

## TECHNOLOGY

### TOOLS AND TRAINING

#### Partnership Between Georgetown U. and Grant Maker Seeks to Increase Training of Disaster-Relief Workers

By Heather Joslyn

Lynn C. Fritz made his fortune helping goods move from point A to point B. Now, he says, he wants to help people who work for disaster-relief organizations move ahead in their careers.

The nonprofit organization he leads, the Fritz Institute, in San Francisco, has given \$500,000 to be used over two years to sponsor a trio of efforts to help increase educational opportunities in the field of humanitarian relief -- part of the \$3-million the institute plans to give this year for disaster-management efforts. The gift will enable Georgetown University, in Washington, to expand its current master's-level certificate program in refugee and humanitarian emergencies, will help initiate a new series of workshops aimed at improving logistics management for relief groups, and will create a training program for midcareer professionals aimed at cultivating the future leaders of humanitarian groups.

Mr. Fritz's interest in disaster relief, he says, grew from his for-profit work in global logistics. His business, Fritz Companies, did research on supply chains for multinational corporations and sought to provide solutions, and the nonprofit organization he founded in 1995, the Fritz Institute, worked to advance logistics education and professionalism. After his company was acquired by United Parcel Service in May 2001, the Fritz Institute's research efforts shifted to

learning how charities provide humanitarian relief, and its mission turned to helping those groups manage their efforts more efficiently. The things he discovered upon researching disaster relief, he says, floored him. "What these people do with so little training, and also few tools, is amazing," says Mr. Fritz.

Professionals in the disaster-relief field, he says, often need basic management training to help them as their careers progress and their responsibilities increase. "These are people managing hundreds of people, organizing complex tasks: getting food, organizing a hospital, keeping bad guys away, setting up a perimeter." While acknowledging that nonprofit professionals can turn to many sources for basic management courses, Mr. Fritz says that few resources are available to specifically deal with the needs of disaster-relief workers.

#### Tackling 'Complex Emergencies'

Georgetown University, he says, seemed a logical recipient for the Fritz Institute's philanthropy. Mr. Fritz is an alumnus of the class of 1964, and his daughter also attended the university. And, he says, he was aware that Susan F. Martin, director of Georgetown's four-year-old Institute for the Study of International Migration, has a long history of work in the disaster-relief

field: The former executive director of the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, she has spent time in Africa and South America doing extensive research on refugee issues.

Ms. Martin says that the Fritz Institute's gift has thus far enabled Georgetown to offer a course exploring project management and complex emergencies -- disasters that stem from a number of causes. They may be triggered by a natural catastrophe, for instance, but may also include man-made challenges, such as political unrest or war.

"When we have a hurricane, even a severe one like Hurricane Andrew, which leveled parts of Miami, it's not the same as a hurricane in Central America," says Ms. Martin.

Complex emergencies are usually more devastating in human terms than purely natural disasters, she says: Three-quarters of all disaster-related deaths worldwide result from famines or civil conflict.

The new program for midcareer professionals is expected to be an intensive three-week program, says Anisya S. Thomas, managing director of the Fritz Institute. Up to 14 participants will be nominated by the humanitarian organizations for which they work; they will pay tuition, but, she says, scholarships will likely be offered. The curriculum is being

designed by Patricia Weiss Fagen, a senior research associate at Georgetown's Institute for the Study of International Migration, and, Ms. Thomas says, the intention is to create a format that will allow the participants to easily share ideas with each other.

One goal of the program, she says, is to help give disaster-relief professionals a greater sense of strategic issues. "The field is very action-oriented," says Ms. Thomas. "They do complex tasks, and sometimes you have to balance the lesser of two evils. There's no intention of doing harm, but sometimes the things you do have unintended consequences." The new program, she says, hopes to "marry the bigger issues to the job that needs to be done." Bringing together disaster-relief professionals through the midcareer program and through the planned workshops, she says, may also help create more institutional memory in the field, which, she says, is fragmented: "There are pockets of expertise on earthquakes, and pockets of expertise on floods."

