

Missions in Africa

Zimbabwe school makes gifts last all year

Here's what Holston churches did: In May and June, churches collected food buckets, sewing kits, children's clothing, and health kits (including soap, toothbrushes, and shampoo) for the children of Ishe Anesu in Zimbabwe. Holston districts participating in this project included Knoxville, Morristown, Tazewell, Wytheville, Big Stone Gap, and Abingdon.

Here's where it went: The container arrived in Zimbabwe on Sept. 4. The Rev. Jerry Russell and a team from Fairview United Methodist Church timed a mission trip to Sakubva so they could help free the shipment from customs. On Sept. 9, Russell and a crew of helpers finally opened the ocean carrier full of goods, sent by Holston Conference in June.

"You wouldn't believe how slick that stuff comes out when a bottle of shampoo comes undone," Russell joked, speaking of the piles and piles of supplies unloaded for Ishe Anesu.

Although most of the necessities sent by Holston in 2006 were long gone, Russell praised Missionary Maria Humbane for still having "a little bit left over," due to her careful rationing. "She will judiciously guard the stuff to make it last, and even trade the leftover, empty buckets for vitamins or cloth to make uniforms," he said.

A priority is to keep the 60 children attending school at Ishe Anesu from starving, although Humbane works hard to share gifts sent by Holston with the community. All of the Ishe Anesu children are victims of HIV/AIDS, Russell said. None of them have fathers; only six have mothers.

"Maria interviews and only takes in the poorest of the poor," Russell said. The children receive two meals at the school each day: a light meal and a full meal. They delight in picking the one night each week when they get to eat ham sent by Holston.

At Annual Conference in June, Humbane dropped to her knees to present Bishop James Swanson with gifts of gratitude from Zimbabwe. "Thank you for your heart," she told Annual Conference members. ■



ABOVE: In April 2008, Herbert and Mary Zigbuo will be re-assigned to train and minister to former child soldiers in Liberia. They seek donations to help them buy a four-wheel-drive vehicle to travel difficult roads (see above). E-mail the Zigbuos at umcliberia@yahoo.com.



ABOVE: The Rev. Jerry Russell (giving the thumbs-up) takes a crew to help unload an ocean carrier full of supplies, sent by Holston to Zimbabwe in June. The supplies finally arrived in September.

Liberians send thanks for essential supplies

Here's what Holston churches did: In May and June, churches collected school supplies (such as chalk, dictionaries, and pens) and health supplies (such as toothbrushes, washcloths, and aspirin) for people in the Ganta community of Liberia. Holston districts participating in this project included Johnson City, Kingsport, Chattanooga, Cleveland, Maryville, and Oak Ridge.

Here's where it went: The container arrived at the port of Monrovia in early August. "Our agent was able to clear it by the 7th of September," writes Pastor Sampson Nyanti, in an e-mail from Liberia to the conference office in Alcoa, Tenn. "We started distribution the first week of October and distribution is still going on."

When Nyanti wrote to us, more than 1,500 students and teachers in six United Methodist schools and several patients in two hospitals had received school and health supplies from Holston Conference.

"People see the supplies as a blessing," reports Nyanti. "Both students and teachers visit my office regularly to express thanks and appreciation for items received ... Widows come to request even the empty containers to reserve drinking water and for other domestic works."

Some of the supplies, such as pens and pencils, will last for a year, Nyanti said. "The soap and toothpastes may go for some months, while the cream and other body lotion may go for more than a semester if used wisely."

Mary Zigbuo, who until recently served in Ganta with missionary husband Herbert Zigbuo, e-mailed that many village children do not own towels or toothbrushes: "A toothbrush is a piece of twig chewed on one end. The chewed end serves as a brush." In village schools, she said, "many children come with loose sheets of used paper that parents manage to tear out of used notebooks."

The people of northeastern Liberia are subsistence farmers with an annual income of about \$600, Zigbuo wrote. "This hardly allows them to provide one meal per day for their families and greatly limits them in taking care of other essential needs such as medical care and education for their children."

"One can imagine what an honor it is for mission station staff to share among God's children in Liberia the humble gift of a school and health kit, packed with love and care, and sent with blessings and prayers by the wonderful people of Holston Conference, year after year," Zigbuo said.

