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Vice President for Student Life Has Long-Time Ties to Liberia

Winthrop University

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Quick Facts

- Ardaiole's father was the manager of Pan American Airways in the 60s, helping run Robertsfield International Airport for the Liberian government.
- He last visited in 2005 as a United Nations international election monitor.
- Ardaiole will give a presentation--"Ebola in a Post-Conflict Nation: Liberia"--Nov. 12 at 8:15 p.m. in G01 Owens Hall.



ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA — The African country of Liberia has been all over the news recently due to the Ebola virus outbreak. But Liberia is more than just a news item. With a name meaning "land of the free," Liberia, the oldest independent country in Sub-Saharan Africa where many freed American slaves emigrated, has South Carolina ties and is still recovering from 14 years of a civil war that ripped it apart.

Winthrop University Vice President for Student Life Frank Ardaiole keeps a close watch on the country, and for good reason. He lived there from 1961-69 near the capital of Monrovia for eight years while his father was a manager with Pan American Airways helping run Robertsfield International Airport for the Liberian government.

Ardaiole will give a presentation--"Ebola in a Post-Conflict Nation: Liberia" Wednesday, Nov. 12 at 8:15 p.m. in G01 Owens Hall.

Ardaiole's time in Liberia led to him being the focus of a chapter in the just released **"The Medicine Man's Daughter: The Story of Dayou Tucker"** by Carolyn Noell. Dayou Tucker, the daughter of a Liberian medicine man, changed the lives of many people in a small church community in Charlotte, North Carolina, where she came as a child refugee from the Liberian civil war. Several years ago, Tucker had come across Ardaiole and his Liberian connection in a newspaper article. She and Ardaiole spoke in person about the country's condition and looked at photos he had taken on his 1998 visit to her home country. Ardaiole even reminded Tucker of the unique finger snapping Liberian handshake and other cultural customs.

Though the interview with Dayou was some 10 years ago, Ardaiole was completely shocked when the book recently arrived in the mail. He still recalls their talk and some of the things he told her about his time in Liberia.

"I attended the eighth grade in a one-room schoolhouse. I was at the top of the class, my brother at the bottom...because we were the only two students," he joked.

Ardaiole returned to the U.S. to attend high school and college, but visited Liberia again in the summers and at Christmas and Easter where his parents remained. His eventual doctorate from Indiana University included minors in African Studies and Political Science.

In one of his last visits in 1998, Ardaiole got to see his childhood home again and was dismayed at

the state of schools in the country as a result of the civil war—no books, and sometimes no roofs. He and Tom Powell, former dean of education at Winthrop, had returned hoping to help rehab Liberia’s elementary school system by working with Friends of Liberia, the largest advocacy group in the U.S. comprised mostly of returned Peace Corps Volunteers. These efforts ended when the civil war started up again shortly thereafter with the reign of Charles Taylor, and the country was left with no running water, no electricity, and complete devastation.

Ardaiolo’s last visit to Liberia was in 2005, when he served as a United Nations international election monitor. By this time he had become head of Friends of Liberia. This first fully free election brought a new person into the presidency, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who was subsequently awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011.

“Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was making great strides to rebuild the country,” Ardaiole said. “But there’s still no potable running water or central electricity. There was so much destruction that it is taking years to rebuild ... And then Ebola struck.”

These days, he listens to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention broadcasts, and television footage often shows Robertsfield, that his father helped manage and now where planes carrying Ebola relief supplies are landing —“a very eye-opening thing full of tragic nostalgia and so much current pathos.”

He also said the book indicated that Dayou Tucker passed away a few years ago, but she was able to return to Liberia once for a visit.

"The Medicine Man's Daughter" is [available online on Amazon.com](#).

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