

# Leesburg group continues Malawi mission at home

Holly Hobbs

It's been a few weeks since they returned from their 23-day mission trip to Malawi, Africa. And the group of nine volunteers, most from Leesburg Presbyterian Church, is continuing its mission to sponsor and support its sister community across the Atlantic.

The team included six from Leesburg Presbyterian on Market Street -- Bill and Beth Rule, Shirley Pearson, Kathy Brown, Laurie Stevens and Tom Chase. Other community member rounded out the group.

Malawi, a sliver-shaped country about the land size of Arizona, sits northeast of South Africa, with Lake Nyasa taking up most of its eastern border.

Leesburg Presbyterian Church is helping sponsor the remote village of Luvwere, offering it financial support as well as school books and medical supplies.

"When we got there, there were hundreds and hundreds of people there to meet us," said Kathy Brown, of Leesburg. "They heard we were coming. We had gifts for them, but they had gifts for us."

The group received a live goat and chicken, and a 100-pound bag of nuts.

Brown said she was surprised and moved by the presents because the Malawian villagers were poor but still wanted to share what they had.

While in Malawi, the group dedicated an integrated preventive health service center, which will provide family counseling, immunizations, HIV/AIDS treatment and education.

Leesburg Presbyterian Church -- along with several other Presbyterian churches -- helped raise the nearly \$100,000 needed to build the center. Of this, Leesburg Presbyterian raised \$8,000 in three years.

"So many people came for this dedication," said Shirley Pearson, a former teacher who has visited Malawi four times.

Pearson, who has experience with sewing, said a favorite memory of the trip was working with the village girls to show them how to make skirts and getting to tell them they could keep the skirts.

"They were just overjoyed," she said.

Tom Chase said the trip's goal was to share knowledge with the villagers they could apply when the volunteers left.

"We tried to make them feel comfortable and [also feel] that they could go on [without us]," he said.

Chase said he noticed the involvement of extended family, which is even more important in Malawi because of the many deaths caused by AIDS.

But most importantly, he said, there are "lots of opportunities to get involved" and help in Africa.

Leesburg Presbyterian Church will continue to send schools, books and medical supplies, as well as financial aid overseas to its sponsored village, the group said.

"All of the gifts are being well managed and distributed," said Brown, adding that the church has reliable contacts, which is important to guarantee donations are given to those for whom they are intended.

"If you give them \$50, there will be a committee meeting that lasts half a day on how to spend it," she said.

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