

LAFF

THE LAFF SOCIETY For the men and women engaged in Life After The Ford Foundation

Special Edition / July 2008



Luis Ubiñas (center), the Foundation's new president, chats with alumni Gabe Mehreteab (left), head of the NHP Foundation in Washington, and Frank Sutton, retired deputy vice president of the International Division. Mr. Ubiñas had invited LAFF to meet at the Foundation.

We are sending this special issue of the LAFF Newsletter to report on the meeting held by the New York Chapter on June 26. The meeting was significant in three respects. With some 100 LAFF members along with about 40 current Foundation staff members in attendance, it was the largest ever meeting of a LAFF chapter. It was also the first LAFF meeting held at the Foundation. And it was the first LAFF meeting addressed by a president of the Foundation.

Bob Tolles has written the excellent account of the meeting, which follows.

LAFF is indebted to Luis Ubiñas for the warmth of his hospitality, his appreciation of the contributions of those who preceded him at the Foundation and his desire for "a vibrant, rich relationship" with the Foundation's alumni—a desire I know LAFF members have long shared. He described that relationship as one "that keeps former staff informed, that celebrates history, that links the current with the past"

At Luis' invitation, we will be meeting with Marta Tellado in the weeks ahead to discuss in more detail what kind of relationship would be most mutually beneficial. Any thoughts you may have on this subject would be warmly appreciated.

PETER F. GEITHNER, President

A WARM WELCOME

Nearly 100 members of the New York Chapter of the LAFF Society were formally introduced to the Foundation's new president, Luis Ubiñas, at a meeting at the Foundation on June 26.

The gathering was at Mr. Ubiñas invitation, who said in his remarks that he had learned from **Peter Geithner**, LAFF president, that a meeting of the New York group was to take place in the summer and had suggested they meet with him at the Foundation. "So welcome back." he said to warm applause.

He added that he had been told by various people that a distance existed between the Foundation and LAFF since LAFF was independently formed by a small group of retirees nearly 20 years ago to maintain contact among staff no longer with the Foundation. He went on to say that in his view the group represented an important part of the Foundation's history. "All the work we do today and in the years to come will build on what you collectively did."

He noted he is often asked why he

decided to join the Foundation after a successful career in business. He said he was not only happy but eager to join because its history and traditions meant so much to him, specifically mentioning the Foundation's work in civil rights, urban development, and to end apartheid. He told of a conversation he had with a South African freedom fighter who in giving him a signed copy of the South African Constitution said it would not exist without the work of the Ford Foundation.

A Changing World

Remarking that he is also often asked what direction he is going to take the Foundation, he said "We're not going to re-invent its mission. We will continue to search for institutions that adhere to our commitment to equal justice, economic opportunity, knowledge, and achievement.

"Over the course of 2008, the incredible staff that works here is going to join together and with other foundations to sharpen our focus and ensure that our objectives are clear, that our grant strategies are geared to a changing world, and that the work we do is true and has lasting impact, just as your work had a lasting impact on my life and the lives of others. We want to be sure we focus on the most pressing issues."

"My hope is that we will begin by 2009 to achieve clarity and focus, to break new
continued on page 2

A Warm Welcome



Mary Racelis, formerly with the Foundation's Philippines office and head of the LAFF chapter in Manila, poses a question to the new president concerning his priorities for the Foundation.



Peter Geithner (left), LAFF president, with Buzz Tenny, Foundation secretary.

ground, to build on our core strengths and values, improving the lives of those living at the margins, achieving social justice, building leaders, networks, and organizations that advance the basic objectives of fairness, and making greater strides toward a more just world. We are able to do this because we have 50 years of achievement to build on.”

A Closer Connection

He mentioned that in recent days he had attended several reunions, including his wife's 25th at Harvard, and that next year he will attend a reunion of retired directors of McKinsey and Company where he had spent nearly all his career.

“I hope that some years from now I will join a Ford Foundation alumni group and I hope to have the same rich relationship with this group that I have had with the other private institutions that have shaped my life.

“I want the Foundation to have a vibrant, rich relationship with its alumni, a relationship that keeps former staff informed, that celebrates history, that links the current with the past.”

With that purpose in mind, he said he had asked Marta Tellado, Vice President of Communications, to work with LAFF on enriching the relationship and invited LAFF members to share their ideas on how the connection might be strengthened.

In introducing Mr. Ubiñas, Peter Geithner added: “We are fortunate to have with us **Dick Magat**, one of the two leading former staff members who led the establishment of

LAFF, the other being **Ed Meade** who is no longer with us but whose wife Mariam had sent a letter stressing Ed's commitment to LAFF and conveying her congratulations on the occasion.

Peter gave a brief summary of LAFF's vital statistics. The organization now numbers some 400, up from an original 150 or so; publishes a quarterly newsletter and a membership directory, both of which are available to everyone who is up-to-date with their dues; and has a growing number of local chapters that include, in addition to

relationship between LAFF and the Ford Foundation and deeply grateful to Luis for inviting us to meet here and his willingness to speak to us.”

Questions and Answers

Following his welcoming remarks, Mr. Ubiñas took about half a dozen questions. His responses are summarized below:

In answer to one about how he intended to establish program directions—whether through task forces or some other means—he said that “many folks had suggested we hire

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New York, those in Washington, Boston, New Delhi, Manila, and Bangkok, with Cairo and others to come.