### **Relief Organizations' Needs**

Humanitarian organizations have tremendous needs for continuing-education opportunities such as the ones the Fritz Institute and Georgetown are joining forces to provide, says Ms. Martin. "The field of disaster relief has traditionally been the domain of well-meaning volunteers who may know much about human suffering but don't necessarily have the training to respond efficiently," she says.

Over the past couple of decades, she says, more universities have been trying to fill the gap, and some grant makers, such as the Andrew W.

Mellon and Ford Foundations, have made significant contributions to programs like Georgetown's. Still, she adds, "It's a relatively small number of funders right now, and a relatively small number of programs." She is hopeful, she says, that the Fritz Institute's gift will help inspire more philanthropy in this area.

The partnership between the Fritz Institute and Georgetown represents a necessary step in the development of relief groups and their leaders, says Bruce Wilkinson, senior vice president of the international program for World Vision, a relief organization in Seattle. Often, he says, discussion of relief-worker training revolves around strategy and mobilizing resources, but gives short shrift to the need for strengthening the organizations' infrastructure -- including their human resources. Midcareer relief workers in particular, he says, need more training and support. "Much of what we learn after midcareer is just experiential, and the luck of latching on to a really accomplished person" who can act as a mentor, Mr. Wilkinson says. Programs like those the Fritz Institute is sponsoring "can help them to break through that ceiling quicker."

Midcareer relief workers, he says, need to be more politically savvy than ever before, he says, because complicated civil disputes in certain parts of the world can create security issues -- not just for the workers, he says, but for the populations they serve. Experienced relief workers also need to learn more about best practices, and to focus on the moral implications of their work, an avenue that Georgetown, a Catholic university in the Jesuit tradition, may be especially qualified to help them explore, he says: "Relief workers need to ask, 'Do I know I'm doing

the right thing?'"

While agreeing that disaster-relief organizations can benefit from expanded worker training, Shaun Walsh, vice president of international relief at the humanitarian charity Food for the Hungry, in Scottsdale, Ariz., stresses the need to emphasize pragmatic solutions to the challenges relief workers face. Mr. Walsh, who has spent two decades aiding displaced persons in such locales as Ethiopia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, favors training that includes a hands-on component. He says he has attended plenty of workshops over the years, but finds that they are often run by academics rather than field veterans, and that the ideas offered may prove untenable during a disaster response.

For instance, at the same time it announced its educational partnership this month, the Fritz Institute said that it is designing Web-based software for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent that will help to keep track of food, medical equipment, and other necessary goods along distribution routes. The system will be available for the federation next spring, says Mr. Fritz, and subsequently will be available to other disaster-relief organizations.

However, although the Fritz Institute reports that many relief organizations track supplies in the field by hand, Mr. Walsh points out that computers can prove useless in remote areas. "A lot of times, we get people saying, 'This is the definitive software you should use,'" he says. "But they forget that a good majority of the time, the warehouses are in the middle of nowhere, with no electricity, and are staffed by people who haven't been educated to handle the

equipment. It's not that it's not useful -- it's just, at what level?"

He says that some relief organizations are endeavoring to offer their own training -- such as the Sphere Project, an international effort sponsored by several humanitarian organizations that has established minimum standards for disaster response. Any university or other nonprofit organization that seeks to train relief workers, he says, needs to survey the field's offerings first. "The potential for reinventing the wheel must be avoided," he says.

One area where new training programs may help relief workers, he says, is in better preparing them to

make more detailed assessments of disasters in order to better meet victims' needs. He points to the weeks after September 11, when U.S. charities were overrun with volunteers and donations they couldn't use.

"One of the biggest lessons that Joe Public learned was that it's not just bringing in a big bag of food or a blanket -- it's doing it in an appropriate manner. It was a learning curve for a lot of people in the States, and for a lot of agencies: Maybe we need to build on this lesson and improve our capacity to do assessments."

The lessons of September 11 and beyond, Ms. Martin says, may prod

grant makers to follow the example of the Fritz Institute. Although many donors give during an emergency, she says, "I'm hoping more of them will become convinced that we need to prepare, and to help people learn to use that money more wisely -- to get more bang for the buck."

Do you think disaster-relief organizations provide enough training to their workers throughout their careers? Tell us about it in the Job Market online forum.