

Danesfort Dispatches

A Quarterly Newsletter from the U.S. Consulate General Belfast

October 2011



Vol. 6, Issue 4

Dear American Community,

I'm sure that all of you are having a very busy fall - somehow the work, events, visitors have not stopped since the beginning of school term. We are very pleased to welcome our new consular officer, Pamela Hamblett, to Belfast. She will be here for the next three years and many of you are likely to meet her renewing passports, documenting new babies, and during her work supporting American Citizen Services.

I very much appreciate Lord Mayor Niall Ó Donnghaile's hosting of the public ceremony to commemorate the 10th anniversary of September 11th. It was a very moving expression of how the people of Belfast and Northern Ireland supported Americans ten years ago. Given the tremendous support that both Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) and Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) have shown to their colleagues in New York during the last decade, I was particularly pleased to host a reception last week for the Northern Ireland team that competed in the 2011 World Police and Fire Games in New York in August. During their visit, the team experienced a "nor'easter" (aka Hurricane Irene). We were proud that they came back with a bushel of medals and are very much looking forward to Belfast hosting the Games in 2013.

Kamala Lakhdhir,
Consul General

World Police and Fire Games Coming to Northern Ireland

In 1985, the World Police & Fire Games Federation, a non-profit organization, run by the Californian Police Athletics Federation, established the World Police & Fire Games. Today, the World Police & Fire Games are a spectacular international sporting event, offering police officers, firefighters, customs and prison officers from around the world an opportunity to showcase their athletic excellence in over 65 sporting events. In recent years the Games have attracted 10,000 to 14,000 competitors from over 71 countries.

The 2013 World Police and Fire Games are coming to Northern Ireland. The Police Service of Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service and Northern Ireland Prison Service will host approximately 10, 000 Law Enforcement

Officers and Fire-fighters from around the world who will compete in a wide variety of sporting events.

For more information and details on how to volunteer go to <http://www.2013wpfg.com>.

Here's to a great Games!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

International Travel Information	2
Spotlight: Voting	3
Internal Revenue Service	4
ACS - Frequently Asked Questions	4
Diversity Visa Lottery Registration	5
Culture Corner	6
Kids Corner	7

International Travel Information from the State Department



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The State Department's Office of American Citizen Services and Crisis Management (ACS) administers the Consular Information Program, which informs U.S. citizens and the general public of conditions abroad that may affect their safety and security. Country Specific Information, Travel Alerts, and Travel Warnings are vital parts of this program. Here's a bit more information:



Country Specific Information

We provide Country Specific Information for every country in the world. For each country, you will find information like the location of the U.S. Embassy and any consular offices; whether you need a visa; crime and security information; health and medical conditions; drug penalties; and localized hot spots. This is a good place to start learning more about where you are going.

Travel Alerts

We issue Travel Alerts for short-term events we think you should know about when planning travel to a country. Examples of reasons for issuing a Travel Alert might include an election season that is bound to have many strikes, demonstrations, disturbances; a health alert like an outbreak of H1N1; or evidence of an elevated risk of terrorist attacks. When these short term events are over, we cancel the Travel Alert.

Travel Warnings

We issue Travel Warnings when we want you to consider very carefully whether you should go to a country at all. Examples of reasons for issuing a Travel Warning might include unstable government, civil war, or ongoing intense crime or violence, or frequent terrorist attacks. We want you to know the risks of travelling to these places and to strongly consider not going to them at all. Travel Warnings remain in place until the situation changes; some have been in effect for years.

For more information, visit <http://www.travel.state.gov>.

Department of State STEP Program iPad Application

The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) is a free service provided by the U.S. Government to U.S. citizens who are traveling to, or living in, a foreign country. STEP allows you to enter information about your upcoming trip abroad so that the Department of State can better assist you in an emergency. STEP also allows Americans residing abroad to get routine information from the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

Now there is an app! Smart Traveler, the official State Department app for U.S. travelers, invites you to see the world with easy access to frequently updated official country information, travel alerts, travel warnings, maps, U.S. embassy locations, and more. With Smart Traveler, you can create personal itineraries, add notes, and organize your trips. Visit the itunes site at <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/smart-traveler/id442693988?mt=8>

Ulster American Women's Club Announcement

The Ulster American Women's Club (UAWC) is a voluntary social group that meets monthly. It doesn't matter if you've been here 2 months or 20 years, living here short-term or permanently, we welcome you to connect with other American women and explore this wonderful land and culture in which we live.

Autumn is in full swing and so is the UAWC! We hope that you will join us at an upcoming activity. On October 19th, we'll have a guided tour of Dunluce Castle on the stunning North Antrim coast. Our Thanksgiving Potluck Luncheon will be on November 16th at a member's home in Moira. Then on December 14th, we'll be attending an Ulster Orchestra lunchtime concert, "Arias in Advent", at the Ulster Hall in Belfast.

