



Summitview Public School students donated 60,000 items for children attending school in the town of Igoma in Tanzania, Africa, through the Stouffville Igoma Partnership project. Students helping load were (from left) Michael Dewar, Mario Tanev and James Moule.

# Students help peers in Igoma, Africa

BY JOAN RANSBERRY  
Staff Writer

More than 60,000 school supply items are on their way to east Africa, thanks to a Stouffville school.

When James Moule, 12, and Tanya Burford, 13, of Summitview Public School learned a drive was on to collect supplies for students attending two schools in the Tanzanian village of Igoma, they volunteered to help.

"The children in Africa don't have the money to buy school supplies," James stressed. "They need our help."

Tanya encouraged her

Grade 8 class to participate, noting "It feels good to be able to help the children."

In launching the drive, special education teacher Nancy Clark and child and youth worker Nina Bettencourt decided to use the fact the distance between Stouffville and Igoma is 12,000 kilometres.

"The goal was set at 12,000 items," Mrs. Clark said. "The response was overwhelming. We went way beyond the goal to collect more than 60,000."

A humanitarian partnership between Whitchurch-Stouffville and Igoma was

established just over a year ago. Following a request from a committee spearheaded by Stouffville Missionary Church (now East Ridge), Whitchurch-Stouffville council gave unanimous support to have the municipality partner with Igoma. The provincial and federal governments have endorsed the project, the first of its kind in Canada.

In promoting the drive, Stouffville Igoma Partnership committee chairperson Peter Neufeld showed the students a video outlining life in Igoma.

James, Tanya and the other students were shocked to learn how different school is for Igoma children. The average classroom has one teacher and 120 students. While four or five students share a desk, the majority of children sit on a dirt floor.

"There are no windows in a classroom," Mr. Neufeld said. "There is just a hole in the outside wall."

During a fact-finding trip to Igoma, Mr. Neufeld visited the two elementary schools. Each has 2,000 students.

"Children get one notebook a year," he said. "They

desperately need supplies, including pencils and lined notebooks"

The partnership's primary goal is urging residents to become involved in improving the quality of life in Igoma, Mr. Neufeld said.

A plan is in the works to have residents sponsor the youth of Igoma so they can take apprenticeship courses and improve their quality of life.

"It's hoped individuals, families, neighbourhoods, churches, service clubs and schools will all support the partnership," he said.

For the most part, Igoma runs on a barter system with people scrounging for food. "Life is especially difficult for the children," he said.

It's an agricultural subsistence economy with 80 per cent of the population of 42,000 involved in primitive farming.

"Most of the older students drop out of school to go to work farming," Mr. Neufeld said.

While the average household income in Whitchurch-Stouffville is \$90,000, about \$300 a year comes into the average Igoma home.

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