Road to recovery

By CLAUDE SOULK

For many people, the road home is fraught with sadness. For Dr. Wafdi Halabi, an Iraqi native who today serves as Executive Director of the Stony Brook University School of Medicine, it has proven a remarkably different story.

Halabi, who left Iraq in 1992 at age 35 as the director general for the national institute for occupational safety and health in Baghdad, had returned to Iraq twice over the past year to help build three environmental centers that track and treat diseases as part of a one-year $2.5 million grant he obtained in October from the United States Agency for International Development, U.S. AID, which administers the United States' foreign aid program.

While Halabi is leading the healthcare initiative, he is not the only professor to attract funds from the program to help with environmental restoration.

Ezidkhan El-Bourz, a professor of anthro- pology, is using a $1.5 million grant to help Iraqis maintain preserves the country's heritage.

Even before he received the grant, El-Bourz traveled to Iraq in May 2003 with the National Geographic Society and the State Department to survey possible archeological sites.

Since then, he has led workshops to train Iraqi faculty and develop teaching and research facilities in archeology at the University of Baghdad and Mosul University.

In addition, the University of Oklahoma is helping rebuild the school's digital library and make it accessible to Iraqi scholars.

Among the other U.S. AID grant recipients, the University of Hawaii is helping revitalize agriculture, DePaul University near Chicago is helping revitalize the legal system, and the University of Oklahoma is assisting with administration and management.

The State University of New York's Center for International Development in Albany is one of five organizations in the country that received a portion of the $2.5 million grant to help return an additional $100 million to improve foreign aid and rebuilding in the end.}

Stony Brook professors bring expertise to war-torn Iraq

Noah Shammash, dean of Stony Brook's School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, said the university is providing much-needed help to set up the environmental centers:

"It was really an eye-opener for us to see how much has been done over there," said Shammash of the recent visit. "We conducted workshops to bring them up to speed. Some workshops were on how to create new laboratories.

"In order to be in terms of technology and facilities, the government did not invest in universities.

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LIMITING THE DAMAGE: Wafdi Halabi, a professor of preventive medicine at Stony Brook University School of Medicine, returned to Iraq twice over the past year to help build three environmental centers that track and treat diseases as part of a one-year $2.5 million grant.

While returning to Iraq is emotional for Halabi, he said leaving Iraq is a wrenching experience as well, all of good-byes to people he has known for years.

"We were aware that we were leaving Iraq in general," he said. "But like the rest of the population, they're poor, wretched, scared. They have no sense of normal living. They're just behind the rest of the world.

"I'm not a soldier. But I have a task to do," he said of the need to push ahead with environmental concerns. "Hopefully things will calm down. But regardless, we have to do our job."