

## Field Reports

### World Community Service

#### Rotarians break ground for Afghan school

They're finally heading home after months in refugee camps, but displaced Afghans still face bleak prospects. Hoping to assist a generation cast with the tremendous burden of effecting a national recovery after years of conflict, U.S. Rotarians recently broke ground for a school near Jalalabad, Afghanistan.



**Students welcome Rotarians to a proposed school site near Jalalabad.**

Planning for the project began shortly after Rotarian Fary Moini, a registered nurse, returned from Pakistan, where she served as a Rotary Volunteer supported by a grant from The Rotary Foundation of RI, in early 2002. Moini, a member of the Rotary Club of La Jolla Golden Triangle, Calif., spent two months helping families in refugee camps near Peshawar, Pakistan. Children living in the camps attended makeshift schools with few amenities, and Moini knew that when they returned to Afghanistan, conditions wouldn't be any better.

Rather than allow education to become yet another casualty of war in Afghanistan, where two-thirds of the population is illiterate, California Rotarians decided to support a new school. Led by Moini, who speaks Farsi, a language similar to the one spoken by many refugees, and Rotarian Stephen Brown, members of the La Jolla Golden Triangle club raised about US\$100,000 to build a school on the outskirts of Jalalabad. The largest single contribution was a \$50,000 grant from the William H. Donner Foundation, a New York-based organization that supports humanitarian projects in developing nations. La Jolla Golden Triangle Rotarian Rick Clark, an architect, drew the plans for the school. With help from Flouran Wali, a U.S. citizen of Afghan heritage and a representative of the Afghan government in Southern California, Brown and Moini organized Southern California Friends of Afghanistan. The group is dedicated to helping Afghans and educating North Americans about Afghan culture.

In November 2002, Brown, Moini, and Wali traveled to Afghanistan to meet with government officials and representatives of nongovernmental organizations working in the region, including engineers from the Abdul Haq Foundation, which will oversee the project. Zamarrud Shah, a member of the Rotary Club of Uni Town Peshawar, Pakistan, accompanied the U.S. delegation. Shah, who hosted Moini during her time as a Rotary Volunteer, was to assume responsibility for on-site project supervision after La Jolla Golden Triangle Rotarians returned to the United States.

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During the group's visit, the government of Ningarhar Province in eastern Afghanistan agreed to donate land for the school. When the Californians arrived at the proposed site, they got their first glimpse of the makeshift classrooms the school will replace. Two large UNICEF tents sheltered about 200 students each, and teachers conducted class without books and other basic supplies. According to Brown, there are at least 7,000 such tents around the country. Groups of students also gather for class by the roadside, a few withering trees their only protection from the harsh sun.



**Rotarian Fary Moini (center, with boy) helps Afghan children in a refugee camp.**

"There are kids just sitting in the dirt," says Brown. "They have no utensils of any sort: no chalkboards, no chalk to write with, no books, no notebooks for writing, no pencils — nothing whatsoever."

Most of the students who will attend the new school recently returned from refugee camps in Pakistan. The government anticipates that there will be hundreds more families returning to the area, and the school could serve as many as 2,000 children, with students attending classes in shifts.

Before the Rotarians returned to Pakistan, they broke ground for the facility. Long-term plans include the addition of a small medical clinic and a vocational training center for adults. Brown says he also would like to build a guesthouse on the grounds to accommodate visiting volunteers. The task will likely require additional funding and ongoing support from Rotarians in Pakistan and the United States, but La Jolla Golden Triangle Rotarians are determined to see the project through.

"If I find that we're out of money, I'll go looking for other money to complete those pieces of it," says Brown. "This is my personal response to 9/11."

**— M. KATHLEEN PRATT**

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## **Refugees return home with Rotary support**

Afghan refugees who have been living in camps in Pakistan since 2001 are returning home with assistance from Rotarians. At the Shalman and Mohammad Kheil camps near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, some 48,000 refugees have been receiving Rotary aid since early 2002 after Rotarians responded to a Notice of Disaster with donations of US\$1.9 million.

Millions of refugees have fled war-torn Afghanistan over the past 20 years, but the RI Board of Directors issued the call for contributions after as many as 200,000 refugees flooded across the border into Pakistan following the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States and the ensuing U.S. air strikes on Afghanistan.

In addition to food, clothing, medicine, and other essentials, donations include funds to provide more than 1,000 refugees with vocational training in tailoring, carpentry, masonry, plumbing, and other trades. Upon completing the training, participants receive the tools and equipment they'll need to start their careers.

