Philanthropist Honored For Afghanistan Work

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Stephen Brown

Philanthropist and activist Stephen R. Brown, retired partner at Luce Forward, has been selected to receive the Global Citizen Diplomat Award from the San Diego Diplomacy Council “for his seemingly impossible accomplishments in Afghanistan in education, technology and medicine.” Brown will be honored at the organization’s annual meeting June 16, at El Vitral restaurant 815 J St. For the past nine years, Brown has devoted as much as 60 hours a week, amassed contributions in the millions of dollars, and made 11 trips to Afghanistan. “In the days after 9-11, I made a promise to myself to do something meaningful to help my country fight the war on terror and to make another attack less likely,” he said.

Fellow Rotarian Fary Moini from the La Jolla Golden Triangle Rotary spurred his initial interest shortly after 9-11. By November 2002, they and Flouran Wali, a San Diego Afghan leader, traveled to Afghanistan to facilitate the building of a school in Jalalabad. ,The Jalalabad Rotary School, in operation since May 2004, now serves 5,500 students, including 1,500 girls. To enable girls to study at the school, Brown and his supporters initially subsidized the salaries for eight female teachers.

“The first 12th grade class of boys graduated last year and the first class of girls will graduate this year,” said Brown.  “And today – thanks to our efforts — more than 1,000 students in 15 high schools in Jalalabad have access to computer labs and are connected with kids in San Diego and around the world.”

While in Jalalabad on their first trip, the group also met with leaders of the Nangarhar University (NU), located just outside the city. “Although it served 4,000 students and had 250 faculty, it had no relationship with any other university, not a single computer, and no usable textbooks.” said Brown. “The professors taught using 30-year-old lecture notes.” Since then, Brown has spearheaded advances at the university, starting with the creation of a satellite-based computer lab, financed by Brown and John Moores, then owner of the San Diego Padres. Brown and friends have brought numerous professors to San Diego and other U.S. cities on exchanges and for graduate-level coursework. They have helped put together two World Bank-funded partnerships between NU and San Diego State University, valued at $2 million each, which support an English language program and a civil engineering program. They also have built and furnished a dormitory for female students on the NU campus.

Brown’s largesse soon spread to other institutions throughout Jalalabad, including the Nangarhar Public Hospital and Nangarhar Medical School.  “We’ve introduced telemedicine enabling local medical professionals to collaborate with their peers around the world,” he said.  “For example, Dr. Stephen Dorros, director of UCSD Radiology, has reviewed 200 CAT scans from Jalalabad.” To encourage additional involvement and exchanges, Brown helped establish a Sister Cities relationship between San Diego and Jalalabad in 2004.

“The time I have spent working with my friends in Jalalabad has been the most rewarding experience in my life,” Brown said. “Our efforts have directly affected thousands of people  and thousands more are aware of our efforts. It can’t help but counter anti-American propaganda advanced by extremists. We’re providing hard evidence of how Americas are and what we stand for.”

Ticket information for the June 16 event, which will include a presentation by Brown, is available at sandiegodiplomacy.org.