

# QuakerAction



**American Friends  
Service Committee**

[www.afsc.org](http://www.afsc.org)

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## Destruction, Loss, Challenge, Opportunity

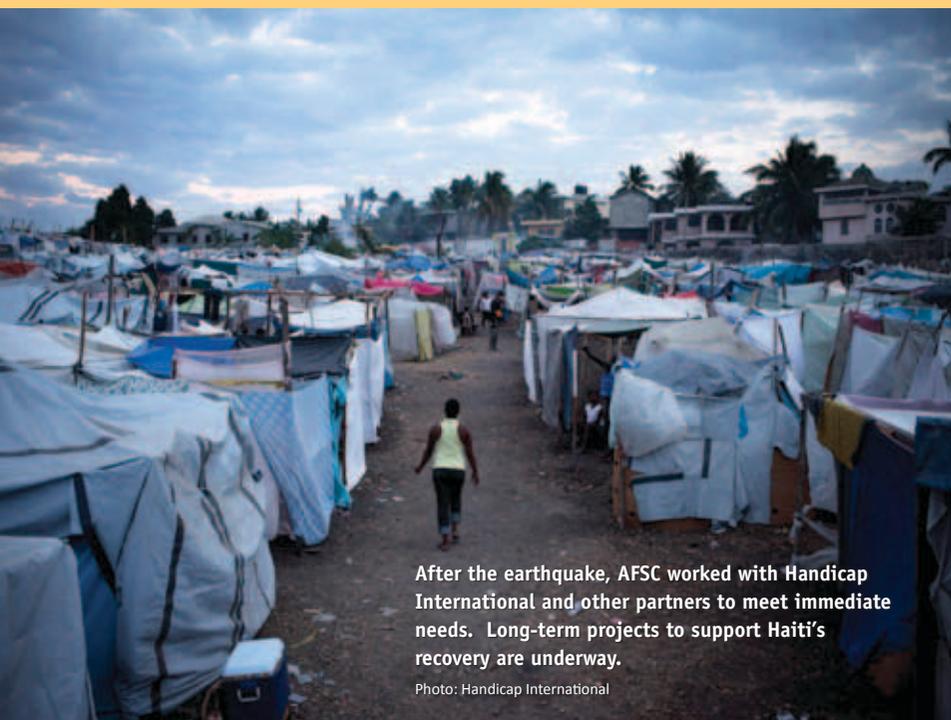
For several decades, the American Friends Service Committee worked with rural communities in the remote Grand'Anse region in southwest Haiti. That program now is under local control and operation, leaving in place a successful community health program and medical clinic that serves many towns and villages.

When the January 12 earthquake hit the capital city, Port-au-Prince, AFSC called upon our contacts in the country and our connections with international agencies already on the ground. We promptly disbursed \$100,000 for emergency aid: plastic sheeting for shelter, cooking kits, food for several small feeding centers, and support for medical services.

Senior staff Geri Sicola (see adjacent story) and Jorge Lafitte spent a week in Port-au-Prince, visiting projects and consulting with other organizations. They left a team to follow up on developments in the city and outlying areas affected by the earthquake.

AFSC has moved from the immediate crisis to recovery. A planning mission spent three weeks talking with a variety of Haitians to find an appropriate niche for AFSC's longer-term work on urban violence.

As this issue goes to press, decisions on next steps to aid Haiti are pending. However, we are buoyed by the remarkable response from our donors, and humbled by their trust in AFSC's careful and prudent approach to disasters such as the Haiti earthquake. Thank you for your generosity.



After the earthquake, AFSC worked with Handicap International and other partners to meet immediate needs. Long-term projects to support Haiti's recovery are underway.

Photo: Handicap International

I had lived and worked in Haiti in the early 1990's and hadn't been back since. Then came the earthquake.

As I flew on a small charter plane into Haiti a little over a week after January 12, many questions occupied my mind. What would the devastation look like in person? How are people coping? How will I handle the disparity between what I can personally do, and the many needs of those whose lives have been turned upside down? While we experienced a calm and beautiful flight, we were all very anxious about what we would find when we landed.

