

MADISON Books for the World Project From Wisconsin State Journal ...
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Thom Wiess, program coordinator for Books for the World, sorts books with the program's local founder, Carol Dombroski, in just the past five years, the program has shipped an average of 200 tons of books per year.



Carol Dombroski works with student Slyoneia Dothe in Kewi Mouth, a rural South African community, where she and her husband Bob helped build a library using books distributed from the Books for the World distribution center in Johannesburg, South Africa.



Through 2015, more than 1,300 tons of books with an estimated used value of \$26 million have been received from more than 200 schools, 15 libraries, and five book resellers in Wisconsin. Above Thom Wiess, program coordinator for Books for the World, in the warehouse where tons of books are waiting to be shipped.

Photos by Samara Kalk Derby State Journal

After she retired from teaching elementary school in McFarland, Carol Dombroski worked as a long-term substitute in a school library, where she couldn't get her mind around all the books being thrown away.

"Teachers can't stand to see things thrown away," she said.

So in 2005, Dombroski, a Madison resident, started collecting the unwanted books and saving them for a cause. She just didn't know what the cause would be.

Then one day she learned of a Rotary International program called Books for the World, which started in Houston, Texas, in 2000.

Soon, she and her husband Bob became a big part of that effort. They and other local volunteers pick up boxes of textbooks and other books from schools and libraries and bring them to a warehouse behind Madison Area Technical College's Truax Campus that MATC lets them use for free.

There, every four to six weeks, volunteer groups from local companies including Epic and

American Family Insurance pack the books into boxes that are then neatly stacked and wrapped on pallets.

When they accumulate 30 pallets, they hire a freight company to truck them to Houston, where they are transferred to a cargo container for shipment to a local Rotary Club in a developing country, according to volunteer Dave Peterson.

Today, the program serves more than 25 countries, including those in southern Africa, Central and South America, India, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

On Martin Luther King Jr. Day, a group of about 20 volunteers was working in the warehouse, where it was about 25 degrees, sorting books and putting them into boxes. Among them was Bill Braun, who isn't a Rotarian but has been volunteering almost from the beginning.

"This is such a worthwhile project," said Braun, who is retired from doing computer support at TDS Telecom. "No. 1, the books don't get landfilled. No. 2, the books are sent to a country where they desperately need books."

The third reason he does it, Braun said, is because it's "Rotary to Rotary to Rotary. There's no government, no military, nobody else involved."

In 2005, before the Dombroskis learned about Books for the World, they took a class about Africa in preparation for a trip there.

At the same time, UW-Madison was helping leaders from South Africa hone their math and science teaching skills. When those leaders went back, Carol Dombroski sent a bunch of her collected books with them.

Within a couple of years, the Dombroskis joined Rotary and became part of Books for the World. Sending books became more streamlined.

Carol Dombroski began calling schools all over South Central Wisconsin and telling them about the project, and what started as two boxes in her basement quickly turned into 8 tons. Gradually, the collection area spread to the entire state of Wisconsin.

Hallman Lindsay Paints, based in Sun Prairie, takes paint all over Wisconsin and returns with empty trucks. The company volunteered to bring books back from across the state as long as schools can get the boxes to their doors.

The local Books for the World group gets more than 700 volunteers a year between companies and service groups, Bob Dombroski said. Local companies donate pallets, cardboard boxes and packing materials, so that all of the local group's expenses wind up being covered except shipping.

The local group gets the books to Houston and then pays \$3,000 for every shipping container sent. About 35,000 books fit in each container.

The developing countries often establish a library or clinic using the shipping container as the building, Bob Dombroski said.