

Countries of Africa

Togo-Tiny Country Ready for Change

BY RON WEBER

In front of a Portland restaurant is a sign bearing the name, "Togo's Eatery." Although there is no connection, "Togo" is also a Western African Nation. While the local restaurant serves up great submarine sandwiches, the five million people in Togo, one of Africa's smallest countries, surely survive on a different menu.

The average annual income for an entire Togo family (\$270) would only buy a few dozen of the local eatery's fine sandwiches. Dire poverty in this country is obviously a key issue.

While French is considered Togo's official language, the most commonly spoken language is Ewe. French is more prominent in the capitol city of Lome. It is the only large city in the country. While Togo's mere 40 miles of ocean shores may seem incidental, it is pivotal to the country's economy.

Free access to the Atlantic is only enjoyed by about two thirds of African nations. Besides the coastal fishing and tourist industries, Togo's chief gross national product includes agriculture (cacao, cassava, coffee, corn, cotton, millet, palm kernels and oil, peanuts, sorghum, yams) and mining.

The majority of Togo's African inhabitants are sustenance farmers, growing only enough to feed their families. Many people of European background are business owners, vacationers or government officials. Nearly three quarters of children attend primary school. Only about 20 percent go on to secondary school. The University of Benin in Lome is the country's

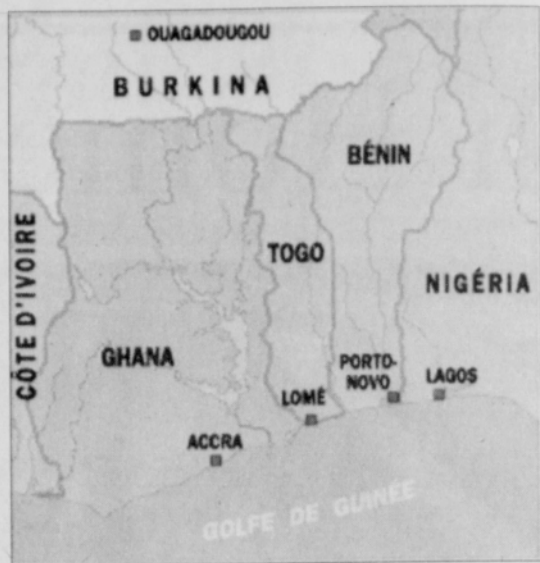
only college. Severe poverty in most regions prohibits families from sending their children on to higher education.

While land is extremely scarce, the climate is also hot and humid. Thus, harvests are small and income is low. Although some citizens group their farms together to enhance financial growth potential, many families still go it alone or survive under a sharecropping system, with European landlords.

In recent years, angry mobs have driven white farmers out. Traditionally over the last several centuries, wealthy Europeans took large parcels of good workable land, leaving only rocky dry soil for Africans. Frustrated and poverty stricken black farmers are now forcing changes.

Like most African countries Togo suffered oppression under European rule for more than 300 hundred years. It won its independence in 1960. Today, this country is a republic and the people vote for their own leaders. With more than 21 different ethnic groups in a country slightly smaller than the state of West Virginia, this can sometimes be a real challenge. The country still suffers from a lot of internal strife between these many ethnic groups.

Most of Togo's citizens are black



and more than two thirds of the population practices local traditional African religions. Muslim and Christian religions account for only about one third of the church-going population. European influence is seen mostly in the south, near Lome, where most of the country's nearly one million Christians are generally Catholic. Togo's one quarter of a million Muslims mostly live in the North.

Recently, Gnassingbe Eyadema, considered Africa's longest ruler died, and his post was temporarily given to his son. This spring a vote by the people of Togo will decide whether Eyadema's son or someone new will become the official leader. Many Africans feel this will be a good time for change.

During Eyadema's rule, brutality marked much of his time in power. Amnesty International has accused Eyadema and his followers of using excessive force to break up protests against his tyranny.

Honoring Fallen Soldiers and Citizens

continued from A5

Although visiting the boots is usually a solemn experience, Segall said that this is just the point.

"It really has helped us reconnect with the grief that is very easy to be removed from," she said. "We don't see the fighting and carnage day to day. We don't see what it's

like to have your child go over to Iraq as an idealistic young person and die or come back traumatized in body and spirit. We're removed from it. It often times takes something that's visual that you can see and touch and move and I certainly felt that reaction myself when I saw the exhibit."

The exhibit has plans to con-

tinue growing as the death tolls rise and has stopped in more than 40 cities since January of this year, including Chicago, Boston, New York, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Austin and Atlanta.

The exhibit is free from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church at 1838 SW Jefferson Street on April 6 and 7.

Arts Scene Flourishes on Alberta

continued from Front

Guardino said that events like Last Thursday have also made Alberta Street feel like a safe place to relax and enjoy the view.