If you are interested in receiving monthly emails with more detailed and up-to-date information on all of our activities, please contact Angie at apramann@gmail.com



Spotlight : Important Information from The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP)

In 2009, the Congress passed the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment or MOVE Act to simplify the absentee registration and voting process and increase access to voting materials electronically via the internet and email. We encourage you to use the Federal Voting Assistance Program website, WWW.FVAP.GOV, which has the forms and information most overseas voters need.

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE 2012 PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY ELECTIONS: The first presidential primary elections take place in January 2012. Plan to submit a new Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) as early as possible in 2012 so your local election officials have time to send you an absentee ballot, and you have time to vote and return it.

Our most important message: If you want to vote, you have to send in a **Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) to your local election officials every year – even if you’ve previously voted overseas – and every time you change your name, physical address, or email address.** Use the FPCA to request an absentee ballot, and to register to vote if you’re not currently registered. The easiest way to fill out this form is to use the online tool available at WWW.FVAP.GOV that walks you through the process based on your state’s specific voting rules. Fill it out every January first and make this your new News Year’s Resolution!

The fastest way to get your absentee ballot is to request electronic ballot. Depending on the specific rules of your home state, delivery may be made by fax, email, or online download. On the 2005 FPCA, you may request electronic ballot delivery in section 4 of the FPCA, but don’t forget to include your email address or fax number. On the 2011 version of the FPCA, you rank your ballot delivery preference in section 6. Otherwise, your ballot will be mailed to you.

Most states now allow you to send the FPCA electronically to your local election officials, but others still require you to print and mail in a hard copy. The online tool at WWW.FVAP.GOV will tell you which method(s) your state permits.

All states now offer a way to verify registration. This is often done by an online verification website or by calling your local election official. This helps confirm you are properly registered and on the list to get absentee ballots. WWW.FVAP.GOV provides a link to each state’s online verification website.

Overseas voters are eligible to vote in presidential primary elections and in state primary elections for federal offices (Senator, Representative), as well as the general elections in November 2012. Some states allow overseas voters to vote in state and local elections. The online tool available through WWW.FVAP.GOV will let you know in which state and local elections you may vote.

States send out absentee ballots at least 30 days before the primary elections, and 45 days before the November general election. Returning your completed ballot as quickly as possible will ensure it reaches your local election officials before your state’s ballot receipt deadline.



Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Email Scam

Many UK residents have reported receiving an e-mail purportedly coming from the IRS which looks like the following:

Subject: IRS notification

Department of Treasury Internal Revenue Service.

Application for a not ordinary resident (non-resident with a United States bank account) saver to receive interest without tax taken off or deducted.

If you receive an electronic message similar to the one above DO NOT RESPOND to the request for information, as this is a fraudulent identity theft scam. The IRS does NOT issue notices via e-mail. The attachment to this particular scam is a fraudulent form requesting personal identification information associated with typical ID theft scams (the attachment is NOT an official IRS form.) The IRS security office has attempted to shut it down this scam. However, we believe this (or similar versions) are still circulating on the internet. The IRS website (www.irs.gov) offers several pages dedicated to scams and frauds, but these particular pages (at the links below) may be useful if you get caught in a scam and become a victim

For more information about email scams visit the IRS website:

<http://www.irs.gov/privacy/article/0,,id=179820,00.html>

<http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=241789,00.html>

American Citizen Services: FAQs

Q: How can I estimate my retirement benefit at several different ages?

Answer: It's easy! Use our *Retirement Estimator* at www.socialsecurity.gov/estimator to get a retirement benefit estimate based on current law and real time access to your earnings record. The *Retirement Estimator* also lets you create additional "what if" retirement scenarios to find out how changes in your situation might change your future benefit amount. Remember, Social Security is not sending out the yearly Statements any more, so this is a good way to keep track of your future benefit entitlement.

Q: If both my spouse and I are entitled to Social Security benefits, is there any reduction in our payments because we are married?

Answer: No. We calculate lifetime earnings independently to determine each spouse's Social Security benefit amount. When each member of a married couple meets all other eligibility requirements to receive Social Security retirement benefits, each spouse receives a monthly benefit amount based on his or her own earnings. Couples are not penalized because they are married. If one member of the couple earned low wages or failed to earn enough Social Security credits (40) to be insured for retirement benefits, he or she may be eligible to receive benefits as a spouse based on the spouse's work record. Learn more about spouse benefits at www.socialsecurity.gov/retire2/yourspouse.htm.

Do you have other questions about Benefits or Social Security?

Check out the Frequently Asked Questions page at http://london.usembassy.gov/cons_new/acs/fbu/index.html.

Alternatively, you can contact Embassy London's Federal Benefits Unit by email: FBU.London@ssa.gov.



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Diversity Visa (DV) Lottery Open For Registration!

