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Echoing Green Names Civil Engineer Among World's 'Best Emerging Social Entrepreneurs'

Elizabeth Hausler receives $60,000 grant to promote and implement affordable earthquake resistant housing in developing countries

NEW YORK – The global social venture fund **Echoing Green** has named civil engineer **Elizabeth Hausler** among the world's **"Best Emerging Social Entrepreneurs"** for her plan to reduce deaths caused by housing collapses during earthquakes in developing countries.

As a winner of the prestigious 2004 Echoing Green Fellowship, Dr. Hausler will receive $60,000 in seed funding and technical assistance over two years to launch the **Center for Earthquake Resistant Houses**, a San Francisco-based organization that promotes and implements the construction of low-cost, earthquake-resistant houses using locally available materials and artisans.

While earthquake fatalities in the developed world have become a rarity, seismic activity in developing countries can be catastrophic. In 2003, an earthquake in Bam, Iran killed more than 26,000 people. Over 13,000 were killed near Bhuj, India in 2001. Most of these deaths were caused by the collapse of unreinforced masonry and adobe structures that are very common in the developing world. In India alone, 85 percent of houses are made of adobe or unreinforced masonry.

After earthquakes, relief agencies typically pour in to rebuild collapsed houses using earthquake-resistant designs, and some train local builders. Despite these efforts, residents often go back to building with unreinforced methods once the relief agencies leave the village, leaving the new houses just as vulnerable as those that collapsed during the earthquake. The new designs are simply too expensive, rely on materials that are not available through the local market, or demand a level of construction skill that has not been developed within the local population. Hausler will promote and implement building techniques that are culturally accepted, easy to adopt with limited training and education, and competitive in cost with common (but vulnerable) building methods.

"The major driving force for me is the repeated, avoidable loss of life during earthquakes in developing countries," says Hausler. "Affordable methods of building earthquake-resistant houses are available. Our goal is to promote these new methods in post-disaster reconstruction programs and in new housing developments before an earthquake strikes."

According to Hausler, both improved and properly implemented earthquake-resistant construction methods will not only reduce the number of deaths and injuries in earthquakes, but also reduce the amount of foreign and domestic aid spent on disaster relief and reconstruction. Her goal is to permanently alter how construction is done in these areas, so that houses built after emergency funding and technical support cease are also earthquake-resistant.

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"There is a growing appreciation among academics and aid agencies for the role technology can play in building safe and affordable housing," says Hausler. "I believe we can permanently change construction practices and save lives."

Starting in high school, Hausler spent her summers laying bricks for a masonry construction company in rural Illinois. She received a bachelor's degree in engineering in 1991 from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a masters in environmental science in 1995 from the University of Colorado at Denver. She attended the University of California at Berkeley where she earned a masters in civil engineering in 1998 and a Ph.D. in civil engineering in 2002. Hausler worked in the engineering consulting industry for five years and also has significant field experience, having spent eight months in India on a Fulbright Fellowship assisting with and assessing the post-Bhuj earthquake housing reconstruction program. She just returned from a trip to Iran to assess the status of the post-Bam earthquake reconstruction, and a second trip to India to evaluate the long-term change in construction practice that has followed the 1993 Killari and 1999 Chamoli earthquakes.

Hausler says the turning point in her career occurred when she sent in her Fulbright application as the World Trade Center towers collapsed. "I realized that I wanted to use my engineering skills for the benefit of humanity, not the decline of it. I envision a world where houses in developing countries will not collapse and kill their occupants during earthquakes. I am excited to apply my skills where they can really make a difference."

Hausler's organization is one of nine to receive the 2004 Echoing Green Fellowship from nearly 700 applicants in 37 countries. Fellows are selected based on a rigorous application process that includes the creation of a detailed organizational plan and a series of in-person interviews before panels of veteran business and nonprofit leaders in New York City. Judges evaluate applicants' leadership and entrepreneurial skills, creativity and the potential of their ideas to deliver long-term social change.

"Through the Echoing Green Fellowship, we are the first to invest in visionary leaders with bold ideas for social change," said Dr. Cheryl Dorsey, Echoing Green's President and 1992 Echoing Green Fellow. "Elizabeth represents a new type of community leader that uses entrepreneurial principles to transform communities."

About Echoing Green

Echoing Green is a 501c3 nonprofit that identifies, funds and supports the world's most exceptional emerging social entrepreneurs and the organizations they launch. Through a two-year fellowship program, Echoing Green helps these leaders develop new solutions to society's most difficult problems in diverse fields including education, health, housing, civil and human rights, the environment, economic development and the arts.

Founded in 1987 with the support of General Atlantic Partners (GAP), a private equity firm, and The Atlantic Philanthropies (USA), Inc., Echoing Green has invested $22 million to help more than 380 leaders create positive change in 30 countries.

Since Echoing Green's inception, fellows' organizations have raised nearly $1 billion in additional funding, delivering a return on investment (ROI) of 44 times Echoing Green's seed funding. Seventy-seven percent of organizations launched by Echoing Green Fellows are still in existence and eighty-five percent of all fellows stay in leadership positions within the social sector. The 2005 Echoing Green Fellowship application is available online. Interested individuals can apply from mid-September to December 2004. For more information, visit http://www.echoinggreen.org, call 212.689.1165 or email info@echoinggreen.org.

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