



ROSSMOOR NEWS

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Former Peace Corps volunteer still helps the poor in Kenya

By Cathy Tallyn Staff writer

Imagine being a 78-year-old single grandmother raising seven orphaned grandchildren, one of whom has special needs.

That's the life older Kenyan women face. A generation of men and women - their children - has just about been wiped out by AIDS.

That was the situation Bie Bostrom found during her two-year stint as a Peace Corps volunteer in the rice lands of Ahero, Kenya, not too far from Lake Victoria. Most of the houses are made of mud; the children play with dolls made of mud.

Bostrom looked into the faces of the children and their grandmothers and knew she had to help them.

Back home in Rossmoor, she founded the nonprofit Grandmothers Raising Grandchildren and started the informational website www.grgahero.org.

There are 50 grandmothers and 170 parent less grandchildren in the village that are being helped and more would like to be included.

Bostrom feels compelled to help these people. But, she said, "There's only so much you can do."

A professional photographer, Bostrom has recorded the faces of the grandmothers and their grandchildren for others to see and perhaps be motivated to help.

Bostrom had pondered whether to re-up with the Peace Corps. She decided instead to help Kenyans while based from her Rossmoor manor. In the three years since she's been back, she's raised more than \$20,000."

"I know it's only a drop in the bucket," she said, "but I've been pleased with what we've been able to do."

She's gotten donations to buy such things as chickens, goats, school uniforms, a laptop computer, portable stoves and large water pots. She even donated the money she made photographing a wedding.

All of the money raised is earmarked to be spent for specific things. Bostrom has made trips to Ahero to see for herself how the money has been spent and how the work is progressing.

She leaves Aug. 15 on her third trip back. She'll stay in the same small house she

lived in during her two years in the Peace Corps.

With the downturn in the economy and pleas for aid seeming to come from everywhere, it's hard to raise money for Kenyan grandmothers and their grandchildren, Bostrom said. But, she quickly added, "That doesn't stop me from trying."

She's sold baskets hand-woven by the grandmothers and clay figurines made by the grandchildren. It's important for the women to know they are helping themselves, Bostrom said. With the Internet, she has found a national and international market. A real estate lawyer bought 200 of the baskets to give as Christmas gifts.

Bostrom has had a table at Rossmoor flea markets. She brings with her display boards with a montage of her photos. She freely gives out business cards in the hope people will decide later to find out more information and perhaps help.

Rossmoor organizations such as the Lions Club, the Connection and the Ceramic Arts Club have all donated money or supplies.

Various residents serve on the nonprofit's board of directors. New members include Treasurer Elaine Neufeldt, a Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya between 1970 and 1973, and Claudia Tierney as well as Rae Ann Suter Mathews, the daughter of Bostrom's neighbor.

"Why do I do it," Bostrom said. "I see the faces of the grandmothers and they are so grateful."

Ahero means "I love" in Luo, the local language.