Spring 2017 Newsletter

News on Trailblazer Foundation’s Activities During the Past Quarter

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Note from the Executive Director .................................................. Page 2
Health Program – Rotary Club Support From Around The World ........ Page 3
Food Security Program – Agricultural Trainings - A Service Taking Root Page 4
Education Program – Four Girls for Families .................................. Page 5
Economic Development Program – Sewing Groups for Sewing Women Page 6
Staff/Board Profile – Meet Executive Secretary Jeni Swink ............... Page 7
Other News – Success in Providing Water Filters to Two Villages .... Page 7
The Final Word – More Photos of Trailblazer’s Agricultural Trainings .... Page 8

(Photos: Trailblazer Foundation’s Chris Coats and Tom Skeele meet with representatives of the Long Beach-based Cambodia Town, during Trailblazer’s recent trip to southern California.)
Hello Trailblazer Supporters,

Whether it’s becoming a long standing pattern, or a new tradition, every year I spend three-to-four weeks in Cambodia. It is important for me to check in with the Cambodian staff, spend time strategizing with our in-country Program Manager and Field Director, meet with project partners, and visit our constituents in the rural villages of Siem Reap Province. Stated another way, it is important for me to spend time with those who make Trailblazer’s rural community development programs happen.

This year, I am starting a new travel pattern, one I expect will become a tradition for me, and the organization. This new commitment to work-related travel is inspired by the same desire to spend time with those who make Trailblazer’s programs happen. In this case, I mean those of you who provide the funding, partnerships, or community connections we need to implement our programs. This year, I have begun making regular trips to visit with present, past and prospective donors, as well as others playing a key role in Trailblazer’s success.

For 2017 and 2018, my focus will be on North America, especially the United States. However, I expect that, in due time, I will find my way to other parts of the world, to meet with people, foundations, businesses, civic groups and others who want, or may want, to support Trailblazer.

My first trip in 2017 was last month. For three days in mid-April, I traveled to southern California, making stops in the towns of Long Beach, Venice, Corona, Escondido, and Solano Beach. Joined by Tom Skeele, Trailblazer’s Communications and Development Director, he and I met with past, present, and potential donors, representatives from two civic groups, a community foundation, and a prospective Board recruit.

As Tom likes to say, when taking these trips, it is good to “make friends, make news, and make money.” We accomplished all three - including an article in the Long Beach Press Telegram about our visit with representatives of the local Cambodia Town (you can read that article on the Media page of our website). Each meeting was productive and inspiring, and Trailblazer’s staff has already begun implementing a handful of great ideas people gave us. For those of you on social media, you may have seen our posts about this trip on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

My next trip is to the San Francisco Bay Area, where I’ll be when this newsletter lands in your electronic or land-based mailbox. After that, it’s the Great Northwest in early June. Then, in the fall, I expect to make one or two trips east of Colorado before going to Cambodia in November. I look forward to meeting more and more people across this continent, and who knows where else around the globe.

If you would like to host an event of some sort in your area, to help Trailblazer share its story with your friends, neighbors, or community members, or if you have other ideas for Trailblazer visiting your community, please get in touch with me at chris@thetrailblazerfoundation.org, or call me at 307-399-2192.

In the meantime, it is great to be putting faces to the names of people, foundations and organizations we’ve either known about, or wanted to connect with – the people who make Trailblazer what it is, through your financial support, programmatic partnerships, and/or community connections.

See you soon, I hope.

Chris Coats
Co-Founder and Executive Director
Health Program

Rotary Clubs – Great Supporters of Trailblazer Foundation The World Over

Since its inception in 2004, Trailblazer Foundation has had a close relationship with the Rotary International community, receiving important initial and ongoing support from Clubs and Districts across the United States, and around the globe. In all, Trailblazer has received nineteen grants from Rotary clubs in the United States, fourteen grants from clubs outside of the States, and two grants from Rotary International.

Our most recent grants came from the Rotary Club of Scarborough (Australia) in December, and the Zurich-Flughafen Rotary Club (Switzerland) in February. Both grants supported our Health program, specifically the distribution of water filters and wells.

It is not surprising that many in the Rotary community have chosen to support Trailblazer. Rotary International is dedicated to six areas of focus, to build international relationships, improve lives, and create a better world. Of those six, three directly relate to Trailblazer’s work: [1] providing clean water, sanitation, and hygiene, [2] supporting education, and [3] growing local economies. Trailblazer’s four program areas are health, food security, education, and economic development.

