

Quilting a Better World

Recently, I had the good fortune to discover a group of women that I believe deserve mention. I believe they deserve mention, because they are a perfect illustration of the power of vision, commitment, and the spirit of generosity in this country.

The CanGo Grannies from Kamloops are a group of women who are committed to making the world a better place. Strictly volunteers, they have spent the last few years raising funds and awareness for the plight of grandmothers in Africa now responsible for raising grandchildren who have been left orphaned by the AIDS pandemic.

After hearing a moving presentation by Stephen Lewis (of the Stephen Lewis Foundation) in the spring of 2004, these women decided to form a group that would undertake as many fundraising opportunities as possible to aid women on the other side of the globe. "To do nothing is murder by complacency," Stephen Lewis told them. It was the impetus to do something miraculous.

To date, this group of forty women has raised more than \$50,000 dollars for the Grandmothers-to-Grandmothers campaign by using their creativity and ingenuity. They have also inspired other groups to form; now 150 across the country. What started as a simply stated and simply planted seed has blossomed into a movement of awesome proportions.

In 2005, an idea was brought forward to the group to patch together a display quilt with the signatures of some of Canada's most famous and influential people. It was an awesome and arduous undertaking.

Hundreds of politicians, artists, musicians and athletes were mailed a three-inch square of fabric for them to sign and send back. It was not an easy task. Finding contact information and getting past the fan mail filters often meant sending a second or third letter or tracking people down all over the planet.

Despite obstacles, the CanGo Grannies were able to collect over 200 signatures and the list of contributors is truly inspiring. Contributing to the effort are people such as Paul Anka, Margaret Atwood, Sarah McLachlan, Dan Aykroyd, Don Cherry, Jean Chretien, W. P. Kinsella, Steve Nash, Bobby Orr, Celine Dion, Wayne Gretzky, Kiefer Sutherland, Brian Mulroney, Robert Bateman, Roberta Bondar, Leonard Cohen, Christopher Plummer, Oscar Petersen, Mike Weir...the list goes on and on. The cooperation and generosity of our country's celebrities is a monument to the power one can harness when committed to a mission of love.

The Quilt, laid out in Canadian flag-like design, will raise funds for the Stephen Lewis Foundation so that grandmothers in 14 sub-Saharan African countries can become self sufficient and raise their grandchildren in love and in health. Imagine having the opportunity to bring so much hope and stability to those who need it the most!

But first, the Quilt has wings! For the next few months, they will be presenting it to the people of Canada to show in communities where other Grandmother groups are working to support the same cause. This Tour is still evolving as groups learn of its availability and work to arrange

display space in local museums and art galleries. For example, several Ottawa groups have cooperated to display the Quilt in the National Art Centre in Ottawa from July 1 – 8. Watch for it in a community near you! See the Quilt at www.greatcanadianquilt.com

This is why I believe the CanGo Grannies deserve special mention. Often senior members of our communities are viewed as having little value to contribute to the fabric of our society. This group has proven otherwise. A single idea, when woven together by the love and commitment of these amazing volunteers, has produced a tapestry of hope and inspiration that reaches right across the globe. They are a shining example that no idea is too big when you put your mind and soul into it. I am humbled by their strength and clarity of vision and I am proud to be able to share their story with you.

If you would like to help or get involved in the fundraising effort, please contact the Stephen Lewis Foundation at 501-260 Spadina Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, M5T 2E4
www.stephenlewisfoundation.ca

Never underestimate the power of kindness and good intention. Look at the CanGo Grannies. They're quilting a better world...one square at a time.

Arlena de Bruin