



Building Blocks

Investment analyst Aram Sethian gives back to AGBU to build a sense of community essential for advancement

ONE SWELTERING EVENING last July, Aram Sethian found himself standing in front of a group of wide-eyed Armenian university students at the AGBU Central Office in New York. Bursting with ambition and enthusiasm, the students sat engrossed, listening intently to Sethian's story of success in the investment world and his words of gratitude to AGBU for having set him down the right path. Each year, Sethian offers his time and expertise to make sure that students have

a head start in their professional lives after graduation.

For Sethian, AGBU has always been a family affair. Born in Los Angeles, he grew up on his parents' joyful and harrowing stories about their native Baghdad. From 1921 to 1958, Iraq was ruled by a monarchy that brought stability to the country, including to the tens of thousands of Armenians who made it their home in the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide. After the king was

deposed, Iraq was subjected to one coup d'état after the next and the Iraqi people suffered over a decade of political and social turmoil at the hands of constantly changing regimes.

During these precarious times, AGBU was a true refuge from the chaos for Sethian's family. "Although political involvement was not tolerated, the mere act of organizing was risky and the state was growing increasingly suspicious of group activity, AGBU survived and



Aram Sethian at the Water Street offices of Vazirani Asset Management in New York.

ing, week-long backpacking trips and overnight survival exercises in state and national parks with just a pocket knife and a pack of matches. “The scouts gave us a place to grow up. We learned how to tie knots, survive in the wilderness and fend off bears—all key skills for Wall Street,” he joked. “But in all seriousness, I saw through the scouting program how powerful it is to build community, because so much of it is preserved long after we’re gone.”

After high school, Sethian left the cocoon of AGBU Pasadena to study economics at the University of California, Berkeley, but returned to Los Angeles four years later to attend Loyola Law School. In the summer after his first year of law school, Sethian took part in a program that would

program as a supervisor to new interns. For the past five summers, he has taken great pride in being a mentor and supervisor to interns with an interest in investment and finance, guiding them as they take their first steps in the working world.

“Anyone who knows me knows that I have a soft spot for NYSIP. It’s exactly what the diaspora Armenian community needs to advance. AGBU does a great job of bringing together some of our most impressive youth for this program. Every summer, students from many different cultures and disciplines come together, but they all share the same ambition: to find their niche in a hyper-competitive world.”

Sethian sees his work with NYSIP as a way of giving back to the Armenian community that has given him so much and as a way of fostering a spirit of generosity that he hopes will guide the interns in the future: “It wasn’t that long ago that I was a NYSIP intern myself. In tribute to the people who opened the door to my genera-

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learned how to take care of its own. Despite it all, the chapter maintained cohesion through a strong cultural program, particularly in music and the arts. “My father was the conductor of the chapter’s musical ensemble, my aunts were in the dance group and my grandparents were on the chapter board. AGBU played a huge role in their lives.”

By the 1970s, however, the volatility of the country became too much for Sethian’s parents to endure and they decided to move to California to start their family. They were welcomed into the AGBU Pasadena chapter, which was composed largely of new immigrants who had also fled the hostility in the Middle East and strove to replicate the wide array of programs they had enjoyed in the region in their new communities.

One of these programs was the AGBU Scouts. As a child, Sethian would set out with the AGBU Pasadena Scouts on gruel-

come to have a profound impact on him to this day: the AGBU New York Summer Internship Program (NYSIP).

Since 1987, NYSIP has brought Armenian university students from around the world to New York for a stimulating summer of professional development. “In the summer of 2009, I seized an opportunity to intern at March Partners, a hedge fund managed by former AGBU Central Board member M. Michael Ansour. I was certainly a little wet behind the ears, but the team sensed my eagerness and essentially gave me the tools I needed to succeed on Wall Street; they pushed me to build a foundation that has carried me through the rest of my career.” After graduation, Sethian was offered a position at the firm and has been in the world of New York investment ever since, first at March Partners and now, for the past four years, at Quad Group.

Sethian’s transformational NYSIP summer led him to continue serving the pro-

tion, I am here to hold that door open for the next generation. Hopefully one day they will be in the position to do the same.”

For Sethian, AGBU is at the heart of advancing the Armenian community worldwide: “The privilege of being in the AGBU community is a gift, but it is not ours to keep. We’re all here to put our time and effort into strengthening the next generation, but it is with the implicit understanding that they will put our work to shame when their time comes,” he emphasizes. “Every successive generation has more resources and opportunities than the previous one, and that comes with the responsibility to accomplish even more. With the incredible agility of an organization like AGBU, we can have both a global impact as donors and a local impact as volunteers. My grandparents did it in Baghdad 60 years ago, and I am honored to carry on their legacy in New York today.” 🌟