

Knowles starts libraries in Ghana

BY DOUG HARRISON
The Acton Tanner

Kathy Knowles has sent 8,000 books to Ghana in the last six years. With that, she has enriched the lives of thousands of Ghanaian children, helped them start up 17 libraries and even had one named after her.

She's presently working with a government representative in Ghana, offering to construct an 800 square-foot building that would act as a reading centre rather than a borrowing library.

It was a project that evolved while Knowles followed her husband, John, to Accra, Ghana on a two-year business venture, which they extended to four years.

She began handing out her own children's books to their neighbours who didn't have books to read in the country's capital of 1.2 million, because they didn't have access to the downtown library. Interest spread, so the Knowles' set up chairs and tables splattered with books once a week in the backyard of their home.

Their garage was then converted to a library twice a week and they also offered literacy classes.

"My own kids like reading, so I wanted to offer that to others," Knowles says from her Ospringe farm residence. "It was just a need. It's quite staggering how many books can be signed out from a library here compared to Ghana."

Ghanaian children, in their first five visits, are allowed to sign out one "old" book. If the books are cared for and returned on time, they could choose two old books. A child could borrow two books, including a new, much in demand



PUTTING SMILES ON FACES: Kathy Knowles shows off some pictures of delighted Ghanaian children holding their library books. She has sent 8,000 books to Ghana in the last six years.

hardcover such as *Curious George*, after 10 problem-free visits. After two months of caring for books, children could choose a new book.

Knowles, who visits Accra once a year, says a lot of kids are starting their own libraries, which include a basin for people to wash their hands before handling the books. As well as books, the would-be librarians need to take a three-week training course before running their own library.

"A lot of people do volunteer work in Canada and even though I'm putting in a lot of hours, I get much more back," Knowles admits, adding the locals are doing a great job maintaining the library.

"I'm working with people who are so dedicated to the cause. It's really exciting to me because it's

hands-on work and I'm meeting lots of people while doing it."

When she returned in 1993, Knowles purchased a shipping container for new and used books - books she obtains here through schools, churches and service clubs. However, she only sends books that are in good shape and will be enjoyed, since shipping costs are \$1 a book.

"I loved it there," says Knowles, who gave birth to Akosua (which means "girl born on a Sunday") while in Ghana. She mentions her other children - Kaitlan, 14, 11-year-old Sophie and Alastair, 9, enjoyed their early years attending an American school.

"The people are friendly and you felt welcome there. And the climate is warm."

Give the gift of life

The Red Cross is asking people to add the gift of life to their gift-giving list this holiday season. Giving blood is a generous way of sharing the holiday spirit and December is often a difficult time for the Red Cross to collect blood, during a time when people are kept busy with the holiday season.

The need for blood never takes a holiday. Each weekday 5,000 people must give blood for the Red Cross to meet the requirements of patients at Canadian hospitals.

There will be a blood donor clinic in Acton Thursday, Dec. 28 from 5 to 8:30 pm in the Legion Hall.

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