This connection between Trailblazer and the Rotary clubs that have supported us was initially made by one of Trailblazer’s early Board members – Pat Butts. A resident of Alta, Wyoming (a neighboring town to Trailblazer’s initial home in Jackson, Wyoming), Pat joined the Board of Directors in 2005. She was the driving force behind many of Trailblazer’s initial Rotary club grants. This included clubs from the Jackson area, which gave Trailblazer six of its first nine Rotary grants. Pat also played a pivotal role in Trailblazer receiving two larger “international grants” from Rotary International.

Additionally, Chris Coats has spoken to numerous Rotary groups - at both monthly meetings and annual conventions. For example, last year Chris was a keynote speaker at the annual meeting of District 5440, covering the U.S. states of Wyoming, Colorado, Idaho and Nebraska. Approximately 300 people attended the conference, with representatives from nearly 50 Rotary Clubs across the district.

Afterwards, Chris received a thank you note from the District Governor, in which he said of Trailblazer: "The story of the evolution of the small project supported by Jackson Hole Rotary into the very effective program today was both immediately noted by the Rotarians, and very much a motivation to plan for bigger and better projects through their own clubs."

Our response: Thank you for the kind words, and the ongoing support. Trailblazer would not be the "very effective program" it is today without the support of a myriad of Rotary clubs around the globe.

You can see a listing of all the support Trailblazer has received from the Rotary International community under the “Partners” tab of our website: www.thetrailblazerfoundation.org.
Food Security Program

Trailblazer’s Agricultural Trainings – A Budding Service Taking Root

In our last newsletter, we discussed the suite of agriculture trainings Trailblazer Foundation provides rural villagers in Cambodia, through our Food Security program. Food security is the ability to have “reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food.” One way to support rural families in achieving food security is to train them in how to grow or raise more food, both in quantity and variety. For Trailblazer, this means providing trainings in horticulture and soil management, raising poultry, and fish farming.

Last year, Trailblazer committed to re-doubling its focus on agricultural trainings, offering more trainings more frequently. In preparation for this growth, we agreed to fund a new Agriculture Manager position at Trailblazer Angkor, our Cambodian affiliate (which implements almost all of our field work). By year’s end, we had provided agricultural trainings to 100 people. With each trainee representing an average family size of 5, all totaled our agricultural trainings directly benefited 500 people in 2016.

For 2017, we committed to providing agricultural trainings to 180 people. This includes six trainings on horticulture and composting (with an average 15 participants each), six trainings on raising poultry (with 10 participants each), and three trainings on fish farming (with 10 participants each). Again, with each trainee representing an average family size of 5, we are projected to directly benefit 900 people through our 2017 agricultural trainings.

Half way through the second quarter of 2017, we are happy to report that we have already conducted three horticulture and composting trainings (for 66 participants), and five poultry raising trainings (for 85 participants). Therefore, we are on track to meet, if not exceed, our objectives for these two types of trainings. As for our fish farming trainings, we plan to host those later in the year, during the rainy season, when there is more water to work with.

For more information about our Food Security program, please visit our website: www.thetrailblazerfoundation.org.

[NOTE: These two photos are from our recent trainings. You can see more photos from these trainings on the last page of the newsletter.]
Education Program

Four Girls in New York Provide Support For Families in Cambodia

"Sisters Emmy and Rae Specht came home to Bellport from a family trip to Cambodia determined to help address the Southeast Asian country’s rural poverty and lack of safe drinking water. Seven years later, they and two of their friends have raised $280,000 to build one school and provide clean water for thousands of rural villagers in Cambodia."

So starts an April 9th article in Newsday, a daily newspaper serving most of New York state’s Long Island region. In 2013, Emmy and Rae, along with their friends Madeleine Joinnides and Eloise Kocay, officially turned their project into a nonprofit organization, called Four Girls for Families.

Trailblazer was pleased to see this article come across our daily Google Alerts post, because we are great fans of Four Girls for Families. We value what Emmy, Rae, Madeleine, and Eloise are doing, because they are driven by the same desire as Trailblazer Foundation to make a difference for villagers in Cambodia. We also greatly appreciate the financial support Four Girls for Families' has given Trailblazer.

The desire to make a difference is often inspired by a person seeing something that doesn’t feel right. As explained in the Newsday article, Emmy Specht’s experience in Cambodia was just such an experience:

“I had never been to a place that was affected by poverty,” Emmy Specht, 14, said of the 2010 family trip where she saw children sitting on empty rice pails begging for money. “We were confused and upset, but we didn’t know how to help.”

It was 2013 when Four Girls for Families (FGFF) first contacted Trailblazer Foundation. In 2014, FGFF supported our Health program, with funding directed toward providing clean, healthy water to rural Cambodian families. Last year, FGFF helped fund Trailblazer’s new school construction project, the one school mentioned in the Newsday article. Finally, Four Girls for Families has voiced its desire to support Trailblazer’s 2017 school construction project.

