

**'Mr. Brown, I know you'll figure it out.'**

— FARY MOINI, after proposing a project to fellow Rotarian Stephen Brown of Del Mar



Fary Moini (in blue shirt) and Stephen R. Brown of the La Jolla Golden Triangle Rotary Club share time with students at the Jalalabad Rotary Elementary School in Afghanistan in November 2006. (Courtesy photo)

# Higher Education

Area philanthropists set sights on Afghanistan



**T**he adage “One good turn deserves another” could be better rephrased in the case of Steve Brown and Fary Moini’s volunteer efforts as “One good deed leads to another.”

What started with a small goodwill trip to Afghanistan in 2003 to take donated books and children’s gloves has grown to a \$2 million project, funded with a grant from the World Bank and working with San Diego State University to bring computer technology to the university in Nangarhar, Afghanistan.

Brown, 59, a Del Mar attorney with the law firm Luce, Forward, Hamilton & Scripps, had spent years working with Rotary to build wells and hippo fences in Africa. He turned his philan-

thropic attention to Afghanistan when La Jolla resident Fary Moini, 56, one of the new members in the La Jolla Golden Triangle Rotary Club, approached him at a meeting shortly after Sept. 11, 2001.

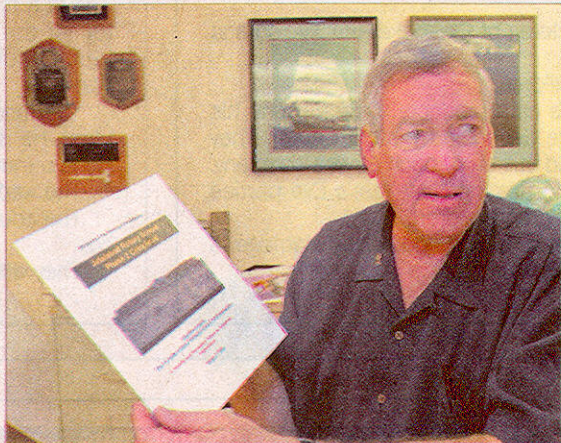
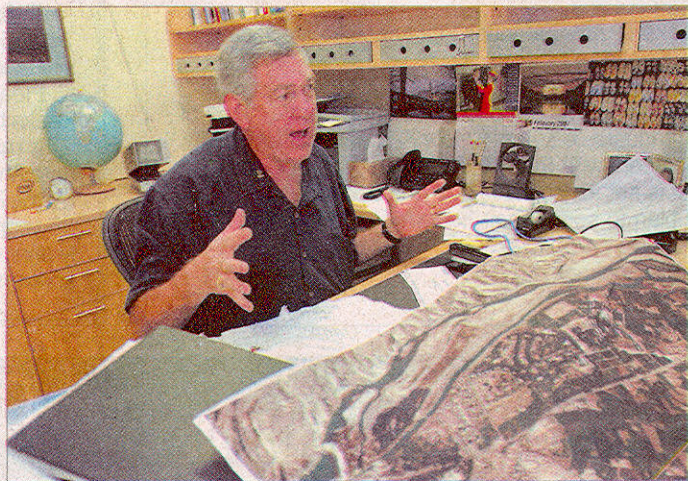
“Mr. Brown, can you help me? I want to go to Afghanistan and work in a refugee camp,” Moini said she asked Brown.

“What can you offer?” replied Brown.

Moini, who was born and raised in a Muslim family in Kerman, Iran, told him she had been a head nurse in a Dubai hospital for three years. She felt her knowledge of Farsi, the language of Iran, could help her communicate with the Afghans, who speak Dari, a dialect of Farsi.

Brown was able to arrange for her through Rotary to spend

► **AFGHANISTAN, G-?**



**Attorney Steve Brown, far left, talks in his Del Mar office about the process of building a middle and secondary school in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. Near left, he displays a grant from the Donner Foundation to La Jolla Golden Triangle Rotary Club for the school, which was completed in March 2004.**



## ► AFGHANISTAN

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### Philanthropists set sights on schools in Mideast nation

two months working in two camps outside Peshawar, Pakistan. When she returned, she pitched Brown another idea.

