



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF TONI CLARK

Toni Clark of Coto de Caza is pictured in Malawi with Esther Padoko, one of the kindergarten teachers at the school started by Kasupe Ministries. Padoko is one of the leaders of the nonprofit's HIV and AIDS support group. Clark started the organization after a trip to Malawi in 2004.

SEEDS for CHANGE

Coto de Caza woman is on a mission to make a difference for the people of Malawi in Africa.

BY MARIE EKBERG PADILLA
FOR THE REGISTER

Toni Clark is on a mission to save the world – one starfish at a time.

“Throwing a single starfish back in the ocean won’t save all the starfish on the beach, but it will certainly help the one you throw back,” said Clark of Coto de Caza, who recently returned from her sixth trip to Kasupe, Malawi, where she helps run a school, health center, library, goat farm and tree farm. “There are so many problems in the world and one person will never fix them all, but one person can

make a huge difference in the lives of a few, and for whatever reason, I’ve been blessed with the opportunity to make a difference for some people in Malawi, so I do.”

For Clark, a member of Crossline Church in Ladera Ranch, the trip to the African nation was the first time back since 2011 when she contracted malaria and the infectious disease brucellosis from sick goats. The diseases left her hospitalized on two continents.

“The entire experience was brutal, but it wasn’t something



Toni Clark of Coto de Caza sits with kindergartners in Malawi.

SEEDS: Part of group's focus is education

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that would ever keep me from going back," she said. "I love those people."

AFRICAN MISSION

Serving others is nothing new for Clark, who has been on missions to Mexico and Thailand, and done community service around Orange County as the former president of the Canyon chapter of the National Charity League.

Clark's journey to help the people of Malawi started with a mission trip with her Bible study group from Saddleback Church in 2004. The experience captured her heart, she said, and when she returned home, she launched Kasupe Ministries, a nonprofit organization to support the poor in rural south Malawi.

Clark said the long-term goal with her nonprofit group is that children obtain at least a 12th-grade education, that everyone know his or her HIV status and that all HIV-positive children get antiretroviral drugs to fight the virus.

IMPACT OF AIDS PANDEMIC

Kasupe Ministries' HIV and AIDS program, spearheaded by Clark, has transformed the rural community, said Coto de Caza resident Barbara Benner, who has joined Clark in Malawi twice and now serves as Kasupe Ministries' board secretary.

When Clark first came to Malawi, the villagers knew little about the disease or how it was spread, Benner said. Clark changed that by leading AIDS presentations at a high school and before village chiefs and hundreds of villagers. During Benner's next trip with Clark in 2008, she witnessed progress, she said.

"Kasupe had started an AIDS program that included AIDS support groups, assistance for getting (antiretroviral) medicines and home visits to AIDS patients," she said. "Toni's dedication to the AIDS program has made a huge difference at Kasupe."

SURVIVING EACH DAY

Kasupe Ministries serves about 12,000 villagers who live in mud and brick huts. They survive by growing corn and tomatoes and breeding cows and goats in a bartering community.

"We are trying to teach them that capitalism is not a bad thing," she said, adding the goal is to show how the villagers can be self-sufficient.

Clark's enthusiasm and pas-



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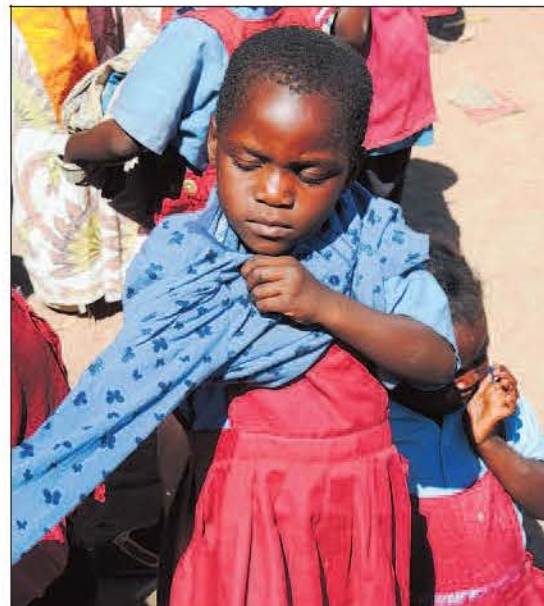
Coto de Caza resident Toni Clark is pictured at Kasupe Kindergarten in Malawi. The school was Kasupe Ministries' first big capital project. Students there start primary school at least two grade levels ahead of other students, according to Clark. The kindergarteners also receive one meal every day, she said.



Clark's daughter Jacqueline Struck, 25, is pictured with a Lilongwe Technical College student.

"First and foremost, my desire to serve comes from Christ. At heart, I'm quite selfish so it's in spite of myself that I've fallen in love with people halfway around the world. ... It was just joy when I saw their smiles, heard their laughs and especially when they sang and danced."

TONI CLARK
KASUPE MINISTRIES



A young Malawian girl tries on a shirt during a clothing distribution.

2 1/2-week trip was education. Together with her 25-year-old daughter, Jacqueline Struck, she visited several college campuses where Kasupe Ministries-sponsored students attend, gave a speech at the Kasupe Secondary School graduation and held a tree-planting ceremony in memory of her father, Bobby Cryer.

Since the start of Clark's mission to help the Malawi people, she has seen big improvements, she said.

"Most rewarding has been the increase in the number of girls continuing their education," she said. Children in the village rarely attended school past fifth grade, but since 2004, in addition to providing a high school education for hundreds of students, there are 33 Kasupe Ministries-sponsored students in college and more than half are girls, she said.

Education is key to the nation's future, Clark said.

"Girls need to start realizing they are not property and that they are smart enough to do other things than pumping out babies. Otherwise the poverty continues," she said. "A cultural paradigm shift has to occur, but we still need to respect their heritage and culture."

Clark is seen as a mother figure to the children and orphans at Kasupe, Benner said. "She is not someone who comes for a week every so often and then abandons them. She is in their corner, driven by her faith in God and a calling to help the people of Kasupe."

PLANTING SEEDS FOR CHANGE

With her nonprofit organization, Clark is planting seeds to change the future for the Malawi people, figuratively and literally. It's a virtue she said comes from her late father, who asked her to always plant a tree wherever she went in the world.

"You just need to be a seed planter and future generations will see," she said.

The sentiment is not lost on her daughter.

"She plants seeds in people's lives, sometimes without seeing the direct effect," Struck said. "She raised me to understand the importance of giving back."

sion for Kasupe is contagious, Benner said. "She exudes love to every person she sees with an ever-ready smile and hug. But, she is not there just to give love, she is there to accomplish things to help

Kasupe - and she works tirelessly to do so."

RETURNING TO RURAL AFRICA

Upon returning to Africa, Clark took with her 280 pounds of

donated clothes from Ladera Ranch residents, loads of medications, first aid supplies and diapers to the poor people in Jonathan Village and surrounding areas.

The focus of her most recent