"We want to make it possible for the people to go back and sustain them-selves," says Lynmar Brock, chairman of the RI Afghan Refugee Relief Effort Committee (RIARREC), an 11-member group established in December 2001 to oversee the expenditure of donated funds. Past RI Vice President Wilf Wilkinson serves as the committee's vice chairman.

RIARREC has worked closely with the government of Pakistan and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to determine the most effective use of funds. Brock says that when the committee disbands on 30 June, any remaining funds will be turned over to UNHCR, which will use the money to support the remaining refugees in the two camps.

Brock credits the in-country committee, led by Muhammad Faiz Kidwai and Past District Governor A.A.M. Mohsin, with being instrumental to the project's success. All of the goods distributed in the camps were purchased in Pakistan, thus avoiding the delays of international shipping while contributing to the local economy. Pakistani Rotarians have closely monitored the handling and distribution of relief items, which include necessities such as rice, kerosene, jackets, and shoes, as well as soccer balls, jump ropes, and coloring books for children.

Mohammad Usman Khan, president of the Rotary Club of Uni Town Peshawar, says the Rotary aid, much of which was emblazoned with the words "Gift of Rotary International," will have a lasting impact.

"Upon returning to Afghanistan, these refugees will always remember Rotary and the great work done by RI," Khan says. "In this way, Rotary's name will become well known and respected in Afghanistan and will help in establishing the Rotary presence in that country."

— ANTHONY G. CRAINE

### Foundation Facts

Major Donors:  
4,496

Bequest Society  
Members:  
2,866

Benefactors:  
59,309

Paul Harris Fellows:  
829,605

*Data as of 31 January  
2003*

## People

### Firefighter answers Afghan call

As chief of the Langford Fire Department in British Columbia, Canada, Rotarian Bob Beckett understands the importance of a quick and decisive response. He served as a volunteer firefighter in Los Angeles during the 1990 riots and volunteered as a paramedic in Sarajevo, Bosnia, in 1995. Soon after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, Beckett, the president of the Rotary Club of Colwood, B.C., traveled to New York with the mayor of Langford and another firefighter to offer support to the families of fallen firefighters.

"It was a moving experience to go there," says Beckett. "We gave hope to people, and that's very powerful." Believing that "something good had to come out of the loss of 347 firefighters" in the collapse of the World Trade Center, Beckett turned his focus to the conflict in Afghanistan. "I felt that a positive response could help lead to a peaceful resolution and a break in the perpetual chain of violence," he says.

Beckett organized a committee to look into establishing a school for girls in Afghanistan, but the group soon encountered red tape. "It was an ambitious project," admits group member George Irami, Ph. D., professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at Royal Roads University in Victoria, B.C. "But we knew any help would be greatly appreciated."



**Bob Beckett (in back, second from right) visits Afghan students (top), and plans a new well (bottom)**

Beckett's next step was to find a Pakistani Rotary club willing to participate. When the Rotary Club of Rawalpindi, Pakistan, pledged assistance, he arranged to go there and meet with the members. Arriving in Pakistan in September 2002, Beckett also toured four refugee camps, three schools, and an orphanage.

"I was moved to tears by the first refugee camp I saw. Then I became more objective, and I realized that plans for a school were premature," he says. After consulting United Nations officials, government representatives, and Afghan teachers, among others, Beckett compiled a list of possible projects.

All 10 of Beckett's ideas to help Afghan refugees living in Pakistan are becoming realities. Initial projects, which include plans for a water well and shipment of basic hygiene supplies such as toothpaste, already are underway. "The funds for the well have been wired to Pakistan, and we have taken care of the toothpaste and brushes. More than 1000 individual school supply packages, additional hygiene kits, and fire-fighting equipment will be sent in June," says Beckett. He's also working on long-term plans to launch a distance education program, train vocational teachers, and establish an adoption program to help find homes for Afghan orphans.

To help finance the projects, students in the Sooke, B.C., school district presented a musical fundraiser, Hands Together for Afghanistan, in November 2002. "One hundred and thirty students took part in the program, which featured Bob's slide presentation on Pakistan," says Sandy Webster-Worthy, district coordinator for fine arts and PACE, a program that serves academically gifted students in grades eight to 12 and provides musical theater training for all students. "It gave a message of affirmation and showed that we can make a difference."

Though the fundraiser generated about \$1,100, benefits extend beyond monetary value. "Now there is a greater awareness among the school children and the community in general about ways to work together to promote understanding, and to have a kinder and more peaceful planet," says Donna

Miller, principal of community education for the Sooke school district and president-elect of the Rotary Club of Colwood.

Beckett agrees. "We've got to educate ourselves about other people," he says. "We're often ignorant of those outside our community."

— MAUREEN LICATA

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