"The neighbors are really glad that we're here because they remember what it was like eight years ago when it was uncomfortable on the street," Guardino said. "I see a lot of families and children. I see a lot of people from out of the area who are coming ooh and ahh."

Diversity wanted

The atmosphere is a bit different from the rest of the area surrounding it, having been renovated a little less than a decade ago. Between Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd and 33rd Streets, boarded up buildings were rented, painted and given a facelift.

While the atmosphere is diverse, African American residents who still live in the area will sometimes walk around the neighborhood as though it's become another planet.

"I would love to see more black owned businesses. What's happening is a purely financial issue," Guardino said. "The buildings that were finally left were buildings that they had to put an enormous amount of money into."

Allan Oliver, owner of Onda Arte Latina and co-founder and president of Art on Alberta, said that a well-rounded ethnic representation is something the street has always been plugged into.

"We have always been very conscious about desiring and keeping that kind of diversity," Oliver



A colorful mural on the wall of Bohio Studios makes Alberta Street eye-catching.

said. "There's a lot of presence of Hispanic businesses and various businesses that are owned by African Americans like the Portland Arts Pavilion, Annie Maes, House of Umoja, and The Black United. They're very important to the quality of the street. There are also quite a few women-owned and gay-owned businesses."

According to their mission statement, "Arts on Alberta was made to enrich the cultural life of the corridor."

"It is one of the things that traditionally, in neighborhoods where there are urban problems, there's been an area where artists have been able to drive a new vision of the community, to set their sites higher and to elevate new goals," Oliver said. "We thought it was important to have a non-profit on the promotion of art and making it part of the community."

Oliver said that the growth of the community has not been exponential

and that there have been struggles made by small businesses, but that keeping corporate presence out is one of the most important ideals.

"It's been something that a lot of people have dedicated energy and creativity to make it a more interesting dynamic here," Oliver said. "(Art) adds an aspect of life that is very important to the emotional and spiritual quality of people's lives. It has a transcendent kind of power."

For those not featured in galleries, Oliver said Last Thursday is "a free enterprise. It's for people that have arts but can't afford a physical location. It's something that creates a kind of free like. People like seeing alternate things happening."

Art on Alberta is also looking forward to the Art Hop on Saturday, May 14, which will feature a parade, art, music, dance and theater. The Alberta Street Fair generally takes place in the fall and showcases three performances stages, a variety of food and merchant booths, and children's activities. The organization is also looking into beginning a kinetic sculpture contest and race.

For more information on volunteering for Arts on Alberta during these events, visit www.artonalberta.org.

Dear Deanna!

My mother doesn't trust me and my feelings are hurt. I have to stay home all the time. I'm not allowed to go to parties, the mall or my friend's house. My mom always things I'm going to do something. I feel this is really wrong. Why does she act like this? --Jasmine, Toledo, Ohio

Dear Jasmine:

There are two sides to every story and you only told your mom's side. She's strict because you probably did something bad that made her less trusting. Enjoy your youth because you'll have time to rip and run when you're older. Be thankful for a caring mother that gives tough love because she's preventing teen pregnancy, keeping you off drugs and out of jail. Do what's right and earn your mom's trust with your actions.

Dear Deanna!

I left my boyfriend because he's verbally abusive and was mean



Real People, Real Advice

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to me while pregnant with our daughter. Before getting to this point, I admit that I called him names, withheld sex and slept in the other room. After I left, he said he realized how much he hurt me and wants to work things out. Although I didn't feel emotions when I was leaving, I realize I love him and want to go

back. He's in counseling but I want to know if he can really change and be a real man to me and my daughter. --Anonymous, Queens, New York

Dear Anonymous:

Lose the guilt about leaving with the baby. You had to do what's safe for you and the child. I'm sure you love each other, but if he really wants to change, he needs to make some wedding bells ring and become a real father. You played a part in this and also need counseling so both of you will be balanced. Actions speak louder than words and time and circumstances will tell if either one of you had changed and can make things work.

Ask Deanna is written by Deanna M. Write Ask Deanna! Email: askdeanna1@yahoo.com or 264 S. LaCienega Blvd. Suite 1283 Beverly Hills, CA 90211. Website: www.askdeanna.com

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I-5 Delta Park to Lombard Widening Project

Project Open House April 5th 4:00pm-8:00pm	Meetings are held at: OAME 4134 N Vancouver Portland, OR (Bus #40 services this area)	Environmental Justice Focus Group April 6th 5:30pm-8:00pm
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Please come to either meeting, learn about the following topics and give your input...

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For more information, please contact:
Kate Deane, ODOT
(503) 731-8245
Kate.h.deane@odot.state.or.us

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