Jorge Lafitte, the AFSC Latin America and Caribbean Regional Director, had arrived several days ahead of me. We brought our own tents and supplies with us, so we would not drain the resources needed for the tens of thousands of Haitians affected by the disaster. We "made camp" on the grounds of the Swiss Interchurch Aid agency, one of AFSC's partners in the immediate relief effort, knowing that significant aftershocks made sleeping indoors feel dangerous. Once settled, it was time to see the relief work that AFSC was funding.

### Calm—and Traffic

The first challenge was getting around the city. While the streets were eerily calm in the neighborhoods we visited, traffic jams abounded because so many of the already narrow roads were blocked by rubble or people now "living" on the streets. Contrary to reports I'd read in the U.S. news media about looting and civil unrest, I saw no signs of violence, but instead remarkable examples of resilience. Amidst the destroyed buildings, some supermarkets and other shops were open. A few banks were conducting business, but most remarkable to me were the number of street vendors selling food and wares in open-air markets or on sidewalks along the way. Everyone was grieving, many were wounded, but the

# Personal Reflections

BY GERI SICOLA

streets were full of life. The fortitude was awe-inspiring.

In Port-au-Prince just after the earthquake, handling the dead and tending to the wounded were twenty-four hour tasks. Hastily improvised medical facilities strained to handle the steady stream of injuries, many of them requiring amputations. And untold numbers of the city's residents left for the countryside to stay in areas far removed from the earthquake's epicenter. However, we heard from many people that as soon as possible, those who had left would return to Port-au-Prince when services and resources were available in the capital again.

It was hard to see and absorb the meaning of the structural destruction all around me. I remember thinking as we entered the Bel Air neighborhood that it reminded me of a scene in some "end of the world" movie. The devastation took my breath away, even as we encountered areas where one building was flattened and the ones next to it were untouched.

## Monitoring AFSC Aid

Jorge and I visited AFSC's partner agencies (see article, page 2) and we observed firsthand the food distribution carried out by Swiss Interchurch Aid in three neighborhoods. With a \$50,000 grant, AFSC partner Handicap International (HI) purchased emergency kits that included blankets, plastic sheeting, mats, water filters, and cooking sets. We saw the work of HI's medical teams in the general hospital and how well all the doctors, Haitians, and others from many other countries found ways to cooperate across language barriers in a very short time.

And we began to plan for the longer-term recovery work. We met with Hai-



Geri Sicola (right) and a colleague outside the tents that sheltered them in post-earthquake Haiti.

tians and people from other organizations to learn about their responses and to hear about future needs and plans.

## Beyond Belief...

The collapse of Haiti's already inadequate infrastructure is immense, tragic and an enormous challenge as Haiti faces rebuilding. So many government officials died in the earthquake and ministry headquarters turned to dust. Even the presidential palace was unsafe and uninhabitable.

In all my years of experience with disasters—natural and manmade—I have never witnessed anything like post-earthquake Haiti. Much of what I saw still haunts me. Two particular sites tell much of the story: the total collapse of the Ministry of Justice and the main nursing school. When the earthquake hit, both institutions were filled with people in the wrong place at the wrong time: government workers, nurses, teachers.

Unlike other disasters, this earthquake has destroyed much of the urban infrastructure, institutions, and systems

that are crucial to a well-functioning society. The challenges are complex, extensive, and long-term. AFSC's role is to find a niche where grassroots needs are served, and where we can bring our peacebuilding and community involvement experience to bear.

My visit to Haiti took an emotional toll. But I am convinced that the resiliency I saw in the Haitian people will prevail over despair. Goodwill, careful planning, and coordinated work from AFSC and many other international groups in Haiti, working together with strong and capable Haitian partners, will help Haitians rebuild their nation.

Despite the rigors of the trip, it was a privilege to be in Haiti. As AFSC programs continue to develop there, I look forward to a return visit—to celebrate, to marvel, to hope.

*Geri Sicola is AFSC's Associate General Secretary for International Programs. She has lived, worked, and travelled extensively outside of the United States, and brought that experience to her week-long visit to Haiti in January.*



## News from around AFSC

### Victory! 2,000 Becomes 20,000

AFSC Hawai'i's youth leadership programs in peace and counter-recruitment led to Hawai'i's State Department of Education's policy changes around military recruitment in local high schools. AFSC helped to organize participation in the Hawai'i College and Career Fairs held around the state. More than 500 youth on Oahu alone learned from staff about how military recruiters have unrestricted access to schools and student records, access they can use to recruit without parental or student permission.

