioned the USIP-funded project as part of a larger plan, developed in collaboration with the Harvard Committee on Iraqi Libraries to distribute educational materials in Iraq over a three-year period. As conditions on the ground in Iraq deteriorated, however, implementation of the USIP-funded project was significantly slowed and funding for a larger program looked increasingly uncertain. A unexpected turn came in late 2005 when Michael Masterson, then Economics Advisor at the Mosul office of the U.S. Embassy, contacted Sabre to say the University of Mosul was interested in a shipment of books on a range of subjects. Following resolution of the considerable logistical and security issues, a container of more than 12,000 new books, mostly in the areas of science and medicine, was shipped via Turkey into Iraq in late 2006, with Sabre’s costs being covered by the University itself. The success of this shipment then laid the ground for an expanded Sabre program focusing on Kurdistan, and Sabre’s interlocutor with Iraqi universities, Dr. Ekhlass A. Jarjee, Entomologist and Manager of the Hawaii-Iraq Education Partnership at the University of Hawaii, facilitated a partnership with the Kurdistan Reconstruction Organization (KRO).

A second Sabre shipment to Iraq arrived in Erbil in August 2007, carrying books and CD-ROMs for three universities – Salahaddin, Sulaimani and Koya – and institutes run by the Foundation for Technical Education. A third container, destined for Dohuk University, arrived in September. This shipment also included two “mirror sites” (hard drives) provided by MIT’s OpenCourseWare for Mosul and Dohuk Universities. OpenCourseWare is a large-scale, Web-based electronic publishing site that provides free, searchable access to syllabi and other materials for MIT undergraduate courses, available to educators and learners world-wide. Also in 2007, the USIP-funded shipment of 21 library collection sets, comprising about 1,500 books, was successfully delivered to Baghdad, along with classification sets prepared by OCLC (Online Computer Library Center). The materials are being distributed to 20 university libraries throughout Iraq, as well as to the National Library and Archive, by the Baghdad-based Al-Sharaka Program.

(Continued on Page 3)
To date, Sabre has shipped more than 35,000 new books, selected by Iraqi universities, with a fair market value of over two million dollars. Thanks to the range of donating U.S. publishers and the breadth of Sabre’s inventory, these shipments have included not only basic core texts in the sciences, medicine, humanities and social sciences but also more specialized – and equally needed – materials. An August 2007 front page article in the Chronicle of Higher Education focusing on Kurdish universities in Iraq noted that,

“Faculty training and equipment are 30 years out of date, international donors are hesitant to become involved in a region so close to bloodshed.... Wrecked furniture and broken air-conditioning units line the paint-stripped hallways...of Salahaddin University. Its musty library, like those of most Kurdish universities, is filled with books from the 1970s and 80s....”

Thanks to Sabre’s determined willingness to support institutions like Salahaddin University, and financial support from the Kurdistan Regional Government, these universities now have access to up-to-date textbooks and reference materials.

Expanded Work in West Africa (Continued)

The Sabre shipment was carried out in conjunction with two other organizations. The local NGO partner for the project was the Gambia Women’s Finance Association (GAWFA). Established in 1987, GAWFA serves as a financial intermediary to enhance the entrepreneurship development of women as a means of eradicating their poverty. The project was funded by the Rhode Island-based Foundation for West Africa (FWA), which also partners with Sabre on shipments to Liberia and Sierra Leone. With FWA support in 2007, two shipments each will be consigned to CREDO (Church-Related Educational Development Organization) and to the Sierra Leone Book Trust, Sabre’s partners in the respective countries. CREDO also received a third shipment from Sabre this year in support of the University of Liberia, with funding provided by the Boston-based Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia.
Sabre People

Sabre Mourns Loss of Employee

Sabre Foundation mourns the loss of Touch Heng (right), who died in April this year. Touch worked alongside his brother, Song, at the Sabre warehouse in Lawrence, both having escaped the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia to begin a new life in this country. Touch's dedication, dependability and good humor will be sorely missed.

Sabre was also saddened by the death of Ellen J. Elliott in March. A member of the Advisory Committee since 1998, Ellen became interested in Sabre's educational assistance abroad because of her own experience with her husband as Peace Corps managers in Nigeria, Sierra Leone and India in the 1960s, and as volunteers in Poland in the 1990s. Her advice and introductions led to the creation of the Sierra Leone Book Trust, Sabre's valued NGO partner in one of its most effective programs in Africa.

New Staff and Advisory Committee Members

Linda Nico is Sabre's new Program Officer. A 2006 political science graduate of the University of Rhode Island, Linda is fluent in Portuguese and worked, while still a student, at the Embassy of Timor-Leste. Elisabeth Mitchell is Sabre's Special Projects Coordinator, who began work at the Foundation as a volunteer in 2005. A Ph.D. candidate in Classics at Harvard, Elisabeth has experience in research, teaching, library work and translation.

James Costa, a longtime friend of Sabre, formalized his support by joining the Advisory Committee. He has firsthand experience of Sabre's work overseas, having participated in the 2004 meeting of African partner organizations in Tanzania and traveled as part of the Sabre delegation to Vietnam in 2006. Randall Perkins is a freelance designer of fine art books. She was, formerly, owner and creative director of Hudson Hills Press. A graduate of Williams College, she currently serves on the board of Planned Parenthood of Northern New England.

