

THE OVERSEAS BRIEFING CENTER AT 30

Thinking Outside the Box: Reinventing Resources at OBC

BY KATE GOGGIN, WRITER EDITOR FOR FSI'S TRANSITION CENTER

The halls of the Foreign Service Institute are abuzz with talk of a new YouTube video about Niamey, Niger. Discussing life in a foreign country is not unusual at FSI, of course, but the ability to access post-specific videos on the Internet is a huge step forward for FSI's Overseas Briefing Center.

The YouTube videos were generated by participants in OBC's *Clips to Go* contest, sponsored during the office's 30th-anniversary celebration last year. Overseas contestants were challenged to create short but interesting videos of Foreign Service life at post. Winning entries were then added to the growing list of audiovisual resources available online and in person at the OBC's offices in Arlington, Va.

The OBC's resource center, traditionally a source for hard-copy information and videos, takes a step forward with the YouTube video links, part of a creative effort to provide research materials to the greater Foreign Service community, including all the foreign affairs agencies, Members of Household and family members — many of whom cannot visit the briefing center or access the State Department's intranet where the majority of OBC's online research tools reside.

The anniversary allowed OBC to shine a spotlight on other innovative products, too. The *Clips to Go* program was an offshoot of a popular OBC resource, *Post Info To Go*, an online application that collates photos, documents and intranet Web links from posts, as well as from other offices, such as the Family Liaison Office and the Office of Overseas Schools. Because every post has an intranet Web site that is organized somewhat differently, it can be confusing to locate key information quickly. *Post Info To Go* offers a predictable format so specific information is accessible without

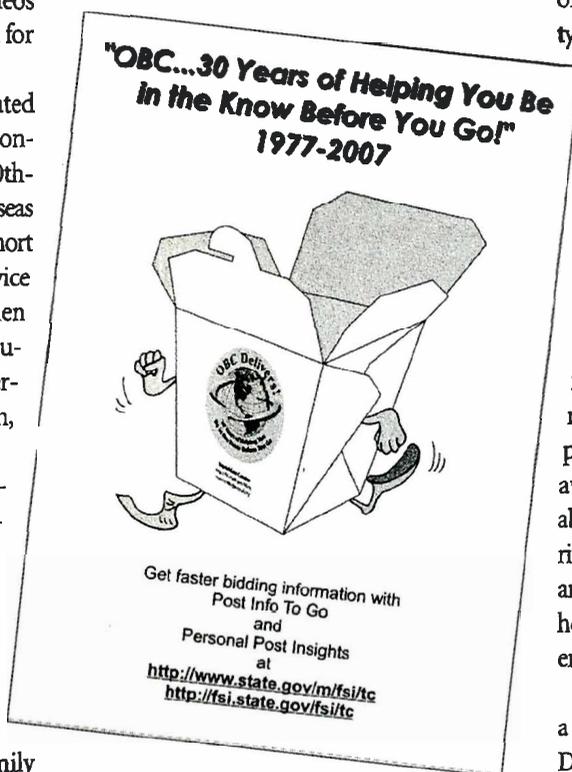
wading through variously organized Web sites or waiting for responses from post personnel. In addition, the collection allows users to share the results of post-specific research through a built-in

everyone from staff in bureau executive offices to career development officers. As attendees munched on fortune cookies, they learned that these resources are not only for Foreign Service members bidding on jobs. Post management, community liaison office coordinators and human resource officers also use *Post Info To Go* to save time answering the most frequently asked questions from family members and bidders.

Long-term goals for OBC include creating password-protected Internet access to *Post Info To Go*, as well as other online resources such as the *Personal Post Insights* collection. This frank and anonymous collection of 1,400 recent first-person opinions on life at post from those under chief-of-mission authority answers practical questions about daily living, such as: How do security concerns at post affect activities? What are the conditions at school? Where is the housing? What are the family member employment opportunities?

Other current outreach efforts include a partnership with BNET, the State Department's video broadcast unit. There are 19 post on-demand videos accessible online at: (intranet) http://obc.bnet.state.gov/category.asp?category_id=146, and more will be available soon. According to BNET, post videos are the most requested of its offerings. OBC encourages all posts to update their audiovisuals to present their best information to colleagues and a realistic view of life for bidders. Details about producing a post video are on the intranet at: <http://fsi.state.gov/rd.asp?ID=123>.

So, get online and join more than 3,890 viewers of the Niamey *Clips to Go* entry. Anyone interested in creating *Clips to Go* may view recent winners and entry guidelines at: www.state.gov/m/fsi/tc/92015.htm. Submissions will be accepted until Aug. 1. □



e-mail mechanism. As a result of these innovations, the program's usage has increased by almost 300 percent since September 2006.

Still, only a small portion of the foreign affairs community currently benefits from the database. To better market the technology and make the Web resources more widely known, OBC secured a small grant from the Cox Foundation for an information campaign during the 30th-anniversary event. OBC Coordinator Connie Hansen designed Chinese carry-out "to go" boxes with the tag line "OBC Delivers!" The boxes were filled with fortune cookies highlighting OBC Web resources.

Ms. Hansen organized briefings for