

Stouffville residents helping in far-flung places

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Correspondent

With Stouffville's fight for clean, safe, water, it's not surprising that residents of Whitchurch-Stouffville are receptive to another community's fight for the same. Since 1989, the municipality has inserted WaterCan donation leaflets in the consumer's water bill. "It's a small way in which we could assist people, who do not have the resources to protect or build safe

water supplies," said Mayor Fran Sainsbury.

Joanna Reesor-McDowell, an active member in the Hagerman Congregation of the Mennonite Church, approached town Council for support of WaterCan's Water Bill Program. WaterCan, a coalition of 15 Canadian organizations, funds clean water and sanitation projects overseas.

Reesor-McDowell said WaterCan projects are a perfect fit for the church's Global Neighbours program.

Through WaterCan, two villages on the main island of Java in the

Indonesian archipelago became the extended community for Whitchurch-Stouffville. In the dry, hilly central region of the South East Asian island, the main water source for the villages of Gunung and Talak Broto is "a good hour's walk straight up the side of a mountain," said Keith Shackleton.

Shackleton monitors the project for the Unitarian Service Committee (USC), the executive agency for WaterCan. Before USC started working in the main village of Gunung, only 32 per cent of the region had access to clean water. Most people would go up the

mountain to the main spring to bathe or wash clothes, then they would fill a container to take home. The contaminated water caused numerous cases of diarrhea and other water borne diseases.

With donations from Whitchurch-Stouffville and WaterCan, USC helped villagers build a gravity-fed water system that supplies about 450 households with clean water. This year the main supply pipe for the larger village of Gunung was completed. Distribution pipes and the standpipes for the outlying hamlets still have to be laid.

"Basically, you run pipes from the water source in the mountain to the village," said Shackleton. Pipes run into a large distribution tank, another series of pipes carries water to several standpipes in the village. This protects the water from contamination at the source, and women are spared the

daily trek up the mountain.

It seems like a relatively simple, mechanical process, but "without health and sanitation education and an understanding of how all this affects the community's environment, a water system won't work," said Shackleton. An early pioneer when it comes to making the correlation between water contamination and people's health, Mayor Sainsbury isn't surprised Whitchurch-Stouffville rallied to help provide clean water for Gunung and Talak Broto. "We know how important safe water is to a community, every time it was threatened we rose up to protect it." Even though there is more work to be done, Gunung and Talak Broto can be added to the list of Whitchurch-Stouffville successes.

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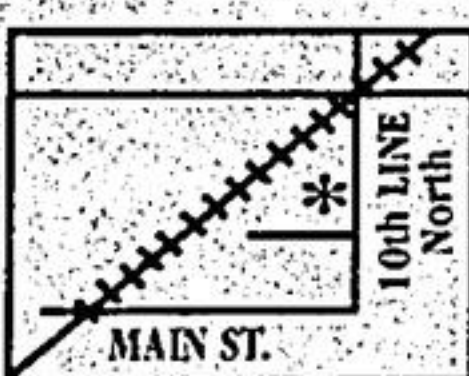
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