



Christine Estrada

By Cathy Von Kintzel

From her days growing up in Honduras, to her studies in Nova Scotia and now her work in Montreal, Christine Estrada is seeing the world through enlightened eyes.

Estrada is a program assistant at the United Nations Secretariat Convention on Biological Diversity, headquartered in Montreal.

“It’s an exciting time for the convention, with the adoption of the new Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing of Genetic Resources,” says Estrada.

The 29-year-old Saint Mary’s graduate was in Japan for the Protocol’s adoption in October 2010. She was there serving the 10th Conference of Parties to the Convention.

“There is plenty of work to be done, and it heralds a big step in the environmental movement.”

The Nagoya Protocol is an international agreement aimed at fairly and equitably sharing the benefits from the use of the world’s genetic resources. That is one of the main objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which is an international treaty to sustain the diversity of life on Earth.

“It’s very exciting to sit with ministers of environment, all gathered in a room, and witness decisions made that will affect millions of lives, as well as the state of the environment,” Estrada says. She saw a willingness on the part of countries to step up and set ambitious, yet hopefully achievable, targets.

The United Nations General Assembly has also declared 2011-2020 as the UN Decade on Biodiversity.

As one of three program assistants to the executive secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Estrada’s work includes organizing events and serving as co-ordinator for various projects and activities. These include the Consortium of Scientific Partners and the Consortium of Universities, and assisting the Donor Task Force.

While in Japan last fall, Estrada was responsible for organizing the second edition of the Global Private Donor Forum. This side event gathered prominent figures including actor/activist Harrison Ford, Monique Barbut from the Global Environment Facility and

“There are so many rewards at so many levels,” Estrada says of her work.

“The global spectrum of my job has definitely sharpened my diplomatic and communication skills . . . especially working in a multicultural setting.

“I feel a great fulfilment working for an environmental cause, which aims for the conservation and preservation of our fragile environment.”

Other aspects of her job include representing the executive secretary at official events, meetings and

Diverse Interests

James Gibbons from Discovery Channel Asia. The project highlighted the importance of private-sector involvement in conservation efforts.

Born and raised in Tegucigalpa, Estrada received her Master’s from Saint Mary’s International Development Studies program in 2008.

“My experience at (Saint Mary’s) was my first experience abroad, so it was a combination of cultural shock, forced adaptation and, ultimately, a moment of self-definition,” she says.

“Although it was challenging at first, those two years quickly turned into an amazing adventure that opened up the world for me. I met amazing people from all over the world, and it solidified my professional and personal aspirations.”

Estrada’s work takes her to exciting places. She also travels on her own time, preferring adventure travel, such as backpacking to remote areas, particularly in the Middle East or Asia. This year, she’s thinking about exploring her beloved Central America.

hosting visiting delegates. She also prepares background documents, statements and research papers and works with other program officers on events, celebrations, documents and activities.

In her spare time, Estrada is a volunteer Latin dance instructor at the downtown YMCA in Montreal. She’s fluent in Spanish and English and is working on her French. She completed her first half-marathon last year and has a passion for the performing arts, music and photography.

Her home and her office reflect her passion for travel and art. At home in her bachelor apartment, she is surrounded by paintings, prints and souvenirs from her travels.

Estrada is not entirely sure about her future, as she claims to not be much of a planner. And working with an organization like the UN makes it very easy to move. She’s moved quite a bit in the past four to five years, including to Panama, where she carried out a diplomatic internship with a regional environmental organization.

“My objective in life is to try to live a full and content life.” □