AFSC mobilized youth, parents, and school community members to press the Department of Education to adopt new policies for "opting out." Now high school students themselves or their parents/guardians may decline to have information passed on to recruiters during the student's high school career. In just one year, this policy change resulted in a ten-fold increase in opt-out registration from 2,000 to 20,000. As a result of another campaign, all public schools now withhold student information and test results from military recruiters when students take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery tests.

In AFSC offices around the country, staff and volunteers dispense information such as the "It's My Life" guide so that young people have truthful information on what enlisting in the military means. And in some locations, ideas for higher education and vocational training are provided as well.

### Indomitable Iowan: Sherry Hutchison

Quaker Sherry Hutchison is ninety-one. An AFSC supporter from Des Moines, she's been a peace proponent for decades. Recently on a bitterly cold night, Sherry stood with others at a vigil marking the death of the 1,000th U.S. soldier in Afghanistan. Just another example of her fortitude and commitment.

The Vietnam War was a turning point for Sherry and her late husband, Larry. They were tax resisters who refused to pay the portion of their telephone tax that funded the war. When an IRS agent appeared at their door to ask, "When are you going to stop doing this?" Sherry replied, "When are you going to stop the war?"

Whereas many others dropped out of peace work after Vietnam, Sherry kept going. She organized vigils and teach-ins, worked closely with other members of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and served on AFSC's local program committee for many years (until someone realized the committee had term limits!).

Sherry doesn't just talk about peace. She's been arrested several times for civil disobedience, including during the period following 9/11. That line-crossing cost her a night at the Polk County Jail, which Sherry dryly observes is "a facility I'd not recommend."

When asked why she keeps going, Sherry insists that it's force of habit and the desire to live in a manner consistent with her values. Moving to Des Moines in 1946, Sherry was very relieved to see AFSC in the phonebook, knowing she had an outlet for her peace and social justice concerns. She's been a habitual partner with AFSC in many ways over many years. Long live Sherry!

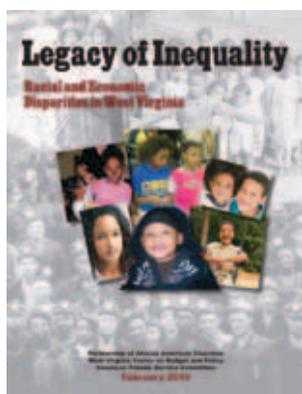


Sherry Hutchison (left) and AFSC staff Kathleen McQuillen pose before boarding a bus for a Washington, D.C. demonstration.

## “Into the pages of history...”

In the foreword to “Legacy of Inequality: Racial and Economic Disparities in West Virginia,” Reverend James Patterson says, “The contributions that people of color have made to the culture of West Virginia are unarguable, substantial, and eternal. Black men and women have walked out of and through these mountains onto the pages of history....”

AFSC, along with the Partnership of African American Churches and the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy, produced this substantive and comprehensive report. It covers subjects such as education and civil rights, the measure of well-being such as wages and incarceration rates, and the consequences of racial disparities in areas such as health. Chapter four, “Policy Opportunities to Improve Racial Equality”, provides a blueprint for activists and the



public to press for changes and progress for communities of color in West Virginia.

Replete with graphs and footnotes, this ground-breaking report concludes that the state should establish an Office of Minority Affairs. As James Patterson notes, “Someone has to mind the store, holding agency heads and systems accountable.”



### Plants and People Flourish

**A once derelict playground in Mar Vista, California, now boasts neat rows of healthy vegetables, thanks to the labor, energy, and imagination of a group of high school students. As Christina Woo, college student and AFSC intern, said, “This area is being transformed into a safe and peaceful place where the students can hang out outdoors. The best part is that this transformation has to do with the students. They are the ones putting their time and effort into this project, cultivating a new sense of community. While planting the seeds to grow food in their new garden, they also have planted seeds of hope for themselves, their neighborhood, and their futures.”**

AFSC’s West Virginia Economic Justice Program works at the grassroots level and at the state capitol to help low-income West Virginians address poverty and unfair working conditions. Its work has had a major impact on the state’s minimum wage laws and other significant legislation.

