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# Promoting Education in Tanzania

by Katy Nally

Hundreds of Tanzanian schoolchildren will meet their first American teacher this January, when Elmer Thienes-Mary Hall Elementary School special education teacher Louise Plack will travel halfway across the world to help local educators and students at three schools.

Plack, a board member of Pocketful of Joy, will journey with the organization's director, who is also her friend, Charlotte Hunter.

"It's going to be fun for her," Hunter said. "The kids are going to be grabbing her left and right."

Now that the school year has finished, Plack said she can begin to "prioritize" for her trip. Hunter recently sent Plack a list of necessities for the three-month journey, and when she read it "I just tingled from the inside out," Plack said.

In January, Plack will leave Marlborough, armed with teacher accoutrements like songbooks, charts and posters. Plack, who has mentored student teachers in the past, said she would also try to help teachers with their English and offer some advice "without wounding their pride."

"We'll try to help teachers raise their standards of education," Hunter added.

Plack knows teacher jargon, and "speaks the same language" as the African educators, Hunter said, and "that's why she's going to be a dynamite addition to this."

This is the first time Pocketful of Joy has brought an American teacher to the three schools it is affiliated with. Since 2004 the non-profit has provided funds for three schools through private donations, and brought in educational materials and staff. Hunter, the founder

of Pocketful of Joy, said she has provided the children with a sewing program so they can make their uniforms and a garden so they have fresh produce.

"That way they become more balanced learners and they don't have to rely on just farming," Plack said.

In addition to studies and extracurriculars, Pocketful of Joy has also allowed for the children's teeth and eyes to be checked by local doctors. "Most of the kids are very healthy now," Plack said.

"We provide the best services we can possibly provide, so [the students] can grow up and become really healthy adults and really take care of themselves and their community," Hunter said.

The changes Pocketful of Joy have made since its inception have been dramatic but slow coming. But this doesn't bother Hunter. "It happens on a level that the villagers can accept," she said. "It's happening very organically."

And the schools have improved so much, that the Tanzanian government now uses them as models of education.

"You're not trying to change their lifestyle," Plack said. "You're trying to make it better."

However, for Plack, her lifestyle as an American teacher will change come January. There is no electricity at the schools, except for one library that has a generator, and, Hunter said, there are no toilets or washing machines.

"You have to be a particular type of person," she said. "I think you have to have courage."

Still, Plack said she's excited for her upcoming

journey, but it will be hard to adjust to the "lack of noise" and "slower pace." "I think it'll be hard for me to switch from here to there," she said.

And when it comes to communicating in another language, Plack said "I go on personality and hand gestures." But, fortunately, the teachers and children speak English.

Plack said she was mostly preoccupied with how to charge her camera, so she would be able to take pictures.

The Elmer Thienes-Mary Hall community first became involved in Pocketful of Joy's initiative through the school's dress down day. Plack explained each teacher pays one dollar every Friday of the school year to dress casually. This year the school gave \$700 to Pocketful of Joy and \$300 to a school in Peru, Plack said.

Plack's church, Quaker Hill Baptist Church in Quaker Hill, also began fundraising for Hunter's organization. Shortly after that, Plack became a board member for Pocketful of Joy.

The board's goal this year is to raise \$67,000 from private donors, Plack said. The organization's dream, she added, is to build a dorm for the girls who walk at least one hour to get to school. Having the housing available would reduce the "dangers of being ambushed" while walking, she said.

Other ideas are to increase the amount of food available at school and to make the teach-



**Elmer Thienes-Mary Hall special education teacher Louise Plack will journey to Tanzania with Pocketful of Joy next January to help teachers and students at three schools.**

ing positions more attractive for teachers.

But for now, both sides of the Pocketful of Joy community will anxiously await their first meeting.