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*Nearly 400 Qing Dynasty courtyards
await restoration in Pingyao, China.
Courtesy of the Global Heritage Fund*



Building a future on ancient sites

by Christine Karavas and Arden Pennell

Palo Alto nonprofit Global Heritage Fund combines economic development with historic preservation around the world

When the Olympic torch passed through the Chinese province of Shanxi in June, only one foreigner carried the flame — Jeff Morgan, founder of the Palo Alto-based Global Heritage Fund.

“Everyone there is just very proud,” Morgan said. “This is a big deal. It’s a real honor for the whole country. There’s an amazing energy in China for this event.”

Morgan was chosen to bear the torch for his efforts to preserve and restore the ancient city of Pingyao, once a famous center of Chinese banking. Located 444 miles southwest of Beijing, the city of roughly half a million citizens has declined since the advent of communism, he said.

But its intact 14th-century city walls and historic architecture, recognized as a World Heritage site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), provide a glimpse into five centuries of cultural, social, economic and religious development, according to the nonprofit.

A small tourist industry has grown up around the ancient city, but Morgan and the fund are working to further restore ancient structures and build more sustainable tourism.

By doing so in Pingyao and at dozens of other historic sites around the world, the Global Heritage Fund leaders are trying to ensure that economic prosperity will take hold in those communities, replacing poverty.

The Chinese government recognized Morgan’s efforts by inviting him to run with the torch through Pingyao on June 25, with a 50-yard dash along the top of the city’s historic wall.

“I think what was really nice was that the mayor placed my segment on top of the ancient wall, and then I came down the stairs,” Morgan said. “Having the chance to be on the wall and identify with the heritage and everything else was really nice.”

As he ran the torch, people cheered, “Beijing jiyayou,” which Morgan said roughly translates to “Go for it!” In addition to Global Heritage Fund conservation members based in China, Morgan’s wife and three children were among the crowds of supporters.

“It couldn’t be better [than] to have your kids screaming and taking pictures,” Morgan said. “It was so fun to watch them. ... And they came back and one of the things they said was, ‘I can’t believe how lucky we are to live in the United States.’”

Running the torch came as a surprise, according to Morgan.

“I didn’t find out until they sent me a letter asking for my shoe size and shirt size,” he said. “And then the list was published on the Internet by each Olympic Committee. And that’s when I saw my name, and it was the only foreign name on there.”

The red-and-white torch now sits in Morgan’s office, a reminder of his participation.

“It just seems like a long time ago,” Morgan

said. “I’m looking forward to watching the Olympics.”

Born and raised in Palo Alto, Morgan graduated from Palo Alto High School in 1980. The son of Jim Morgan, Applied Materials board chairman, and Becky Morgan, former California State senator, he attended Cornell University, where he got a degree in city and regional planning. He then went to Stanford University and earned a master’s degree in management from the Graduate School of Business. Before the Global Heritage Fund, Morgan worked for Hewlett-Packard Co. and Sun Microsystems, as vice president of marketing and vice president of business development respectively. He now lives in Portola Valley.

Morgan began thinking about making the switch from business to the nonprofit world after spending a weekend at Catalina Island’s Santa Cruz Island Nature Conservancy Refuge with friend and then-director Steve McCormick.

McCormick encouraged him to pursue conservation, and Morgan felt a long-dormant interest awakening in cities and societies, first developed when he studied planning as an undergraduate.

Morgan then met Ian Hodder, the chairman of Stanford University’s archaeology department, and the idea for a nonprofit began to come together. Morgan was impressed with Hodder’s focus on long-term sustainability of archaeological sites. Together, they built an advisory board and wrote the charter for the new nonprofit — the Global Heritage Fund.

Located on Emerson Street, the group’s goal is to help Third World economies preserve their local, historical gems — while building responsible, thriving tourist industries, Morgan said.

Too often, heritage is thrown aside as modernity marches on, he said. “These sites are being destroyed left and right, especially in Asia where there’s been a lot of growth, so they just wipe them out” to build cinderblock apartment complexes.

Or, villagers don’t know the gold mine alongside them, he said. They take stones from an ancient, crumbling temple to build their homes — never realizing the potential in their backyards.

“A lot of them just don’t realize that their grandkids could be making thousands of dollars on this type of thing,” Morgan said.

Both development and ignorance lead to missed opportunities to uncover, preserve and

(continued on next page)



Courtesy of the Global Heritage Fund



Courtesy of the Global Heritage Fund

Top: Authentically restored ancient courtyards from the Qing Dynasty, such as this one, lay at the center of a conservation plan for the Chinese city of Pingyao.

Above: The well-preserved “market tower” is one of many sights that draw 1 million tourists to the ancient city of Pingyao, China, each year.



Jeff Morgan, founder of the Palo Alto-based Global Heritage Fund, runs the Olympic torch in June in Pingyao. He was the only foreigner selected for the Chinese segment of the relay.

Building a future

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market local treasures, he said.

Tourists flocking to the ancient temple of Angkor Wat now power the Cambodian economy, while the abandoned Incan city of Machu Picchu is Peru's largest source of income, he said.

"If you take advantage of one of these sites and develop it responsibly, you're going to be bringing thousands of people out of poverty," he said.

But if done improperly, tourist industries can ravage — or simply ignore — local villages and towns, he said.

Winning a UNESCO World Heritage designation can spark an influx of unexpected guests and wreak havoc on a local economy when cities don't have proper tourist facilities. Gaudy hotels built by outside investors can mar the landscape, ruining the charm that attracted visitors in the first place.

