

Tanzanian villagers' lives changed by well



Access to a centrally located well for clean water has changed the lives of a Tanzanian village. Now instead of walking 2 miles to a contaminated pond and carrying water back, a job mostly by kids, they only have to go to the well for their daily water needs. This access to water has enabled them to grow and eventually sell sunflowers (pictured) for the seeds to be extracted for oil.

When we need water for things like a drink, cooking, dishes, laundry or personal hygiene it is there for us, all we have to do is turn on the faucet. This is not the case yet today for many places around the world.

For the past 15 years Steve Elzinga of Erie has been making annual trips to Tanzania in East Africa, a place he became fond of after doing missionary work there years ago with his wife. Over the years he has made many friends in the country. "The people are so wonderful and friendly," he said.

At the end of last year when Elzinga was visiting a little village located about 30 miles from Dodoma, the country's capital, he discovered a need and a disturbing fact and decided to do something to aid the village.

"The capital is modern but once outside the city it's like

another world, it's pretty basic," he said. The village has about 200 houses but none of them have water. "They have to walk every day about two miles to a pond to get their water, for their household needs, that is used by goats and cattle. You and I wouldn't think about drinking it," he said.

The water is carried in five-gallon pails with a pail suspended on each end of a stick and carried on a back. Children are often the collectors of the water. "That's about 40 pounds of water in each pail, about 80 pounds of water," Elzinga said.

He was told that the young boys and girls that carry the water on their backs, if they do this too much that it stunts their growth. "I decided to come back home and raise some funds to dig a well in the village center to reduce and/or eliminate the distance to travel," Elzinga said.

Elzinga had in years past helped two other little villages in a remote area of Tanzania get wells so he reached out to people who had donated in the past as well as members of the Mennonite Church in Toledo where he is a member.

He needed to raise \$25,000 for the project and when he shared the story the funds were quickly raised. "Donations ranged from \$200 to \$10,000," he said.

The elders of the village allocated a plot for the well on centrally located public property and funds were wired to an acquaintance of Elzinga's named Gideon who has an NGO (non-governmental organization). Gideon is quite capable of handling the logistics of the well installation and had helped with the two previous well projects.

The well ended up being over 500 ft. deep with a pump that is powered by solar panels "They do have lots of sunshine, they are just south of the equator," Elzinga said. While solar panels are more expensive than a diesel-powered pump, he said the people had no money for fuel. Once installed the solar panels would be good for many years. "The panels work out just great," he said.

The well serves the daily needs of the 200 houses, translating to about 1,000 people. They have planted sunflowers in the area of the well that when harvested and sold, sunflower oil will be extracted from the seeds that will be used in cooking. "They will be able to grow vegetables now that the well is there," Elzinga said.

You can only imagine how you would feel with the changes in your life that this well would make and having access to clean water. "The people were so excited," Elzinga said.