We at Trailblazer think it is impressive what these four teenagers have done, because we know that raising $280,000 is no small feat. In the Newsday article, their mom, Joanne Specht, said what the girls have done is nothing short of miraculous. “They’re changing the world for thousands of people.”

The same has been said of Trailblazer, and we are pleased to partner with Four Girls for Families on this common mission.

You can see the full Newsday article on the “Media” link of our website: www.thetriailblazerfoundation.org.
Economic Development Program

Stitching Together Funding to Purchase Twenty Sewing Machines

In our last newsletter, we explained how, for many years, Trailblazer has been informally supporting the local Women’s Development Center. Most of that support has been in the form of sewing machines, which we’ve donated to be used for training and equipping women to produce and sell textiles. As we formalize our working relationship with the Center in 2017, Trailblazer has committed to donating 20 sewing machines this year (among other needs we are helping the Center address).

To raise this $4,000 (each sewing machine costs $200), Trailblazer will implement a new fundraising strategy – enlisting the support of people who themselves like to sew (because they understand the importance of having a sewing machine). To that end, we have begun researching sewing groups and businesses we can contact, to pitch the idea of them donating the cost of one or more sewing machines.

This idea came from Aimee Cebulski, one of the people Trailblazer’s staff recently met with in southern California (see “Executive Director Update” on page 2). In 2008, after returning from a trip to Cambodia, Aimee organized a photo exhibition of her work, called “Photography Works.” Through her efforts, Aimee raised more than $2,000 to fund water programs for Trailblazer Foundation and Imagine Ankgor. She is also the driving force behind aim communications, a boutique integrated public relations, writing, marketing and photography agency based in San Diego.

Thus, it is no wonder that, after Chris Coats explained Trailblazer’s commitment to provide twenty sewing machines to the Women’s Development Center, Aimee immediately said, “you should enlist the support of people who sew.” A great idea, one Trailblazer has adopted in our new “Stitching Together” campaign, to raise the funds necessary to purchase and deliver sewing machines to graduates of the Center’s five-month sewing training.

To that end, do you know of a sewing group, or a store that sells sewing products, whose members, owners, and/or customers might be interested in helping Trailblazer “stitch together” better economic opportunities for women in Siem Reap province? If so, we would love to hear from you. We are developing a fundraising packet to give to interested sewing enthusiasts, which we would be happy to send to whomever you think might be interested.

You can learn more about our partnership with the Women’s Development Center, part of our overall Economic Development program, by visiting our website: www.thetrailblazerfoundation.org.
Staff/Board Profile

Meet Jeni Swink, Our Executive Secretary

For more than ten years, Jeni has been the anchor to Trailblazer’s US operations. Jeni joined the staff in 2006, a little more than half way through her 20+ years living in Jackson, Wyoming (she recently moved to a small town south of Portland, Oregon).

During those two decades in Jackson, Jeni developed and launched Mike Atkins Teaching Ministry International. She also helped develop and manage the Upward Basketball and Cheerleading program, serving up to 250 participants during her eleven years there.

In 2011, Jeni re-joined the staff at First Baptist Church, as administrative assistant and webmaster. Also, Jeni had the privilege of home schooling her children through high school, and served as the HOW Teton County Contact and TEACH Coordinator for 12 years.

She continues to encourage home school families, and stays involved in protecting parental rights. Meanwhile, her favorite students are currently studying Exercise Physiology at George Fox University (her daughter), and training to be a fire fighter (her son).

You can learn more about our staff and Board of Directors on our website: thetrailblazerfoundation.org.

Other News

Success Story… Trailblazer Receives Contributions for Seventy Water Filters

In our last newsletter, we mentioned how Trailblazer Foundation was conducting a fundraising campaign to raise $5,600 toward the construction and delivery of water filters to seventy families in two rural villages in Cambodia. You can read more about this funding campaign under the “Donate” link on our website: thetrailblazerfoundation.org.

As we explained in the appeal, from our years of experience, we know that providing a water filter to each family in a village that wants one is the first step toward sustainability for that family, its members, and the village as a whole. Through this fundraising campaign, we wanted to complete this process for two rural villages in Cambodia’s Siem Reap province.

We are happy to report that we raised significantly more than our goal. In fact, we raised more than $14,000. This included one anonymous contribution for the cost of thirty-five water filters, enough to provide filters to all who wanted one in one of our two chosen villages. With the additional funding, we will have more resources to meet our overall annual goal of constructing and delivering 450 water filters to rural families in Siem Reap province.

To those of you who contributed to our most successful quarterly appeal yet, we toast you with a glass of clean water.
A Final Word....

Here are two more photos from Trailblazer Foundation’s recent agricultural trainings.