

Concert changed couple's lives

BY HANNELORE VOLPE
Staff Writer

After hearing the heavenly voices of the Watoto Children's Choir at a concert last year, Stouffville's Bill Clark knew he had to help the young Ugandan orphans somehow.

He and his wife, Nancy Clark, traveled to Kampala, Uganda, to help build three homes and start work on a fourth earlier this year. The Stouffville Pentecostal Church members were accompanied by Barry McKinley and his daughter Christine and Kevin Morris, all Whitchurch-Stouffville residents.

Each block home will house eight orphans, with a "Momma" to look after them. The Mommas are single women usually in their 30s and 40s. Many of the children were found by the local Watoto Child Care Ministry's workers, abandoned on the streets of Kampala. Many of the youngsters have been orphaned through the AIDS epidemic rampant in the area. The Watoto Child Care Ministry has around 2,000 children aged three years and older in its charge in three separate locations, one rural and two in the city.

"Conditions are very appalling," said Mrs. Clark, after helping to build the homes at the rural Bbira site, which also houses a small school. At the Bbira site, Mrs. Clark found that local men were working for \$3 a day, there were no mechanized tools, many shovels were broken and the tires on the wheelbarrows were flat. When the Clarks left the worksite, "We even left our boots there," Mrs. Clark said.

It broke her heart to see the orphans in the government-run facilities. The

rickety cribs of little babies had signs saying "name unknown." Older children had no clothes, no toys and stared vacantly around. Some inflicted wounds on themselves.

When they got back to Stouffville, Mr. Clark told his wife, "We need to see what we can do." So they started their next project: filling a 40 foot container which will be shipped to Kampala next Saturday. He started speaking to church groups and Rotary clubs. Nancy Clark's mother in Perth, Gwen Travis, started putting out the word that generators and other equipment was needed to send to Uganda. A generator never did materialize, but 1,400 pairs of running shoes did, donated by Brown Shoes. Mrs. Travis' dentist pitched in toothbrushes; wheelbarrows and an auger were donated, and Mrs. Clark's Grade 4 class at Summitview Public School in Stouffville came up with several bags of school supplies.

Stouffville residents have also donated bicycles that their own children have outgrown. Monetary donations that come in are matched by the Stouffville Pentecostal Church's Mission Fund. Richard Muir of Uxbridge has given the Clarks the use of his warehouse for the equipment that is being collected.

A group in Springfield, Missouri, has also collected money for the Watoto Child Care Ministry. Laird & Sons, whose owners live in Stouffville, have provided a small skid loader. The Clarks are allowing about three months for the container to arrive in Kampala and are planning to be in Uganda near the end of July to oversee its arrival.

The Watoto Children's Choir will visit Stouffville for tonight's concert starting at 7 at Stouffville Pentecostal. The 20

children in the choir will stay overnight with local families before heading off to sing at the People's Church in Willowdale and other locations in southern Ontario. Three of the young orphans will be staying with the Clarks.

"We have to keep building these homes because there are so many children living in desperate conditions," Nancy Clark said.



Stouffville teacher Nancy Clark with Ugandan children. The Watoto Children's Choir from Uganda performs at Stouffville Pentecostal Church this evening.



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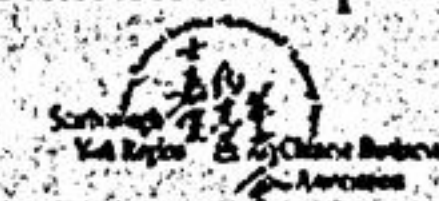
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