Important Notice: DV 2013 Program

The online registration period for the 2013 Diversity Visa Program (DV-2013) will begin on Tuesday, October 4, 2011, at noon, Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) (GMT-4), and conclude on Saturday, November 5, 2011, at noon, Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) (GMT-4). See the **Diversity Visa Program Instructions** webpage for more information, <http://dvlottery.state.gov>.

DV 2012 Program

Entrants in the Diversity Visa 2012 program may check the status of their entries through the Entrant Status Check on the E-DV website now through June 30, 2012. Review more about Entrant Status Check.

Diversity Visa Scammers Sending Fraudulent Emails and Letters

The Department of State, Office of Visa Services, advises the public of a notable increase in fraudulent emails and letters sent to Diversity Immigrant Visa (DV) program (Visa Lottery) applicants. The scammers behind these fraudulent emails and letters are posing as the U.S. government in an attempt to extract payment from DV applicants. Review the procedures for the DV program so that you know what to expect, when to expect it, and from whom.

Review additional fraud warning information at <http://london.usembassy.gov/ukpapress111.html>

ESTA Reminder - Check Your Status Before You Travel

The Electronic System of Travel Authorization (ESTA) is an automated system that determines the eligibility of visitors (including British and Irish passport holders) to travel to the U.S. under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). The ESTA application collects the same information collected on Form I-94W. ESTA applications may be submitted at any time prior to travel, though it is recommended travelers apply when they begin preparing travel plans and before they make any non-refundable arrangements. If some months have passed since you made your application with ESTA, be sure to review your ESTA status to ensure the status is unchanged.

ESTA Questions & Answers - <https://help.cbp.gov/app/answers/list>

To register for ESTA - <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>.

Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Update

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is undertaking efforts to focus its resources and improve the passenger experience at security checkpoints by applying new risk-based, intelligence driven screening procedures and enhancing its use of technology. TSA's risk-based, intelligence-driven screening approach is based on the following premises:

- The majority of airline passengers are low risk.
- By having passengers voluntarily provide more information about themselves, TSA can better segment the population in terms of risk.
- Behavior detection and interviewing techniques should be strengthened in the screening process.
- TSA must accelerate its efforts to optimize screening processes and use of technology to gain system-wide efficiencies.

TSA has developed conceptual screening processes consistent with this approach which will be tested at airports starting in August 2011. TSA will continue to look for ways to enhance its layered approach to security through new state-of-the-art technologies, expanded use of existing and proven technologies, better passenger identification techniques, and other developments that will continue to strengthen our capabilities to keep terrorists off commercial aircraft.

For more details, visit their website at http://www.tsa.gov/what_we_do/rbs.shtm



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Culture Corner

The U.S. Consulate General occasionally provides partial grants for cultural events which have an American element. Some of the events are free, for others there is a charge. This quarter, we encourage you to check out:

Ulster Bank Belfast Festival at Queens - October 17-31, 2011 - This year's festival will be showcasing the best international art, music and culture, highlighting Northern Ireland's rich and vibrant . For more information visit <http://www.belfastfestival.com> for more information.

Hallowe'en Family Festival - October 26-31, 2011 - Various venues - Ulster American Folk Park, Ulster Transport Museum and Armagh Museum offer a variety of events over the Halloween weekend. Lots for adults and children to enjoy. Visit their website at <http://www.nmni.com> .

Belfast Cinemagic Festival - November 2011 - A festival just for kids! This festival brings the lights, camera and action of cinema, movies and storytelling to the young (and young-at-heart!). Go to their website for all the latest news and events - <http://www.cinemagic.org.uk>

Disclaimer: This listing of events, performances and other activities is for information purposes only and does not constitute an endorsement by the U.S. Consulate General Belfast. All opinions expressed by the artists, writers, and performers participating or contributing to the events listed are those solely of the participants and contributors and not the U.S. Government or its designated representatives. Listing information is believed to be correct at the time it is listed but the U.S. Consulate General accepts no liability for subsequent changes to these details and no reliance should be placed upon them.

American Citizen Services: In the event of a genuine emergency involving a U.S. Citizen in Northern Ireland, our after-hours phone number is 07545 507738.

Consular Closure Dates

The U.S. Consulate General Belfast will be closed on the following dates:

Monday, October 10, 2011 - Columbus Day
Friday, November 11, 2011 - Veteran's Day
Thursday, November 24, 2011 - Thanksgiving Day
Monday, December 26, 2011 - Christmas Day
Tuesday, December 27, 2011 - Boxing Day
Monday, January 2, 2012 - New Year's Day



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KIDS CORNER

p i l g r i m s m n
u f c f p i e t h o
m a e e y r u u a v
p m l a z p b r r e
k i e s b u j k v m
i l b t n g g e e b
n y r s i t c y s e
t h a n k f u l t r
q s t u f f i n g f
z r e d i n n e r x

turkey

dinner

harvest

feast

family

November

stuffing

thankful

pilgrims

pumpkin

pie

celebrate