Pastor Nyanti also wrote this in his e-mail: "Ganta believes that the United Methodist Church is a blessed and caring church. Most people look up to the Ganta United Methodist Mission Station as a savior for the needy. ... I hear people say, 'I thank God for Methodists who has made it possible for my children to have something to write on this year.' Of course, the thanks is for Holston Conference." ■

Environmental initiative in Virginia

New farmers guild restaurant provides a proud taste of home

By Caitlin Sullivan
Washington County News



Sherman Lamie walked into The Harvest Table, opened the menu and saw his name. He's not the only local farmer with his name there. There's a handful of others.

About 15 years ago, Lamie found three cushaw squashes growing in his back garden. Though he didn't know how they got there, he saved the seeds, and every year raised a new generation of the squash to make pies. His cushaw/butternut pie became a family favorite. This year, however, you don't have to be a family member to get a taste. Anyone eating

at The Harvest Table, which opened in September in Meadowview Square, can enjoy it. At least for as long as squash is in season.

Lamie grows 12 to 15 varieties of squash on 8/10ths of an acre on his Rich Valley farm.

Small farmers like Lamie aren't necessarily the type of food providers restaurants seek out. This, however, isn't your normal restaurant. For starters, The Harvest Table serves only locally grown food, for the most part, and relies on farmers like Lamie to keep a steady supply of it. At least eight farmers from around the region provide fresh produce.

"A lot of restaurants start with chicken breasts, we start with the chicken," said Steven Hopp of the Meadowview Farmers Guild, the organization behind the new restaurant and general store on the Meadowview Square.

"We source things as locally as we can with the goal to bring outsiders into Meadowview, to bring money in through tourism," Hopp said. "It's the reverse flow of money. It's the key to a viable future for our region."

The idea started as Hopp's response to a proposed truck stop in Meadowview and chain restaurants he thought would follow.

"Your money is staying here instead of being sent to a corporate office in Chicago," Hopp said. "This (restaurant) is designed not to do that. It's a food network designed to incorporate as many people who want to be involved."

If the kitchen runs out of squash, chef Philip Newton simply calls up a farmer and meets him in Abingdon to restock, as he did just the other day. Or maybe, as happened last week, Hopp will drive to a farm and help cut chard for the restaurant.

It takes that kind of dedication, along with a willingness to adapt and wear several different hats to make the restaurant work.

Sometimes, Newton said, a half hour before opening he and his fellow chef Richard Houser are still assessing that day's food supply, bouncing around supper ideas for that night's menu.

"We've been open eight nights and have had five different menus," Newton said. "It's more difficult than being able to call up a food supplier, but the end product is so fresh."

Newton's sure it will get easier though.

"Next year we'll have people growing and producing things just for us," he said. "Farmers will grow extra rows of potatoes and onions and garlic, things we use a lot."

Most of the produce, like the squash, comes from Washington County. Hopp said the dried beans come from the Carolinas. A farm in Roanoke provides the free-range chickens. The beef comes from just over the county line in Smyth County. The trout comes from the mountains of North Carolina. The crab and rice come from the coastal area of that state. Some of the shi-take mushrooms are from Mendota.

The food wasn't the only part of the restaurant that was carefully researched and chosen. The general store's renovation was just as important.

American chestnut was salvaged from an old barn for the wood siding in the dining room, old tobacco sticks are now used as part of the banister, the building's old chimney was used to build the brick gas-fired oven.

Even the green color of the dining room was a detail carefully chosen. Hopp said he decided on the green to contrast the orange and red that fast food restaurants usually use to stimulate appetite.

But there's also been some compromise. The chairs and light-fixtures weren't made locally – about the only things that weren't. The cleaning products and olive oil just can't be produced locally.

Hopp described the restaurant's atmosphere as upscale with prices ranging from \$5 for a small supper to \$22 for a filet mignon.

"I don't think we're any more expensive than Red Lobster at Exit 7 but if they're getting a burger here, it's raised and grown here. They know for sure that their dollar stays here," Hopp said. "If people are resistant to coming in, it's probably because they don't understand it."

The choice to go local, very local, came at a cost. Hopp said it would be at least a decade before the Farmers Guild begins to get back what it has invested. But it has, after all, invested in local people.

"The Farmers Guild has been a big benefit," Lamie said. "It's buying local products."

Taking truckloads of squash to the Guild reminds Lamie of when his mom was a kid and her dad would go to Saltville and peddle produce out of a wagon.

Lamie ate at the restaurant last week. He said though it seemed there were mostly people from Abingdon, not too many of his neighbors, he didn't mind.

"I walked in with my holey jeans and plopped down and ate with them. I mean, my name's on the menu." ■

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Photos by Caitlin Sullivan, Washington County News
Harvest Table chef Philip Newton presents a plate of steaming roasted pork and apples.