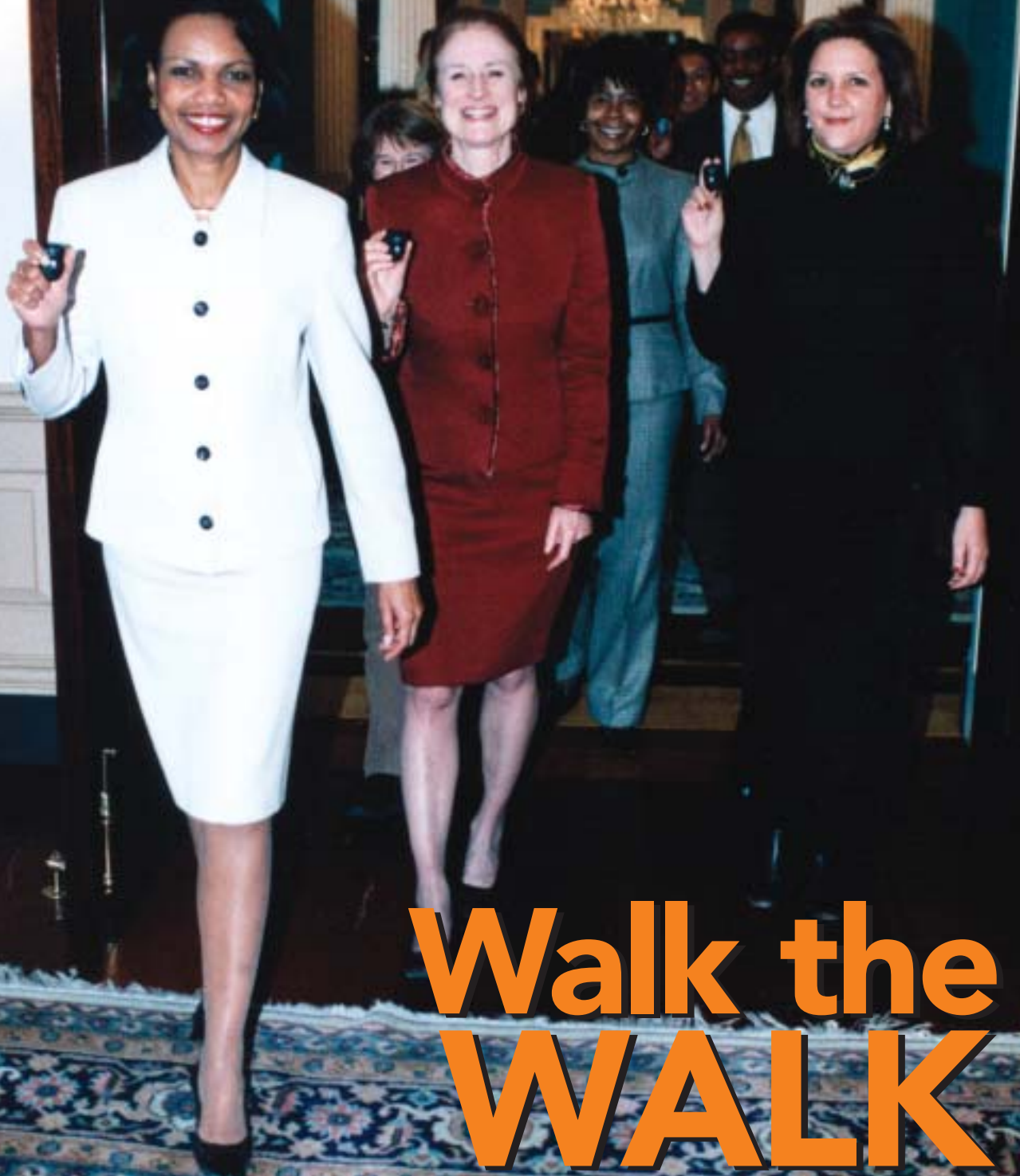


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Walk the WALK

Entry-Level Officers Featured in U.S.–Lao Relations Seminar

Last year, the United States and Laos celebrated 50 years of unbroken diplomatic relations. In conjunction with the celebration, Embassy Vientiane presented a seminar on U.S.–Lao relations at the Lao Foreign Affairs Institute.

The seminar, held in late summer, brought together Embassy personnel and more than 50 entry- and mid-level staff from the Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Committee for Planning and Investment and various other ministries and government agencies. Ambassador Patricia Haslach and MFA Deputy Director General Bounnheuang Songnavong gave introductory remarks and then turned the program over to three embassy entry-level officers.

Consular Officer Phil Nervig discussed the history of the bilateral relationship and the legacy of the war in Indochina. He noted that there were 560 Americans listed as missing in action in Laos at the end of the war. In 1985, the U.S. military, with the assistance of the Lao government, began joint programs to search for MIA remains. To date, the U.S. has recovered and identified 188 sets of remains and repatriated them with full military honors to Hawaii to await forensic identification.

Laos remains the most heavily bombed country per capita in history, Mr. Nervig said, and experts estimate that 10 to 30 percent of all bombs dropped during the war did not explode on impact. As a result, more than 11,000 deaths have been attributed to unexploded ordnance accidents since 1975 and economic development in many parts of the country has been hindered. U.S. has provided assistance for ordnance removal and community awareness programs, he said.

Political-Consular Officer Terry Mobley discussed the role of the embassy's Narcotics Affairs Section, which works closely with the Lao government on crop control, law enforcement and demand reduction projects throughout Laos, as well as rural development assistance.

He also discussed the opportunities for increased trade and investment and highlighted the U.S. government's focus on human rights, religious freedom and human trafficking.

General Services Officer Erin Sawyer mentioned the establishment of the Lao-American Center, the cornerstone of Embassy outreach to young people in Laos, which serves as

an information clearinghouse on all aspects of American life and provides access to English language study materials, U.S. periodicals and the Internet.

The presentation was part of Embassy Vientiane's mentoring and development plan for entry-level professionals, which is designed to develop and hone the skills needed for a successful Foreign Service career. All ELPs take advantage of a variety of leadership and management opportunities, including serving as control officer, participating in crisis management training, speaking in public and serving on embassy committees.

Work rotations, post exchanges and temporary duty assignments are encouraged by senior management in Vientiane. ELPs have worked in other sections and traveled to other embassies and consulates in the region for consultations, conferences and other opportunities to share best practices.



The seminar organizers pose in front of the embassy. From left, Erin Sawyer, Terry Mobley and Phil Nervig.

Attacks, Kidnappings Don't Deter Contractor of the Year

The recipient of the Department's 11th annual Small Business Prime Contractor of the Year Award is Framaco International, Inc., which completed an Iraq project under difficult circumstances.

The Department's contract with Framaco International was for the design and construction of improvements to the interim embassy facilities in Baghdad. Framaco was cited for accomplishing this vital work despite the challenges of operating in a hostile environment. The work sites came under

mortar attack and some Framaco workers were kidnapped by insurgents. Fortunately, they were later released.

Despite these obstacles, the Framaco team worked aggressively around the clock, seven days a week, completing the project 10 days ahead of schedule and within budget.

The award, sponsored by the assistant secretary for Administration, recognizes small business contractors who have displayed exemplary performance, customer service, management and technical capabilities.