



Candid Cameras

MISSION MEXICO CAPTURES A DAY IN ITS LIFE

BY MATTHEW A. MYERS AND LESLIE BASSETT

A snapshot of a day in the life of Mission Mexico—its people, the embassy and all nine U.S. consulates—would take thousands of photos. But this is just what Mission Mexico recently accomplished: a day-in-the-life project that in book form—and eventually online—depicts the events of an average day across the mission's many operations.

The project was a team effort. Ed Ramotowski, consul general in Guadalajara, secured a donation from Kodak de Mexico of 200 disposable cameras, which were distributed to volunteers across the mission. John Dinkelman, principal officer in Nogales, helped gain a grant from the Una Chapman Cox Foundation to support the project's organizational, layout and printing costs. Karen Martin, principal officer in Merida, identified a talented eligible family member, Dan Taylor, who agreed to lay out a book featuring photos

that captured the breadth of mission activities.

With the support of regional security officers, information officers and 350 eager volunteers, the photography got under way.

Over several days in February, mission community members—including family, local guards, contractors, Locally Employed staff and direct hires from all mission agencies—snapped away. They took photos of visa lines, cafeteria staff, U.S. government planes awaiting take-off, maintenance staff checking warehouse inventories, the mailroom team hauling pouch bags and the Foreign Commercial Service promoting U.S. companies.

There were also photos of employees beginning their commutes, local guards checking the gate, staff members typing, children on the school bus, staff playing after-hours soccer and an awards ceremony or two.



Pitching In

In Merida, a visa applicant photographed every step of his interview process. There were aerial photos from Tijuana of the U.S.-Mexico border, taken during a Customs and Border Patrol ride-along, and from Merida of famous Mayan archaeological sites.

As part of the project, every post in Mexico was asked to take a “family photo,” and add a little local flavor to the shot. The U.S. Embassy in Mexico City provided a wide-angle shot of about 400 of its 800 staff members. In Nuevo Laredo, the consulate general’s staff wore cowboy hats. In Monterrey, employees spelled out the post’s name by positioning their arms and legs to make the letters. The staff in Ciudad Juarez used software to place its group photo under the archway of one of the main border crossings between the United States and Mexico.

With the help of entry-level coordinators and information specialists at the mission’s nine consulates and a large embassy team led by Eva Sibaja, the project team uploaded more than 10,000 photos into a shared network site. Then the hard work began, as the team culled through large files of wonderful pictures to select the few that could be included in the day-in-the-life book, capturing the broad range of mission activities.

Project Editor Dan Taylor spent months poring over the photos, selecting the right ones for each topic area. The team realized a narrative would be required to put the photos in context. Jeff Adler, vice consul in Merida, and Matthew Myers, a consular officer in Ciudad Juarez, took the lead in crafting the words to go along with the photos. Taylor then went through four more edits of the book before he was finally satisfied.

Teamwork

The chosen photos highlighted the mission’s nonimmigrant and immigrant visa work and American citizen services work. They also depicted methamphetamine lab seizures undertaken by Mexican law enforcement officers who had been trained by their American colleagues. They captured the mission’s efforts to promote U.S. investment and agricultural trade, stop trafficking in persons and preserve the environment. Finally, they caught vividly how the mission team keeps buildings operational, information flowing, facilities secure and its communities safe and happy. From morning to night, the photos show Mission Mexico working as a team.

The project team posted each edit of the book on Mission Mexico’s blog and received rave reviews from participants, although some were disappointed that their photos weren’t selected.

Thanks to funding from the Una Chapman Cox Foundation, the mission will publish 1,000 copies of an 84-page photo book, which will go to diplomats in residence, State Department offices, political advisers, interagency colleagues and the National War College. They will also be used to explain how the Foreign Service promotes U.S. interests and to recruit new members. A Web version will be posted on the mission’s Internet sites.

The Mission Mexico blog at www.intelink.gov/communities/state/mexico details how the project was organized, and the Web site <http://mexico.usembassy.gov/dayinthelife> has the book. In all, the project was a fairly low-cost effort with terrific payoff in morale and public diplomacy benefits. ■

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