The full “Legacy of Inequality” report is available on AFSC’s website, [www.afsc.org](http://www.afsc.org).

### Somalia: Bricks and a Roof Make a Difference

Liban Abdiqani Hirsi has a new responsibility: hall booking officer. The hall in question is the rehabilitated community center in Beled Hawo in southern Somalia. In an area fraught with fraternal warfare and long-standing feuds, the center has become a central meeting place for all members of the community—various clans, women, and

internally displaced people who have fled violence to this small city.

Working through a local partner, AFSC provided the funds for most of the construction materials and furnishings for the center. The contractor reinforced the lower part of the walls and the upper portion uses interwoven fine woods to provide some security and ventilation too. And the roof is made from local thatch which also helps cool the building in a hot, arid land.

In keeping with AFSC’s emphasis on building peaceful communities, one of the first activities in the center (which holds 150) was a workshop on peace and leadership. On the second day, those attending organized a Hall Management Committee. Thus Liban Hirsi has a new role. And everyone involved hopes that this “convening place” will help the community to build new relationships and develop tools for conflict resolution.

## FOCUS ON FLORIDA: Meet Paul-Andre Mondesir

**H**aitian Community Social Advocate Paul-Andre Mondesir has worked with AFSC since 2006. The January earthquake in Haiti stepped up his work with Haitian and other immigrants throughout South Florida. The disaster finally brought Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Haitians. Paul-Andre explains the situation here:

**Q: Can you describe the Haitian immigrant community in Florida?**

**A:** About 350,000 Haitians live in South Florida, more than 40 percent of whom are naturalized citizens. Because many work in construction and the service industries, the economic downturn has hurt them badly. Ten years ago, their median household income was \$28,000, but it dropped to \$10,000 in 2008.

**Q: What are remittances and how do they help Haitians in their country?**

**A:** No matter what their income, Haitian immigrants send home payments called remittances that have sustained life for literally millions of families in Haiti, where the jobless rate is about 70 percent. Those families use the money for day-to-day expenses such as rent and food, and to pay school fees. Haitians in the U.S. send an average \$100 million back to Haiti monthly.

**Q. Three days after the Jan. 12 earthquake, the INS granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to undocumented Haitians living in the U.S. What does TPS mean for them?**

**A:** This welcome and overdue change has meant less stress and fear. For the

first time, after five, ten, even twenty years, these people have a transitory legal status which means they can work openly, pay bills, and easily send money to Haiti.

**Q. How has AFSC worked with Haitian immigrants in the past and how did you incorporate TPS into the program?**

**A:** We've focused on educating them about their rights, tapping into a large network of pastors in different cities. Staff conducted community meetings and started a weekly radio show in Creole. We taught peace and reconciliation programs not only in Miami, Homestead, and Fort Lauderdale, but in other South Florida communities such as Fort Myers, Naples, and Immokalee.

In 2008, following a series of devastating cyclones, AFSC incorporated TPS information into our outreach. We formed a coalition including an attorney, a Catholic priest, a member of the Haitian media, and community activists, to press the U.S. to offer TPS to Haitian immigrants.

**Q. How much of your time these days is spent on TPS?**

**A:** At least 50 percent of our staff time is spent on TPS. On a recent day, 25 out of 30 walk-ins to the AFSC office were people in need of TPS assistance. Staff are working at full capacity. For example, our paralegal, Marie Jean, volunteers whenever the City of Miami and the local lawyers association give free TPS advice and help completing applications. We have trained volun-



**Paul-Andre Mondesir has a weekly radio program in Creole for the Haitian immigrant community in South Florida.**

teers, and we've enlisted prominent Haitians such as attorney Ralph Francois, who made presentations at two community meetings in Immokalee.

**Q. Is there anything you'd like to add about the current situation for Haitians in Florida?**

**A:** One important challenge for AFSC has been the extensive exploitation of Haitians filing for TPS. Unscrupulous people have required payments from \$250–350 to do the paperwork. I even heard about one immigrant in Naples who paid \$1,800. But thanks to AFSC and our diligent efforts, the word is getting out. Voluntary help is available; take advantage of it!

