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UD'S DIRECTOR OF CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS WORKING TO KEEP ALIVE DAYTON PEACE ACCORDS

DAYTON, Ohio — A Roman historian and archeologist, Bruce Hitchner has spent 22 years piecing together fractured relics from civilizations past. Today, he's helping to restore an existing civilization fractured by war.

Hitchner, director of the Center for International Programs at the University of Dayton, is organizer of events recognizing the third anniversary of the Dayton Peace Accords (Nov. 20-22) that marked the end of the Bosnian war.

More than an organizer, however, Hitchner is considered the catalyst in keeping Dayton, Ohio, an influential geographic and political power in the ongoing Bosnian peace process — and not merely relegated to historical namesake.

Paul Williams, legal adviser to the Bosnian delegation during the Dayton Peace Accords, says Hitchner has displayed an uncanny ability to keep the international spotlight of the 3-year-old treaty here. In doing so, he continues to persuade diplomats, journalists, business leaders and educators alike to become a part of its implementation.

"And he's done a remarkable job of promoting the exposure of the University of Dayton in Washington — and in the international scene as well — just by getting a variety of influential people, including Richard Holbrooke, to come to Dayton to analyze the Dayton Peace Accords," says Williams, a professor of international law and relations at American University in Washington, D.C.

Each year since the accords, the University has sponsored a symposium examining a particular aspect of the peace agreement.

Dayton, by virtue of namesake, has a "moral obligation to see the peace process through," says Hitchner, who from the start has determined to make it more than "just a birthday celebration.

"A feel-good event alone is not justified. We want to do something that will build lasting peace in the region," says the professor of history and newly named chair of the Dayton Peace Accords Project, a nonprofit group dedicated to promoting goals of the accords.

The anniversary will have a ceremonial side — U.S. diplomat and chief architect of the peace accords, Richard Holbrooke, will receive an honorary degree from UD, and a painting commemorating Dayton's role in the peace process will be dedicated at the Dayton Art
Institute. Also, a meeting of Bosnian college students, two of whom attend UD, and their advisers will be part of the events.

But the heart of the three-day event, Hitchner explains, will be a two-day workshop of influential people in such areas as academia, business, military, media and international law. Their goal: to hammer out a list of recommendations they believe will promote peace for years in the Balkans, publish and present them to NATO.

About 2,000 copies of the workshop’s publication will be given to relevant embassies, governments and nongovernment organizations throughout the world.

"Bosnia is going to be a difficult situation for a generation. This isn’t like a business endeavor that if fails, we quit and cut our losses. We’re not going to quit," vows an unflinching Hitchner.

"Bruce is a passionate, high-energy person who has a real flavor for whatever needs to get done, especially in the international arena" says Charlie Russo, UD professor of education administration and a fellow in the Center for International Programs. "He seems to have a vision for all of us involved."

That vision has included developing cultural, business and educational ties between the Dayton area and Bosnia. "Real peace and rebuilding a civil society is not made by focusing on one avenue alone," Hitchner says. "You must engage people in every aspect of human life."

A publication overseen by Hitchner, Bringing War Criminals to Justice — produced from the second anniversary workshop sponsored by UD’s Center for International Programs, the University’s School of Law, the Balkan Institute, and the Public International Law and Policy Group — has especially helped reinforce focus on the peace process.

"The publication has gotten wide distribution throughout Washington, D.C., Bosnia and among nongovernmental organizations associated with the peace plan," says Williams, who also heads the Public International Law and Policy Group. "It’s being used to push an indictment against (Yugoslavian president) Slobodan Milosevic and to get the U.S. government to be more aggressive in apprehending war criminals. It has become an effective foreign policy tool."

Hitchner, a self-described eternal optimist who believes "good will eventually conquer evil," accepted the center’s directorship in June 1996, just before the first anniversary of the peace accords, but only on the condition offered by his wife, Becky: "Do it to make a difference."

"My wife has been the conscience of many of my motives," he explains. "She had me thinking about the moral and ethical considerations of the position and the (Dayton Peace Accords). We agreed that we wanted to do something that would sustain its mission on a truly
international level and that was appropriate to the mission of this University and this community.”

Yet between the “moral imperatives” and “ethical considerations” lie the visions in Hitchner’s mind and heart that compel him to rise every morning and ask, “What can I do today?” Eyes that well with pain and water recall the family trip to Sarajevo last year and a woman weeping on a hillside of graves, mourning the slaughter of loved ones. And there’s the picture he keeps on his office door, a 7-year-old girl recently shot to death by the Serb army.

“On archeological sites I would see evidence of death but not be able to react to it,” Hitchner explains. “I could analyze it but not respond to it. But now when I see death and injustice I can — and do — react to it. I say, ‘We can’t allow this to happen, and even if it does, we must try to stop it every time, every single time.’”

As director of the center, Hitchner is challenged with shaping an international mission, one which he assures will perpetuate the Marianist philosophy of commitment to Christian and human rights throughout the world.

“We couldn’t have come up with a clear mission by looking at the institution from within or by looking at it from a purely traditional university perspective,” Hitchner says. “I think UD has a particularly important vision as an institution in the world. And UD should not see itself merely as an institution in the Miami Valley, or in Ohio, or an institution among Catholic universities.”

Hitchner says his involvement in the Dayton peace process has changed his life forever.

“I had been a pure academic my entire career, interested in pure knowledge and research,” he says. “And I still take that job seriously. But we in the professoriate often see ourselves as terribly self-important. To be a professor is very meaningful, but I’m now aware of how vital participation is to my existence.”

As for the center’s direction, Hitchner is resolute in keeping the Bosnian peace process in the forefront of obligations, for now — but he eventually plans to point his sights in other areas of the world as well.

“We felt Bosnia was a place where we could aim our efforts and perhaps make a difference,” Hitchner explains. “But it doesn’t mean that we’re not concerned with atrocities in Rwanda or human rights issues in China. We are — but we want to develop a reputation for developing strength and stability in Bosnia first.

“And that will happen someday, maybe soon.”

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