

For Immediate Release

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## AGA adds Robert Weldon to Tucson Conference Line-up

The Accredited Gemologists Association has announced the addition of Robert Weldon to the list of presenters at the annual AGA Tucson conference, Wednesday, February 5 at the Marriot University Park hotel.

Weldon, who will be receiving this year's AGA Bonanno Award for Excellence in Gemology, is to discuss the ongoing project of educating artisanal miners of East Africa about the stones they recover. Through GIA funding and a contract with Pact, a Washington DC non-governmental development organization with offices in Tanzania, the program has put valuable information into the hands of the people whose livelihood depends on mining gemstones.



*Robert Weldon with an artisanal miner from Tunduru, Tanzania. Photo by Pedro Padua/GIA.*

Started over a decade ago through the inspiration of fellow Bonanno Award winner Dr. James Shigley, a GIA Distinguished Research Fellow, the program features a book with descriptive text in Swahili and numerous photographs of the gems being recovered. An inspection tray and instructions in cleaning and examination teaches the miners to recognize stone quality of their rough material. After the first class was presented to the Tanzanian Association of Women Miners, it has spread through Tanzania with the intent of reaching 10,000 miners across East African nations.

Weldon, Director of the Richard T. Liddicoat Gemological Library and Information Center at GIA, co-wrote the manual and with the GIA staff, has seen immediate results for the over 1000 miners already trained. Miners are now able to bargain better with their buyers and return more money to their families and communities. The social impact of the project has been enormous and exposure to the supply chain has opened up other opportunities for miners, such as gem cutting and jewelry manufacture.

The AGA conference is a day of gemological insights and discoveries, with Weldon being joined by presentations from Dr. Jeffrey Post, Dr. Laurent Cartier, Dr. Aaron Palke, Richard Hughes and workshops with Eric Fritz, Samantha Lloyd and Claire Scragg. The evening gala and presentation of the Bonanno Award is included with the conference registration and may also be purchased separately.

Conference registration includes continental breakfast, light lunch & the AGA Annual Gala & Dinner featuring great networking opportunities, music, dance floor & the presentation of the Antonio C. Bonanno Award for Excellence in Gemology to Robert Weldon. Early registration fees through January 28, 2020 provide substantial savings online at [www.accreditedgemologists.org](http://www.accreditedgemologists.org).