# Understanding Haiti

How much do you really know about Haiti? Since the earthquake, media coverage of Haiti has grown dramatically, but it has focused largely on the crisis and outside relief efforts. To help put recent events in a larger context, here are some suggestions for exploring Haiti's history, culture, and people.

**For an introduction and overview, these sites provide quick, accessible information:**

**Country Profile: Haiti – BBC**  
[www.tinyurl.com/haiti-profile](http://www.tinyurl.com/haiti-profile)

**Timeline: Haiti – BBC**  
[www.tinyurl.com/haiti-timeline](http://www.tinyurl.com/haiti-timeline)

**For a deeper understanding of Haiti's complex realities, here are book suggestions:**

## **Haiti: The Breached Citadel**

by Patrick Bellegarde Smith

The study gives a Haitian's perspective on Haiti—and on wider Caribbean and global concerns.

[www.tinyurl.com/haiti-citadel](http://www.tinyurl.com/haiti-citadel)

## **The Uses of Haiti**

by Paul Farmer

A classic study of Haiti's history and the U.S. role in its fate.

[www.tinyurl.com/usesofhaiti](http://www.tinyurl.com/usesofhaiti)

## **Anacaona: Golden Flower, Haiti, 1490; The Farming of Bones; The Dew Breaker; Krik? Krak?; and other books**

by Haitian author Edwidge Danticat

The collection lovingly brings to life the history, hopes, and human experiences of Haitians.

[www.tinyurl.com/danticat](http://www.tinyurl.com/danticat)

## **Mountains Beyond Mountains**

by Tracy Kidder

The Pulitzer Prize-winning story of Paul Farmer's mission to improve healthcare in Haiti and other impoverished countries.

[www.tinyurl.com/haiti-mountains](http://www.tinyurl.com/haiti-mountains)

## **Teaching about Haiti**

A free online guide from Teaching for Change is valuable for classroom teachers or anyone interested in a thorough exploration of Haiti.

[www.tinyurl.com/haiti-teaching](http://www.tinyurl.com/haiti-teaching)

**These videos illustrate key elements in Haitian history and culture:**

## **Égalité for All: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian Revolution (2009)**

A film documentary of Haiti's successful slave insurrection.

[www.tinyurl.com/haiti-revolution](http://www.tinyurl.com/haiti-revolution)

## **Divine Horsemen:**

### **The Living Gods of Haiti (1985)**

This documentary presents Maya Deren's footage from the late 40s and early 50s vividly capturing Haitian voodoo dances and rituals.

[www.tinyurl.com/haiti-horsemen](http://www.tinyurl.com/haiti-horsemen)

**For analysis of the current crisis, the international response, and Haiti's capacity to rebuild, check out these resources:**

## **Frontline: The Quake**

A powerful PBS report on the scope of the devastation and new approaches needed to make aid more effective. The site also has links to NPR stories and an impressive Haiti resource guide. [www.tinyurl.com/haiti-quake-pbs](http://www.tinyurl.com/haiti-quake-pbs)



Photo: Handicap International

## **Haiti—The Politics of Rebuilding**

This video report from Avi Lewis of Al-Jazeera, featured on Democracy Now!, examines the promises and pitfalls of rebuilding Haiti.

[www.tinyurl.com/haiti-rebuilding](http://www.tinyurl.com/haiti-rebuilding)

## **Haiti's Excluded**

Reed Lindsay's article in *The Nation* magazine takes on aid organizations for too-often bypassing Haiti's capable community leaders and organizations.

[www.tinyurl.com/haiti-excluded](http://www.tinyurl.com/haiti-excluded)

## **What You're Not Hearing about Haiti (But Should Be)**

The article from *CommonDreams.org* examines the U.S.-sponsored neo-liberal economic policies that led Haiti into ruins.

