

Celebrating
10 Years

Armenia Tree Project Celebrates 10 Years of Greening Armenia



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Jeff Masarjian,
ATP Executive Director

BOSTON—The Armenia Tree Project (ATP), one of the few Armenian Diaspora-based environmental protection organizations working in Armenia, held a special celebration event on June 5 commemorating 10 years of greening Armenia. The event was held in the Grand Ballroom of the Seaport Hotel.

The evening's program included award presentations, congratulatory messages, and honorary speeches as well as dinner and dancing, with musical performances by Artie Barsamians Big Band, the Seventh Veil, and the Richard Hagopian Ensemble.

Ms. Stella Aftandilian, the 10th anniversary committee co-chair, opened the program by welcoming and thanking the nearly 600 attendees and guests. Several dignitaries were present at the event, including Armenian Ambassador to the US Dr. Arman Kirakossian, US Congressman Edward Markey, and State Representative Peter Koutoujian.

ATP Executive Director Mr. Jeff Masarjian was the programs first speaker, who briefly discussed the progress the organization has made since 1994.

"The ATP has planted and restored over half a million trees in Armenia, while providing jobs for hundreds of people, Mr. Masarjian explained. "Our plans for the next decade include expanding our community reforestation programs in partnership with villagers and other organizations, which will also provide social and economic development opportunities. Our new tree nursery in Vanadzor will produce over one million saplings each year to begin reforesting the devastated landscape of Armenia."

Mr. Masarjian then introduced a film depicting the ATP's new reforestation and poverty reduction programming in remote Armenian villages. The 18-minute long film was produced and directed by Kennedy Wheatley of Los Angeles.



Following the film, 10th anniversary committee co-chair Mrs. Annie Balikian announced that over \$1 million had been raised thus far in honor of the ATP's 10th anniversary. These collected funds will provide a firm foundation for expanding the ATP's community forestry and economic development programs and launching its large-scale reforestation program in the northern city of Vanadzor.

Several ATP staff members based in Yerevan were also in attendance, including Country Director Susan Yacubian Klein, Deputy Director Jason Kauffeld, and Program Managers Anahit Garibyan, who is the ATP's first Yerevan staff member, Samvel Ghandilyan, and Tigran Palazyan.

Ms. Garibyan discussed the history of the ATP's activities in Armenia, and how the two-person staff was at first equipped only with a donated laptop computer, working in a corner of the Armenian Assembly of America's Yerevan office. She commented



Nora Gabrielyan, left, receives the John T. O'Connor Environmental Activism award from Carolyn Mugar

on how far the organization has grown, citing its multiple accomplishments and the increase of the Yerevan office staff to over 45 employees.

Ms. Carolyn Mugar, the ATP's founder, presented a brief history timeline of the organization and how it came into existence, beginning with her 1993 visit to



'I fully expect that in the next decade we will achieve a historic milestone: 15 million trees planted and restored by 2015, the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. Together, we will realize this goal, and these new forests will become a vital part of the legacy we leave to future generations.'

Carolyn Mugar,
ATP Founder



'Sadly, we are at great risk of losing the forests and the rare plants of all of Armenia... If trees are chopped down without any plan or thoughtful system, the consequences will affect everything: underbrush with rare plants immediately disappears, the rain washes away soil, springs dry up, the biodiversity becomes impoverished, and the climate changes.'

Dr. Nora Gabrielyan,
John T. O'Connor
Environmental Activist
Award Recipient

Armenia. She honored Dr. Nora Gabrielyan, who holds a PhD in botany and is the author of over 16 books studying Armenia's diverse plant life. Dr. Gabrielyan spoke about Armenia's unique and varied ecosystems and identified examples of rare and endangered flowering plants that rely on rapidly disappearing forest habitats.



Stella Aftandilian, Carolyn Mugar, and Annie Balikian

"The forests, which recently covered only 10% of the territory of our country, now cover even less," Dr. Gabrielyan explained. "If trees are chopped down without any plan or thoughtful system, the consequences will affect everything: underbrush with rare plants immediately disappears, the rain washes away soil, springs dry up, the biodiversity becomes impoverished, and the climate changes."

Dr. Gabrielyan is the first recipient of the John T. O'Connor Environmental Activist Award, which was presented to her by Ms. Mugar. Additionally, Dr. Gabrielyan has been awarded a \$25,000 grant by a private donor for publishing her latest book, printed in English and Armenian, titled the "Illustrated Guidebook-Index of Armenian Flora."

Ms. Mugar continued by honoring Ms. Regina Eddy, ATP's former Executive Director, for her tireless efforts in guiding the organization during its early years. She revealed that Ms. Eddy rose to the challenge of spearheading the organization's initial



project planning by performing extensive research on Armenia's biodiversity as well as the grave environmental risks facing the country in modern times. Ms. Eddy was honored with a special plaque commemorating her achievements, which was accepted by her close friend Ms. Ellen Kurz, due to Ms. Eddy's inability to attend the program.

Another advocate recognized for the preservation of Armenia's environment was Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian, who passed away earlier this year. He was a founding member of the Land and Cultural Organization and was the chief planner for the renovation of St. Gevorg of Moughni Monastery in Armenia, having also planted several hundred trees in its surrounding environs. He also served as an advisor to ATP's programs in Armenia and inspired the planting of over 19,000 trees at 51 church sites during ATP's 1700th Anniversary of Christianity in Armenia tree planting campaign in 2001.

Mr. Robert Aram Kaloosdian, ATP advisor and supporter, gave closing remarks and made reflections on the importance of the organizations undertakings. Ms. Mugar and her late parents, Stephen and Marion Mugar, were also honored for their long-standing commitment to Armenia, as plans were revealed to develop a special site for reflection and contemplation at the Tsitsernakberd Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan.

The organization is now gearing up to expand its programs in Armenia, which will include large-scale reforestation, social and economic development in rural villages, public education, and the promotion of sustainable forest management policies.

The ATP is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1994 during Armenia's darkest and coldest years with the vision of safeguarding Armenias future by protecting its environment. Funded by contributions from Diasporan Armenians, the ATP has planted and rejuvenated 531,000 trees at more than 400 sites ranging from Gyumri to Goris.

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