"Let's build a school in the area of Jalalabad, Afghanistan," she suggested.

"That's a bad idea," Brown said, warning her that war was coming to that nation.

"Mr. Brown, I know you'll figure it out," came the response.

And so he did.

"He (Brown) was the force behind the whole fundraising for the school," Moini recalled. "He raised \$100,000 and then said, 'Why don't we go there and meet the people, have some meetings and do some of the preliminary work?'" she recalled.

The next year, Brown and Moini flew back to Afghanistan to open the new Jalalabad Rotary School, which covers grades 1-12. The school now has 2,800 students, 900 of whom are girls, where only a year before there had been two large UNICEF tents with 200 boys and 200 girls in classes under each.

The school, run by local residents, boasts 20 classrooms — 14 for girls and six for boys — a medical clinic with two examining rooms and an adult vocational training center with a computer lab with Internet access.

Brown said they soon found out the first desire of the Afghan students is to learn English. "After all, 90 percent of the content on the Internet is in English," said Brown.

"They are so isolated from the rest of the world," said Moini. "They know English is an opportunity to connect with the rest of the world."

Soon, the La Jolla Golden Triangle Rotarians were forming a Rotary Club of Jalalabad, taking the sister-city program to Afghanistan (pairing Jalalabad with San Diego) and organizing for a half-dozen Afghan university professors to come to San Diego for a month.

"They were a delight to have here," said Brown. "We



**Stephen R. Brown of Del Mar with students and officials at the groundbreaking of Jalalabad Rotary Elementary School project in November 2002. 'He was the force behind the whole fundraising for the school,' said colleague Fary Moini. (Courtesy photo)**

gave them each a laptop and sent the doctors home with a microscope for remote diagnosis."

By March 2004, the school project had moved on to Nangarhar University, which had no computers for faculty, students or administration. They had no textbooks for classroom use. The professors taught from lecture notes, and most of the library books were in Arabic, which only the theology department was able to read.

So Brown and the La Jolla Golden Triangle Rotary Club sent the university a set of World Book Encyclopedias, several textbooks on plant cultivation in developing countries, and arranged for 10,000 English dictionaries to be sent as well as five boxes of college math textbooks.

The club also started plans to set up a satellite-based computer/Internet lab. "You have to think that you're doing this on the moon," said Brown about the country's lack of infrastructure.

Discussion about how best to provide wireless Internet access quickly turned into issues of reliable electricity and broadband connections. For these complicated technological tasks, Brown brought in the University of San Diego, who

designed the network, and San Diego State University, who provided technical expertise. Steve Spencer, SDSU Inter-network Institute project coordinator, provided initial training for faculty to use computers and Internet resources.

"That was one of the funny stories," said Moini. "He (Spencer) was teaching one of the professors how to make e-mails and telling them that you have to be careful not to open some with attachments because they might have viruses. 'I have some antibiotics at home if you want me to bring some tomorrow,' the Afghan professor said."

The University's International Learning Center was privately funded by Brown himself and an acquaintance of his — John Moores, owner of the San Diego Padres. "I knew he was looking for return on his investment," said Brown. "And here was a powerful social return. For \$72,000 total, we could have ViaSat Internet and provide basic maintenance." Brown, who is married with two grown daughters, also put in \$10,000 of his own money.

Then came the big dollars. With the help of Cynthia Billis, a professor at the University of San Diego, Brown found out about the World Bank. In De-

ember 2006, the World Bank announced its intention to fund a nearly \$2 million three-year contract to assist Nangarhar University in developing English language programs and creating an International Learning Center to expand information technology resources.

Moini will work as a liaison for the project between SDSU and Nangarhar University.

"Sometimes I ask myself how I got involved with Afghanistan because it is one of the least likely places I would have visited," said Moini. "But now I really think that was my mission, my calling. The people are so very grateful there, and one of the blessings is how meeting so many wonderful, extraordinary people has enriched my own life."

Brown agrees that their work in Afghanistan has been gratifying indeed. "I think we can really make a difference here," he said. "We are winning hearts and minds because we ask for nothing in return ... We are fighting the war on terror by giving them hope and opportunity."

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