

Kenyan school to memorialize teen

(Publication Date: 09-29-2007)

By Amy Kotlarz/Catholic Courier

FAIRPORT -- As Hannah Congdon and fellow Fairport High School students traveled to India in 2006, she was drawn to the orphans in the tsunami-torn areas they visited.

After the trip, she didn't forget the children she met. For example, in May 2007 she joined in a Walk for African Orphans, which took place in Perinton Park. Congdon's dream, her father recalled, was to join the Peace Corps after college and teach English in developing countries.

"She was like sunshine coming into a room," said Joanne Cala, one of the adult chaperones on the 2006 trip who cofounded the charity Joining Hearts and Hands. "She had a smile, or she had something to say, to every person."

Congdon, who was killed in a car crash in June with her friends and fellow Fairport High School Class of 2007 graduates Meredith McClure, Bailey Goodman, Sara Monnat and Katie Shirley, will be memorialized with a nursery school in Katito, Kenya, that will be known as Hannah's Hope. The school will be built by Joining Hearts and Hands using area donations.

Hannah's Hope will feature two classrooms, a teacher's room, bathrooms and a kitchen. Sixty percent of the children at the school will be orphans and street children, while 40 percent will be tuition-paying students.

Since June, family and friends have raised more than \$12,000 for Hannah's Hope, said Hannah's father, Terry Congdon. He and his wife, Marilyn, are parishioners of Fairport's Church of the Assumption.

"It's strange to say after what we've been through, but I have to say we feel really blessed," Terry Congdon said, speaking during a Hannah's Hope fundraiser hosted by local scrapbook enthusiasts. "We're lucky to live in Fairport and lucky for the outpouring of love and support."

Hannah's Hope also will be supported at an upcoming chicken barbecue fundraiser from 1 to 6 p.m. Oct. 6 at 7592 Newco Drive in Hamlin. The daylong fundraiser on the shore of Lake Ontario will include live music, door prizes, goodie bags, a cash clam bar and silent auction. Tickets are \$20. Call Bill Minoia at 585-964-8405 or Joanne Cala at 585-377-8298 for details and ticket sales locations.

The scrapbooking event, which was Sept. 8 at St. John of Rochester Church, was organized by Marcia Kosanke, who said she had wanted to make a scrapbook for some of the Hannah's family members who had been neighbors of hers in the past. Hannah also baby-sat Kosanke's daughters as she was saving money for her India trip.

That is why Kosanke came up with the idea to organize a crop, which is the term for an event where scrapbookers create scrapbooks together. Although crops are common, charity crops are more infrequent, Kosanke said. To make her crop a fundraiser, Kosanke charged a fee for scrapbookers and supporters to participate. Those who attended received food throughout the day and gift bags filled with donated items.

Kosanke said she planned the event within a few week's time. Once she decided to go ahead with it, she was told the church was available Sept. 8 or next spring.

"So I said, 'the Holy Spirit's calling the shots,'" Kosanke said. "I thought maybe we would get 12 people. We have 30."

Through the participation fee and raffles of donated items during the event, the crop raised more than \$1,300 for Hannah's Hope.

Wiping away tears at the event, Margie Miraglia, Hannah's aunt, said the love and support from the community has been constant.

"It's been a really rough summer, and they continue to help," Miraglia said.

The school is being built by the charity Joining Hearts and Hands, which was started by the leaders and chaperones of the 2006 India trip, Joanne and William Cala. William Cala is the former Fairport School District superintendent and is currently the interim superintendent of the Rochester City School District.

The couple started the charity to address poverty and the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Kenya, which they had seen firsthand during a trip to the country in 2005. Since its inception in 2006, the charity has raised thousands to build schools, host health clinics, establish sustainable development initiatives and sponsor students at many schools throughout Kenya.

Joanne Cala said that from the outset sustainability is being incorporated into Hannah's Hope. It will be sustained by a goat cooperative, she said, where residents will sell goat's milk and breed goats to make money for themselves and the school. One reason why goats have been chosen is goat's milk has beneficial properties for people with AIDS, she said.

The school will use the Montessori method of education, which Joanne Cala said has had good success in other early childhood education schools in Africa.

In late October, the Calas are scheduled to return to Kenya to break ground for Hannah's Hope. The school will be built at Christ the King Katito Catholic Church, which is led by Father Alfred C. Atemo Ogada. Ultimately, they hope to raise \$45,000 to complete the school.

"Thank you for this incredible effort," Bill Cala said. "The entire community has pitched in, not only for Hannah's Hope, but for all of Joining Hearts and Hands."

Many people at the crop had never met Hannah or her family, but were moved by the idea to crop for a cause.

"What a way to help not only Fairport, but all the children," said Linda Schmitt of Webster, a consultant for the scrapbooking supplies company Creative Memories.

Jan Patchen of Brighton, a parishioner of Our Lady Queen of Peace Church, said she heard about the fundraiser through a family member.

"I wish we could fix everything for kids," said Patchen, a middle-school teacher. "This is a great way to start."

EDITOR'S NOTE: To contribute to Hannah's Hope, make a tax-deductible check payable to Joining Hearts and Hands Ltd. and send it to 9 Fieldston Grove, Fairport, NY 14450. Write "Hannah's Hope" in the memo area on the check. More details are available at www.joiningheartshands.org.

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