He also announced that Barry Gaberman, former Foundation executive vice president, has agreed to become LAFF's vice president.

Peter described Luis as a native of the Bronx who grew up in a close family, who had an extraordinary academic record at Harvard and Harvard Business School, as well as an exemplary career at McKinsey and Company, and who is now 9th president of the Ford Foundation. “We are delighted at the prospect of a closer

outsiders to do the work for us.” But such an approach would not take advantage of the immense capabilities of the Foundation's staff and colleagues who help us develop grants. He further described the direction-setting effort as “inclusive, collaborative, and program-officer intensive.”

In answer to a question about the board, he said he was very lucky in that regard, describing the board as informed, involved, thoughtful, and committed to the values of the institution. “I can't underestimate how valuable the board is, how good it is, and how involved and thoughtful it is.”

His longest response was to a question



Richard Magat (right), LAFF co-founder, with Henry Saltzman, an alumnus from the early 1960s.

about his management style and how it differed from that of his predecessors. “I’ve worked with dozens of CEOs of large companies and the most effective ones, rather than imposing a narrow perspective on management, adjust their leadership style to the context of the situation.” In some cases, their style was top down and incisive, in others it was inclusive and deliberative, and in still others quickness in making decisions. It depended on the context. “What they shared was a deep willingness to listen, to ask for and be comfortable with discordant views, and a deep willingness to take responsibility for their actions.”

“What are some of the guiding principles in figuring out what you are going to do?” he was asked. First and foremost, what is proposed must reflect the values of this institution. “We don’t begin a conversation unless the subject is deeply rooted in the Foundation’s values, mission, history.” From a process point of view, he added, “it’s pivotal that we think of grantees as our partners, that we not just look at our own communities, that we step up from many small things to larger things, that we take account of complexity, that we think about measurement and accountability, and that we respond to changing circumstances.”

He was asked what he found surprising about the Foundation. He listed the eagerness and openness of the program staff to think in terms of scale and of impact. He said he also found surprising the level of talent throughout the Foundation, and not

just on the program side. Also found surprising is the loyalty of grantees, mentioning he made a practice of seeing one or two people every day from outside the Foundation, a routine he will continue to follow.

One questioner wanted to know whether the Foundation is thinking in terms of larger networks than small community-based organizations. In response, he stressed the importance of knowing the specifics of the local situation. “We need to know what’s happening on the ground.”

The Overseas Challenge

He was asked whether he saw a Foundation role with regard to the low standing of United States in various parts of the world. Mr. Ubiñas agreed that the way the rest of the world thinks of the U.S. is extremely challenging. But he also noted the level of democracy, freedom, access, and opportunity in various places was even more challenging than it was years ago. “We have to factor in these circumstances and sometimes conclude we have no choice, given the work that we do.”

The final comment was made by Dick Magat. “Having been raised in the South Bronx, you may recall that nasty depiction of the area in the novel, “Bonfire of the Vanities,” by Tom Wolfe. But on this occasion, it’s worth recalling a novel published many years earlier by an author named Thomas Wolfe, titled “You Can’t Go Home Again.” Today, Mr. Ubiñas, you have proved that we can go home again.” ■

Attendees

Joseph Aguerrebere	Marian Krauskopf
Sharon Alpert	Elizabeth Leeds
Edward Ames	Beverly Levine
Carol Arnold	Michael Lipsky
Verne Atwater	Thea Lurie
Sanda Balaban	Richard Magat
Radhika Balakrishnan	Mara Manus
Josephine Brune	Stephen Marks
Constance Buchanan	Ruth Mayleas
Kay Carsky (w. Sutton)	Nancy McCarthy
Mariam Chamberlain	Sheila McLean
Amanda Claremon	Ghebre Mehreteab
Barbette Coll	Vernice Miller-Travis
Pat Corrigan	Inca Mohamed
Joan Dassin	Janice Molnar
Ramon Daubon	Gayle Morgan
Susan Davis	Sheila Nelson
Vicki Dawson	Seamus O’Cleireacain
Peter de Janosi	Mary Petrocik
Keiko DeLille	Mary Racelis
Dianne DeMaria	Gustav Ranis
Shep Forman	Rachel Ranis
Barry Gaberman	Dee Roberts
Peter Geithner	Richard Roberts
Adrienne Germain	Esther Roditti
Sheila Gordon	Anthony Romero
Leslie Gottlieb	Peter Ruof
Peggy Greaves	Judy Samuelson
Ronald Gross	Elisa Scatena
Bud Harkavy	Michael Seltzer
Fran Harkavy	Joshua Smith
Evelyn Hendricks	Linda Stamato (w. Jaffe)
Margaret Howard	Eugene Staples
Sanford Jaffe	Frank Sutton
Marjorie Johnson	Ina Taylor
Michelle Kahane	Kerwin Tesdell
Natalia Kanem	Marcia Thompson
Joan Kaufman	Robert Tolles
James Kelly	Edwin Torres
Felicia Khan	Toby Volkman
Rona Kluger	Anna Wadia
John Koprowski	Evelyn Bush Walsh
Starry Krueger	Alexander Wilde

Photographs by Dayna Bealy, Ford Foundation

The LAFF Society

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