[www.tinyurl.com/haiti-hearing](http://www.tinyurl.com/haiti-hearing)



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**Summer 2010  
Volume 91, Number 2**

## Peggy & Allan Brick: Sixty-year Supporters and Going Strong!

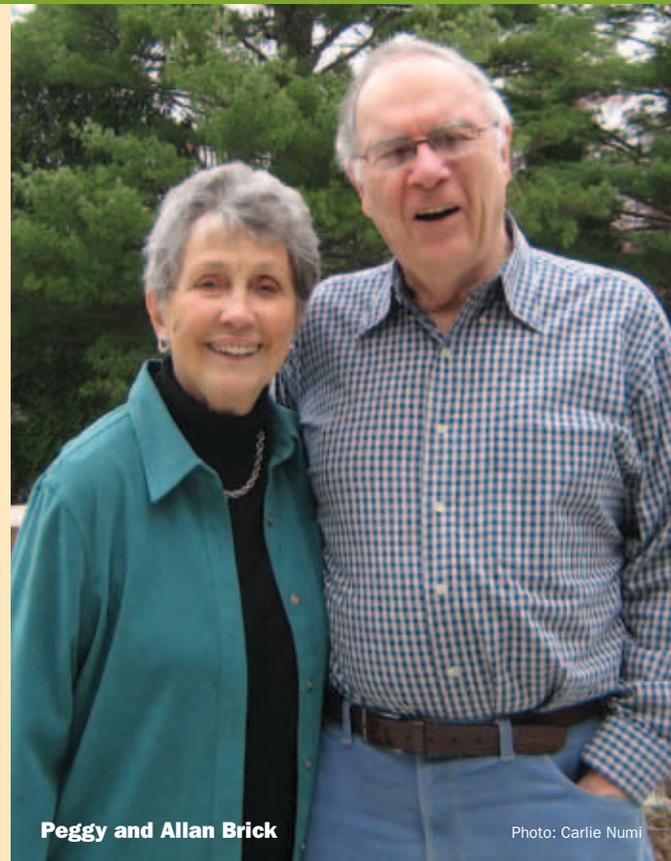
**The Bricks and AFSC go back a long way!** Notably, they helped open the Middle Atlantic Region Office in Baltimore where Allan served as Peace Secretary. Even when they pursued other peace paths through the Fellowship of Reconciliation, they counted on the Service Committee for information and joint projects.

Now residents of a Quaker continuing care retirement community, the Bricks remain vigorous and active. And they are pleased they could support AFSC with a planned gift: a charitable gift annuity.

In this way, they know their principles will live on in AFSC's programs. As Peggy is quick to say, "We are AFSC Quakers. We believe that the essence of our faith is to put beliefs into ACTION in the community and the world. Besides, an annuity makes terrific financial sense!"

**You can join the Bricks through gift and estate planning. Please contact the AFSC Gift Planning Office in Philadelphia toll-free at 888-588-2372, ext. 3, or visit our website at:**

**[www.afsc.org/giftplanning](http://www.afsc.org/giftplanning)**



**Peggy and Allan Brick**

Photo: Carlie Numi

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Published by the  
American Friends  
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**Who we are**  
The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that includes people of various faiths who are committed to social justice, peace, and humanitarian service. Its work is based on the belief in the worth of every person and faith in the power of love to overcome violence and injustice.

**Editor:** M'Annette Ruddell  
**Contributing Editors:** Tony Heriza, Alexis Moore  
**Design:** David Gerratt/NonprofitDesign.com  
**Photography:** AFSC unless noted otherwise  
**E-mail address:** [quakeraction@afsc.org](mailto:quakeraction@afsc.org)

Printed on recycled paper

- National Office**  
1501 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102-1403 Tel: (215) 241-7000
- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Middle Atlantic Region</b><br>4806 York Road<br>Baltimore, MD 21212      | <b>Southeast Region</b><br>189A Sams Street<br>Decatur, GA 30030                        | <b>NY Metropolitan Region</b><br>15 Rutherford Place<br>New York, NY 10003   |
| <b>New England Region</b><br>2161 Massachusetts Ave.<br>Cambridge, MA 02140 | <b>Central Region</b><br>4211 Grand Avenue<br>Des Moines, IA 50312                      | <b>Pacific Mountain Region</b><br>65 Ninth Street<br>San Francisco, CA 94103 |
| <b>Great Lakes Region</b><br>637 S. Dearborn, 3rd Flr<br>Chicago, IL 60605  | <b>Pacific Southwest Region</b><br>634 S Spring St., 3rd Floor<br>Los Angeles, CA 90014 | <b>Pacific Northwest Region</b><br>814 NE 40th Street<br>Seattle, WA 98105   |