Or, as has happened in Cambodia, major national businesses can co-opt the tourist trade — leaving the province wherein lies Angkor Wat the country's third poorest, Morgan said.

The Global Heritage Fund, in contrast, helps cities plan the preservation of historical sites while managing tourism responsibly, so neither sites nor cities are left trampled by the influx of interest.



The Global Heritage Fund's Jeff Morgan signs a five-year conservation partnership with officials in Pingyao.

The job marries Morgan's business acumen with his love of conservation and travel, he said. His fluency in Spanish, Chinese and Japanese don't hurt, he added.

Since launching the Global Heritage Fund in 2002, he and his team have identified 40 sites for planning, conservation, training and community development. There are, or will be, sites in China, Guatemala, India, Iraq,

Libya, Pakistan, Peru, Russia, Turkey and Vietnam. The long-term goal is to invest \$20 million over the next 10 years. Currently, the team is at work at 12 sites, including Pingyao, where Morgan said he plans to invest \$1.5 million in total.

"We try to set up a financial trust that's sustainable, and more money keeps going into it to keep things going," Morgan said.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Pingyao was a major banking city along China's Silk Road. The ancient, walled city — beyond which modern developments stretch to the Northwest — contains more than 4,000 Ming- and Qing-era courtyard buildings (some dating back nearly 700 years), as well as temples, towers, palaces, banks and ancient residences, according to Morgan.

The courtyards are made of stone, wood and brick, ornately decorated with carvings and



A Global Heritage Fund group, including representatives from the U.S. National Park Service, UNESCO Guatemala, Quebec and Canada, visits Pingyao in 2007.

tile.

"They're just these amazing buildings," Morgan said.

But when the communists took power, courtyards that formerly housed one family were filled with six families each, and historical preservation was put on a back burner, he said.

"It's one of the poorest places in China," Morgan said. "It's a coal-mining region in China. It had a wall around it, and it was a poor place in the middle of nowhere."

It is "only one or two" of the places in China where people can still see preserved Qing courtyards, he said.

A super-highway now connects Pingyao to surrounding cities, and an estimated 1 million people visit the city per year.

But their visits create pollution alongside tourist profits, Morgan said.

"Right now, the average stay is four hours," Morgan said. "They come in on a bus, and they leave. They maybe eat and throw away their garbage and go to the restroom. That costs money for the town. ... This region is getting destroyed."

Terry Quan, the nonprofit's chief of operations, said the group is working with local officials to create a master conservation plan.

One of Morgan's goals in Pingyao is to encourage visitors to stay longer — rather than just passing through with a meal and bathroom break. The Global Heritage Fund engaged U.S. National Parks Service staff to provide guidance on visitor services, historic preservation, park management and site interpretation, according to the nonprofit. In addition, the Fund's staff is researching traditional arts and crafts methods — such as stone, wood and brick carving, paper cutting, calligraphy and more — to encourage the revival of artisan enclaves and cultural events in Pingyao.

The group is hoping to find some older citizens who still remember traditional artisan techniques. Now, a few trades such as lacquerware and cotton shoemaking dominate the courtyard industries, but the group suspects the diversity of businesses was much greater in earlier decades, Quan said.

Tourists currently head to a few main spots in town that can be seen in an afternoon, such as a bank tower and famous, monolithic city wall, Quan said. A "heritage route" along a series of restored courtyards — filled with artisan wares as well as potential workshops for tourists —



The 14th Century City Walls of Pingyao were well cared for until about a hundred years ago according to the Global Heritage Fund's Jeff Morgan.

would encourage longer stays, he said.

Another way to transform stop-and-go visits into longer stops is to market Pingyao as a place to stay while visiting other nearby sites, according to Morgan.

At the end of the project, Pingyao residents





Public domain photo/Peellden

Then, it is up to Pingyao to reap the benefits, he said. Those include both money from longer-term stays and the cultural delights of crafts and preserved historic sites, he said.

Nearly 400 donors, most based near Palo Alto, support the Global Heritage Fund, which currently has a budget of \$4.2 million. The board is working to increase the budget to about \$8 million within the next five years, according to Morgan.

“Local people really give us the fuel to accomplish the mission and do 12 projects at the same time,” Morgan said. “I think heritage conservation is fairly new on an international level. ... Some smaller people have been doing it for a while, but in terms of people’s minds, it’s pretty new.”

“We really want to, I think, emphasize the importance of these sites in the world and in the big picture,” he continued. “Also, the sites are nonrenewable. A forest can grow back, but sites can’t. Once they’re gone, they’re gone forever. And we’re losing them on our watch right now.” ■

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On the cover:
A street in the Old Town section of Pingyao, China. Public domain photo/Benzh.

should be able to manage and control their own preservation and tourism, he said.

“We’re trying to get the local business people to be the owners of the site. ... We fund capacity-building, training and planning and help them on initial conservation work.”



Courtesy of the Global Heritage Fund

Tourists and locals stroll the main street of Pingyao. The Global Heritage Fund hopes to revive artisan complexes where tourists can view traditional craftspeople at work.



Courtesy of the Global Heritage Fund

Ornate tiles, carvings, lanterns and banners decorate the restored courtyards in Pingyao, China.



Courtesy of the Global Heritage Fund

Hundreds of courtyards are dilapidated due to neglect, improper restoration and encroachment.