Sabre Foundation is grateful to its enthusiastic volunteers:

Melanie Bowdish, Mansfield, MA; Chip Coalter, Lexington, VA; congregants of South Church, Andover; and students, staff and alumni of Phillips Academy Andover - all pictured left at Sabre's Lawrence, MA warehouse on Andover's Non Sibi Day, September 15th. Special thanks to Rochelle Jaffe for organizing the event.
Special Insert: New Programs

Collaboration With World Vision in Latin America

Sabre is collaborating with World Vision to send pre-school and primary level Spanish-language children's books to six countries in Latin America: Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Nicaragua. While these countries have a literacy rate of more than 75% (96% in the case of both Chile and Costa Rica), the cost of new books is prohibitive for many families and educational institutions. Fortunately Sabre has access to a wide range of appropriate materials, published in the U.S. for the domestic market. To date, four containers have been shipped (to Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Nicaragua), holding more than 71,000 books with a fair market value in excess of $750,000. World Vision has at least twenty-five years of experience providing aid to these six countries, beginning with Chile in 1961. Educational support often takes the form of constructing schools and libraries. With the help of Sabre, classrooms and library shelves are being stocked with new, high-quality Spanish children’s books.

Valeska Rodriguez reading a school book in San Carlos, Chile, one of the countries receiving books through the joint initiative between Sabre and World Vision.

Lebanon

In April, Sabre sent a shipment holding 6,644 books and CD-ROMs to ASSABIL, Sabre’s partner organization in Lebanon. The shipment arrived in Beirut and cleared customs in early June. Founded in 1997 as a non-governmental association, ASSABIL established the first municipal public library in Beirut. ASSABIL promotes public libraries throughout Lebanon, supports activities that encourage a love of reading, especially among young people, and sponsors cultural and social activities that encourage people to come to the library. The selected materials included books and CD-ROMs for children and teenagers, and fiction and reference materials for adults.

ASSABIL volunteers preparing boxes of books for distribution.

Palestine Shipments Readied

Sabre’s first shipment to Palestine should be on the ocean as this Update goes to press. Some 8,000 new books on science, technology and medicine (in multiple copies per title) are going to Sabre’s partner, Al-Quds University in Jerusalem, for distribution among its departments and to other universities, colleges and libraries in the West Bank. Books for a planned second shipment will cover business, the social sciences, and the humanities. As in all Sabre programs, the titles have been selected from current offering lists sent to its partners abroad. This pilot program for Palestine caps more than a year of careful planning (during a very challenging period) with Al-Quds and the United Palestinian Appeal (UPA) of Washington, D.C., who are jointly funding the project. Sabre salutes several individuals whose collaboration has made the project possible: (at Al-Quds) Dr. Sari Nuseibeh, President, Randa Kamal, Library Director, and Safa Dhaher, Library Acting Manager; (at UPA) George Salem, Board Member, and Samer A. Badawi, Executive Director.
Sabre Foundation and American Corners

American Corners are small, American-style libraries located within a local partner organization, usually a public or university library. Each American Corners program is a joint partnership project that promotes cooperation and understanding between the United States and host countries by providing information about the U.S. Access to American Corners and their collections is free and open to the public.

South Eastern and Central Europe

At the invitation of Bill Middleton, Information Resource Officer (IRO), U.S. Embassy Vienna, Sabre Executive Director Tania Vitvitsky and Dr. Helena Pavic of Sabre’s partner organization, Sabre-Zagreb, participated in a conference on American Corners held on May 15 – 18, 2007 in Zadar, Croatia. Their joint presentation explored the possibility of using Sabre’s Croatian program in Zagreb as a regional distribution center for materials for American Corners sites in the region. American Corners in Albania and Slovenia have already picked up materials for their sites, while Bosnia and Serbia are expected to follow shortly. Of particular interest were titles published by American university presses including Harvard, Princeton and Yale.

Selecting books at the Sabre-Zagreb distribution center.

Nigeria

A shipment of new books from Sabre Foundation – including much-requested books for children – is on the way to Nigeria to benefit 12 American Corners in that country. Planning for the shipment was initiated during an October 2006 visit to Nigeria by Sabre’s Tania Vitvitsky at the invitation of Henry Mendelsohn, IRO in Abuja. Vitvitsky visited a number of educational institutions in Abuja, Kaduna and Zaria; she also made presentations, in collaboration with Mendelsohn, at two American Corners on the topic, “Book Donation Programs: the Good, the Bad and the Ugly.” Mr. Mendelsohn obtained funding from the MacArthur Foundation for the shipment, which will be distributed by Sabre’s partner organization in Kano, the Northern Book Trust.

Ukraine

Sabre’s long-standing Ukrainian partner organization, Sabre-Svitlo Foundation in Lviv, renewed their cooperative agreement with the Kyiv Embassy. Under the 2006 – 2007 agreement, Sabre Svitlo distributed 11,258 books and other educational materials to 79 institutions, including 28 Windows on America (American Corners in Ukraine) and numerous other libraries and universities throughout the country.

Book Donation Philosophy

Sabre Foundation’s Book Donation Program is valued by overseas NGOs because of Sabre’s steadfast adherence to the policy that when it comes to the educational needs of developing and transitional countries, indigenous organizations know best. The keystone of Sabre’s book program is that it is demand-driven. Rather than trying to send as many books as possible, regardless of demonstrated need, Sabre gives its overseas partners the opportunity to select books and CD-ROMs from detailed inventory offering lists that are sent electronically. Only titles and quantities specifically requested by its partners are shipped by Sabre. Those titles are new, high-quality, up-to-date books selected by Sabre from the offerings made by donating publishers. In the selection process, Sabre’s rule of thumb is that something which is of no value in the U.S. is usually equally valueless overseas. The schools, universities, libraries and individuals that benefit from Sabre’s Book Donation Program are not regarded as the recipients of aid for whom “any book is better than no book at all.” They are regarded instead as clients with limited resources.