

SENIORS LIFESTYLES

Local couple launches humanitarian aid project

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Special to The IFF

A retired Georgetown pastor and his wife have launched a local humanitarian aid project mainly to help children in Liberia.

The country in West Africa is slowly recovering from years of destructive civil war and political instability and while English is the official language, dialects are also spoken.

Boxes of donated school supplies and other useful items for children and adults are piled high in the Delrex Blvd garage of Peter and Marrie Kranenburg and will soon be shipped to Liberia.

The couple saw first hand how urgently help is needed in a rural area south of Monrovia, the capital, when, in 2006 they went there to visit their son-in-law and daughter, Bob and Renita Reed.

Bob is developing a curriculum for a community college and works on projects for the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee while Renita is helping to reestablish local infrastructure and teaches women infected with HIV (AIDS).

Marrie revisited the Reeds this year and decided to get Georgetown's Christian Reformed Church (GCRC) involved in making it easier for Liberia's children to go to school.

She says, "One school grew from 220 children to 409 in a year but had absolutely no sources, not even books, only a dilapidated blackboard and chalk."

Last year GCRC raised \$900 to help put a metal roof on a church adjoining this school since it is also used as a classroom on weekdays. A cement floor was also laid.

Peter says the church roof used to leak like a sieve when it rained, forming puddles on the dirt floor.

He adds, "Everything in this rural area is primitive and no electricity service exists beyond a few small generators. A refugee camp remains half full."

Items being sent by container from Georgetown include text books from Grades 1 to 8 plus everything from pencils to binders, educational toys, bicycles and things adults might be able to sell at a local market to gain income or help start a business. Hundreds of cloth bags for students to carry books in are being sewn by women volunteers at GCRC.

Shipping is being handled by Art Kelly, of Brampton, a retired teacher who has a successful help program in another area of



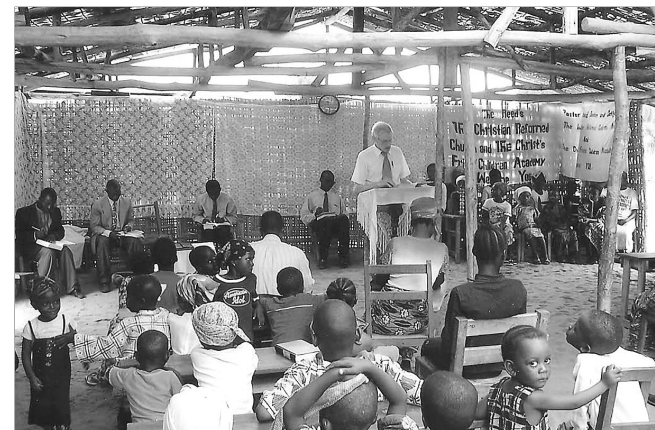
Peter Kranenburg and his wife Marrie outside their Delrex Blvd garage that's jammed with donated school supplies and other useful goods going to Liberia this fall to help poor kids. Marrie holds a book bag, one of hundreds sewn for kids by women volunteers in Georgetown. *Brian Dexter photo*

Liberia in partnership with the YMCA.

Kelly founded a registered charity called Active Kids Beyond Our Borders (AK BOB) after returning from a trip to Ukraine in 1999 where he helped to reconstruct a church.

Twice a year AK BOB sends all kinds of goods to Ukraine to support 10 orphanages and has also facilitated replacement of old equipment such as sewing machines, washing machines, stoves and wheelchairs.

Kelly says, "We've sent about 12,000 pounds of merchandise



Peter Kranenburg preaches in a church/school building in Liberia last year before it was given metal roof and concrete floor with help from \$900 in donations from Georgetown Christian Reformed Church.

to Ukraine in the past two years."

The Brampton-based charity is low-key and its volunteers, many of them retired teachers or members of various church denominations, meet regularly to pack and sort donated stuff at Kelly's home.

In India AK BOB supports the Wanless Hospital in Miraj in various ways. The facility was founded by a Canadian missionary in 1874. In Liberia the emphasis is on helping schools and giving long-term support in areas where other aid agencies aren't active.


Kelly occasionally sets up an information booth about AK BOB at Brampton's Gage Park and says, "It doesn't take much to help kids to go to school."

He got into the humanitarian aid field as a retirement project after his first visit to Ukraine when, with other Canadians, he came across the case of a small child being denied surgery for severe cleft palate disfigurement for the sake of \$50 needed for rehabilitation care.




Kelly says, "We dipped into our pockets and the problem was solved. The situation really tugged at our hearts."

For more information about AK BOB go to www.activekids.org

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