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SHIRLEY AND DAN MOOERS pose with children of Zimbabwe on a recent trip to Africa. (Contributed photo)

Dan and Shirley Mooers address famine, hardship and hunger

South Portland couple returns from Zimbabwe

By Jim Keithley
Sentry staff

They have traveled the world as goodwill ambassadors trying to end hunger and help the struggling people of third world countries.

Daniel and Shirley Mooers of South Portland have just returned from an 8-day trip to Zimbabwe, Africa.

For the past 18 years, the Mooers have traveled to little known corners of the world to help in projects to relieve suffering and to help people improve their lives.

They have been to Mexico, Trinidad, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Tiland, Russia and four South African countries, including Zimbabwe.

Dan Mooers has served on the board of directors for Rotary International, an organization with 1.2 million members in 31,000 different communities world-wide. Mooers is also an active member in the

local South Portland/Cape Elizabeth Rotary.

He was approached by the president of Rotary International and asked to help in the latest famine relief mission to the economically devastated country of Zimbabwe.

Mooers, a South Portland attorney, put out an appeal to local Rotarians for donations of money and school supplies.

The Mooers said they were overwhelmed by the generosity of the community. (Please turn to page 4)

Mooers

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munity.

"I received a call from Halifax, Nova Scotia, where Rotarians collected \$1,000 from members, an amount that will feed 500 children for three months in Zimbabwe," Mooers said.

Contributions totaling \$5,000 from Rotarians in Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire and the Canadian Maritimes helped assist the famine relief effort.

The Mooers left Maine on Mother's Day, Sunday, May 11 and spent five days in the African nation visiting a number of schools.

"One school had 600 kids in eight rooms," said Dan Mooers.

"It was heart-breaking," said Shirley Mooers. "The children we saw all had legs that looked like sticks," she said. "It was very cool, windy and rainy and most of these children were bare foot."

The Mooers learned from

the teachers that some of the children had to walk 10 kilometers to get to school.

The couple from South Portland brought along four huge suitcases full of school supplies that were donated here in Maine.

"Everything from color books, pencils, note paper and crayons," Mrs. Mooers said.

The Mooers said the children were taken with the colored crayons.

"Boy, these little kids would clutch those crayons like you'd just given them a million bucks," Mr. Mooers said.

The schools were located in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city.

Rotary International has been designated as the only agency allowed to distribute food through the schools.

The Mooers handed over a check for \$5,000 allowing the local Rotarians in Africa to buy enough cornmeal to feed hundreds of people.

"They can buy a ton of cornmeal for \$210 U.S. dollars," Mr. Mooers said.

The cornmeal is shipped

to the schools. Poverty and disease are so common in that country that the cornmeal alone draws children and parents to the schools.

"They don't have enough to eat at home. They can't make the walk to school and those children who do go to school can't concentrate and in many cases parents keep their children home because they're too weak," said Mrs. Mooers.

The Rotarian-sponsored food-delivery program brings everyone to the schools.

"The parents come and do the cooking," Mr. Mooers said.

The Mooers have experienced similar situations in other third-world countries. They say the parents are the ones who build the schools with their own hands so their children can get an education and have at least one meal a day.

Zimbabwe is as depressed as any of the other countries the couple visited.

"Of the 14 million people in that country, two million aren't in the distribution

chain," Mr. Mooers said. "Some of them simply survive by boiling leaves and grass," he said.

Along with the food and school supplies, the Mooers brought along a few toys. Three soccer balls.

"Five dollar soccer balls you can get at the nearest sports store," Mr. Mooers said. "As soon as they saw those balls, their eyes got so big," he said.

The Mooers said Zimbabwe is a country that is economically destroyed.

"People are literally lining up for a whole week so they can put gas in their car," Mr. Mooers said.

"The country is in shambles," he said.

They said HIV and AIDS have savaged a large portion of the population.

"Twenty-five percent of the population has AIDS," Mrs. Mooers said.

"A 15-year-old boy in Zimbabwe has a 60 percent chance of dying from AIDS," Mr. Mooers said.

Medical supplies are few. The Mooers said hospitals aren't have certain medica-

tions, but they don't have the proper equipment to administer the drugs.

"Doctors and nurses are leaving because they are so frustrated," Mrs. Mooers said.

"Most of these children's parents are dead of AIDS," Mr. Mooers said. "They are being raised by cousins and grandparents," he said.

The Mooers have traveled to more than a dozen such countries in the last 12 years. What little they can do to help alleviate hardship is what motivates them to continue on with these humanitarian missions.

"We are grandparents and we want to see the world become a better place for them," said Mrs. Mooers. "That's why we do it."

Mrs. Mooers admits the experience is rewarding and frustrating at the same time.

"There is satisfaction when you see the smiles on the children's faces, but such heartache knowing that we are only doing so very little," Mrs. Mooers said.

The Mooers returned to

Maine with emotional connections to the children and images they won't soon forget.

"Their eyes are not alert and bright like our children here," Mrs. Mooers said. "Their eyes are almost haunting sometimes," she said.

"The image I come away with, is that these people are not looking for a handout, they are just looking for help," Mr. Mooers said.

There is no time to rest for the Mooers. They are heading off to Australia next week for another Rotary International meeting. They will hear and learn about another section of the world where their services might be needed.

"There's always a need, somewhere," Mrs. Mooers said.

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