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Alumni Profile

Beth Rogers Thompson

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Serving globally



Jan Edmonson '72 sits in front of a tapestry from Venezuela. As a career foreign service officer, Edmonson has enjoyed collecting ceramics, watercolors and tapestries from her global travels.

Jan Edmonson '72 has met Nobel laureates, political opposition leaders, presidents and dictators.

As a Foreign Service officer with the U.S. Department of State, she also has experienced the hardships and dangers of life in hot spots around the globe.

Currently, Edmonson is deputy director for the Near East-South Central Asia Office in the Department's Bureau of International Information Programs. She oversees the Department's Persian-language Web site, publications and other outreach programs to Iranians abroad.

Edmonson, whose career has focused on public diplomacy and public affairs, says she decided in first grade that she wanted to do something that would allow her to travel. She applied only to Linfield after a neighbor gave her a catalog, and fell in love with the campus immediately.

"Linfield set me on the path to success – the size of classes, wonderful professors and the camaraderie of the Linfield community," she says. "It gave me an incredible foundation for my work."

After receiving her B.A. from Linfield, she earned

two master's degrees in international relations from The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in Boston. In 2001 she received an M.S. in national security strategy from the National War College.

Among her international experiences, Edmonson served in Panama during the U.S. invasion that ended its military dictatorship in December 1989. From her apartment, she saw Manuel Noriega's headquarters explode and burn.

In August 1994, Edmonson was in Havana during the only anti-Castro demonstrations and riots in the history of Cuba.

Her most recent overseas assignment, in 2002-2005, was at the U.S. Embassy in Zagreb, Croatia.

"My favorite place that I've lived is Burma, (now known as Myanmar)" from 1996 to 1999, she said. "The Burmese people are simply remarkable – it is one place where the people do not deserve the government they have. I also love northern Italy – the food, the wine, the lifestyle, the food, the wine..."

Despite her fluency in Spanish and ability to speak Burmese and Croatian, Edmonson wishes she were more proficient in languages. For Persian, she relies on her Iranian staff.

Edmonson's staff members, not named here because of security, say she "uses her strong management and people skills to gather the troops and to support them, keeping the focus on successful and productive team work. Her sense of humor keeps us going on more difficult days."

Edmonson says her proudest accomplishment is "that I have represented my country very well overseas in a variety of foreign cultures, often in difficult or dangerous conditions; and that I've respected my local staffs' professionalism, dignity and cultures."

When her Washington tour is up in summer 2009, Edmonson hopes for an assignment in Afghanistan. Then, she says, "I will probably retire in a couple of years and go on my 'busman's holiday' – traveling and reading about exotic lands. And playing golf."

She lists parts of the world she still yearns to visit: "I'd like to see the Great Wall in China, Red Square in Moscow, the fjords of Norway, and visit Vietnam (my generation's war), Indonesia (just because), Scotland, Ireland, Wales (family roots), New Zealand and Iran. And I'd like to walk in Linfield's Oak Grove at least one more time."

– Beth Rogers Thompson