

BOOKS FOR AFRICA

FALL 2002

NEWSLETTER

Malawi Project Marks Milestones for BFA ...and for Every School in Malawi

The tiny nation of Malawi, in south-eastern Africa, is about to become a lot bigger on the BFA map. No, it hasn't annexed new territory or otherwise expanded its borders. But with the completion of the first phase of BFA's Malawi Project this fall, the nation's 800 secondary schools will be in line for all new reference libraries, while the project's second phase will do the same for more than 5,000 elementary schools. What this means for overall educational performance is clear: a nation starved for basic information will have it at its fingertips in every village that boasts a school.

The goal of the project was simple: procure, ship, and distribute brand new reference libraries for each and every school in Malawi. Each library would include a complete set of encyclopedias, a dictionary, and an

atlas. Given the size of the country, it seemed feasible to develop a project that would target every school in the nation. The decision to seek all new books for a basic reference library was seen as a valuable model that could be replicated at least regionally in larger countries. So, even by concentrating on a single country, BFA would be building a base with implications continent-wide.

While there were surely times along the way when one might have been tempted to say—"What were we thinking?!!!"—the truth is this project has opened new doors for BFA. It's been an enormous undertaking, but with a mix of hard work and some good fortune, it's well on its way to setting a standard for school libraries in Africa.

As with most beginnings, this

one has its share of serendipity and circumstance. In 1998, former Peace Corps volunteer John Ziegenhagen joined the BFA board with a special interest in Malawi, the country where he'd served. As the project evolved, BFA executive director Bob Kowalczyk just happened to connect with World Book, Inc. through a purely social dinner one night in Chicago, which in turn produced a substantial book donation. Long established Rotary Club contacts both in the U.S. and in Africa led to BFA's single largest project grant to date, and a track record and reputation for performance resulted in all freight being donated by the U.S. Department of State.

The overall budget of \$500,000 was the largest commitment to a single project in the organization's history,

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Thanks, Bob!

Bob Kowalczyk, BFA's first and only executive director, has announced his retirement at the end of this year. As hard as he's worked to get BFA to where it is today, part of that work has always been aimed at building an organization that could be passed on to the next generation of leadership. Fourteen years ago, there was no BFA—today, it's ready for the future, thanks to Bob.

In 1989, Bob left his position as executive director of Fraser School, ready for new opportunities. That same year, Tom Warth came back from visiting schools and a library without books in Uganda, and founded BFA. Tom met Bob, and the rest is history. With energy, ability and dedication,



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Bob Kowalczyk with students in a Botswana school.

Malawi Project

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even though it represents only a portion of the project's true costs.

Publishers, government, and private funders both here and in Africa are making major contributions that offset many of the project's expenses.

For example, World Book, Inc. is making the brand new books available at 50% of their production cost, which represents only a fraction of their retail value. The books being sent to the

secondary schools alone are valued at more than \$7 million! The cost of the books is being wholly supported by a \$50,000 grant from Rotary International, which in turn matches \$50,000 contributed by Rotary Clubs in districts 5950, 5960, and their respective district foundations, for a total of \$100,000. A pending grant in the amount of \$400,000 from Coca Cola-Africa is earmarked to support the cost of books for the primary schools.

The project marks several "firsts" for BFA. As we move into our next

generation of support for the children of Africa, the significance of being able to work on larger, more costly, and more complex projects with multiple partners and greater control of the quality of the books heralds a new era. Without sacrificing BFA's ongoing commitment to broad-based support throughout the continent, this project demonstrates the possibilities of leveraging resources toward an identifiable target with profound effect.

Thanks, Bob!

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Bob took Tom's vision and built this organization.

In his first year, BFA sent three shipments to Africa, for a total of 75,000 books—not bad for a brand new organization with only one employee and no official office space. The organization has challenged itself time and again, and each time Bob has met the challenge. Two years ago we reached the million-book milestone, sending 40 containers in a single year; this year, we've shipped 47 containers, or 1,175,000 books. All told, BFA has sent over 7 million books to 22 countries during Bob's 14 years.

Under Bob's leadership BFA has

become known by more and more people in the Twin Cities, around the country, and around the continent of Africa. An enthusiastic Rotarian, Bob has led BFA in establishing partnerships with Rotary clubs across the region and country, and in receiving countries in Africa. Through these and many other partnerships, the organization has established credibility and a reputation for getting the job done. With only a month left before his retirement, Bob will be back in Africa this November implementing BFA's largest single project to date—placing a reference library in every secondary school in Malawi.

Knowing that he hoped to retire this year, Bob prepared by hiring an associate director and development

director in the last two years. Besides providing much needed support, these positions offer history and continuity, as well as supporting continued growth. An executive search committee has been active since spring, and BFA plans to hire a new director January 1, 2003.

We're 7 million books closer to ending the book famine in Africa, thanks to Bob. And because there are millions more to go, we'll welcome the energy and leadership of a new director this winter. Later this fall, we'll have to say goodbye and good luck, but for now we can just say, "Thanks, Bob. We couldn't have done it without you."

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3/1/2002 – 7/31/2002

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Milestones

Congratulations to development director Suzanne Koeplinger on earning her Masters degree in Leadership from Augsburg College in May.

Executive director Bob Kowalczyk will lead his sixth tour to Africa this October. Countries on the itinerary are Botswana, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. (For information on future tours, contact the BFA office: 651.602.9844)

We sadly report the deaths of three committed supporters of BFA:

Terry Ehrich, a fellow publisher and friend of BFA founder Tom Warth, generously supported BFA from its inception.

Bill "Cutz" Klas, another one of BFA's earliest cheerleaders, provided significant and continuous support in many ways over the last 14 years. His wife Louise was a founding board member, and daughter Annie currently serves on the board.

Federal Magistrate Judge John "Jack" Mason had recently become an enthusiastic supporter and was in his second year as a member of the BFA advisory board.

Updates

Suzanne Koeplinger and intern Melanie Caesar represented BFA at the National Peace Corps conference in Washington DC in June.

Bob Kowalczyk represented BFA at the International Rotary conference in Barcelona, Spain in June.

Suzanne Koeplinger, board member Ron Aminzade and board chair Lane Ayres met with First Lady of Tanzania Anna Mkapa this past May to give an update on the Tanzania Initiative and discuss

progress on plans for the Nyerere Library in Tanzania.

We sent our 7,738,000th book to Africa in September, in a shipment to Ethiopia. As of the start of fiscal year 2003 in July, we have already sent 10 containers of books. Countries served so far are Liberia, South Africa, Ghana, Tanzania, Nigeria and Ethiopia.

You are cordially invited to our Fall Open House

2pm – 5 pm
Sunday November 24, 2002
at the BFA warehouse
253 East 4th Street, St. Paul, Minnesota

music and refreshments