

Message from Ambassador (Ret) Donald Booth
On the Occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the American International School of
Monrovia (AISM)

I was fortunate to serve as U.S. ambassador to Liberia from July 2005 to July 2008, a period of frenetic re-building after 14 years of destructive civil war. The opening of AISM was a critical element in the re-building process. The talented people needed to forge a new Liberia were deterred by a number of factors, one of which was the total absence of a school where their children could receive a quality education.

The idea of establishing AISM originated with a small group of local alumni of the former American Community School (ACS) who approached Embassy Management Counselor Mike Bajek and arranged to meet with me on a dark, rainy evening in 2006. They proposed re-starting a school at the old ACS facility. At that point, a small, dedicated team came together to make the creation of a new school, AISM, a reality.

With no money, only an idea, I went to President Sirleaf, who immediately saw that an American school would signal a return of safety and stability and thus help lure back the talent and investment needed to re-build Liberia. She offered her government's support in making the old ACS property available for the new school. I also received enthusiastic support from Gilbert Brown and the Department of State's Office of Overseas Schools as well as from the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), which granted a loan to fund the renovations and equipment needed to make AISM a reality.

The initial AISM Board members were all essential to the successful launch of AISM. Reem Ayoub led in student (parent) recruitment. Mike Bajek and PAE project manager Glenn Iacovetta organized and supervised the renovation/construction work done by the Dixon Group. Glenn was ably replaced by Graham Farbrother, PAE's chief engineer, who saw renovations through to the end, including the 2008 renovation of the gymnasium. Cherif Abdallah provided critical Liberian community support. Tom Jeffery of ITC Bank, supported by Embassy budget officer Marina O'Connell developed the first business plan, budget and successful loan application. Abdallah Shehny of Shehny Trading provided all furnishings for the new school. And Gib Brown (USAID), supported by DeeDee Smith, managed the difficult job of staff recruitment. It was not easy for Reem to convince parents to put down money to reserve a slot in a non-existent school. It was a difficult and time-consuming process to get squatters off the old ACS property. Only the before and after pictures can begin to explain the transformation from virtual ruin to the modern classrooms existent at AISM's opening. Obtaining a loan for a small new school and recruiting international staff to teach at a brand new school in "war-torn Liberia" required miracle workers.

Fortunately AISM had miracle workers beyond its incredible Board. Anita Booth stepped in as de-facto business manager in the spring/summer of 2007 and ensured

local staff was hired, supplies were ordered and school administrative functions begun in preparation for AISM's grand opening. Then, a week before the planned opening of the school in September 2007, the husband/wife director/teacher team we had hired backed out. We scrambled and with the superb assistance of the Office of Overseas Schools, convinced Jerry Craig to become AISM Director. Jerry, quickly mastered the management and educational direction of AISM and set it on its course to be a school of excellence serving both the expatriate and Liberian communities in Monrovia.

In the best tradition of American international schools, the American International School of Monrovia endows its students with the invaluable skills of critical thinking and teamwork. Some of AISM's students are now well into high school and likely thinking about attending university. Their success in life will be the true measure of what the succession of dedicated AISM directors, Board members and U.S. ambassadors have achieved through their service to and support of AISM.

AISM has survived incredible obstacles - a difficult birth, a global recession and the Ebola epidemic. Nonetheless, AISM has emerged stronger and positioned to remain an institution of academic excellence for generations of students to come.

I congratulate Director Trudeau, the faculty and the staff for your many achievements. I wish you and the entire AISM community my very best wishes as you celebrate AISM's 10 anniversary.

Donald Booth
Ambassador (Ret)