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The San Diego Union-Tribune.

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Rotary helps Afghan girls get to school

March 20, 2004



DIANE BELL

It was a dream come true.

Five present and former San Diegans witnessed the dedication recently of a school near Jalalabad, Afghanistan. While not yet officially open, the school eventually will accommodate 2,000 students a day in two shifts.

And 50 percent of them will be girls, at the insistence of San Diegans who raised the money for the school. Girls were denied access to education for years under the Taliban.

At the dedication, about 300 Afghan boys trooped in wearing their bright blue shirts. About the same number of girls also filed in.

Village elders and other dignitaries attended. The governor of the Nangarhar Province arrived at the dedication ceremony with a small army of guards.

Rotarian Fary Moini of Mira Mesa had made creating such a school her mission more than two years ago after a visit to nearby refugee camps.

A fellow Golden Triangle Rotarian, Stephen R. Brown, worked with Moini to earn the support of Afghan leaders, secure a site, raise \$155,000 to build the school and to equip the classrooms.

They also spurred the creation of a Rotary chapter in Jalalabad that can offer an ongoing presence to the project.

Former San Diegan Flouran Wali, who now works in Afghanistan, was there, too, and able to see what her help had achieved.

The school, a sturdy structure of brick and mortar – in sharp contrast to the mud huts clustered around it – is less than three miles from the bombed-out compound that once sheltered Osama bin Laden.

Rising behind the school is the mountainous Tora Bora region, known as an al-Qaeda hide-out.

Finishing touches are needed, furnishing isn't quite complete and six more classrooms await in phase II, but the first 700 students are expected any day now.

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Constructing a school in a war-torn country was a challenge, but Moini wasn't deterred. She has spent the past four months in Afghanistan overseeing her project, having turned over day-to-day operation of her two tuxedo rental shops here to an assistant.

Friends are planning a welcome home when her plane touches down at Lindbergh Field Sunday evening.

San Diegans Farid Saydee and Steve Spencer, also Rotarians, happened to be in Afghanistan and were able to bolster San Diego's contingent at the dedication.

An e-mail to friends from Spencer captured the moment.

"As the ceremony ended, I walked around the outside of the school and felt overwhelmed with emotion. Education is so fundamental and these people have so little. The school (is) a symbol of hope for the future. All you had to do was look into the eyes of the kids."

On the move

Former Gov. Pete Wilson has a new job. He's joining the L.A. office of the Bingham Consulting Group, which specializes in governmental and business consulting services.

Wilson, an attorney by trade, also lends legal expertise by virtue of his of-counsel status to the Bingham McCutchen law firm. A sort of welcome-to-work party is planned April 1 at The Lodge at Torrey Pines . . .

Ace Parking owner Scott Jones, whose passion is rock 'n' roll, took his college student son, Keith (whose name was inspired by Rolling Stones' Keith Richards), to Monday's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame awards at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York. Prince not only gave an outstanding awards performance, Jones says, he also followed up with an energetic 2:30 a.m. post-ceremony concert in a Manhattan club . . .

Model Rachel Hunter will strut down the red carpet in San Diego on April 8. Not to collect an award, but to highlight her new line of facial products, Classified Cosmetics, at Alexander's in La Jolla . . .

Deborah Norville has been asked to take listeners "inside the news" when she speaks at an April 3 luncheon given by the Assistance League of Inland North County. The former "Today" show host now headlines a new interview-format show on MSNBC.

85 and flying high

Call it a leap of faith. On Sunday, San Diegan Pauline Mirkin plans to celebrate her 85th birthday by sky diving – for the first time.

She'll do the deed in tandem with her son-in-law, a sky diving instructor in DeLand, Fla. Several family members will be there to witness her big event and to party with her afterward.

"It took me a few years to get up the courage to do this," Mirkin says, "but now that I've made the decision to go ahead I am looking forward to



it." She's not doing any special exercises to prepare, but says she plays golf a few times a week.

Diane Bell's column appears Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays. Fax items to (619) 260-5009; call (619) 293-1518; e-mail to diane.bell@uniontrib.com; or mail to The San Diego Union-Tribune, Box 120191, San Diego 92112-0191.

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