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Locals Help Build Zambian Library

Books Will 'Inspire People's Imaginations'

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By EMILY SHARRER

HARRISONBURG — When a local 8-year-old boy heard about a Bridgewater College professor's efforts to build a library in his native nation of Zambia, he donated all the money he had, \$8, to the project.

When 3,092 books were stuck in Harrisonburg with no way to get to Zambia, New York City resident and Zambian citizen Mbumwae Suba-Smith included them in a shipment she was sending to the nation.

When organizers needed workers, Zambia residents volunteered.

When the library needed books, Rockingham County and Harrisonburg City schools responded.

And when Mwizenge Tembo hatched the idea for the library, he never anticipated such a response.

"That kind of floored me," said Tembo, a Bridgewater College sociology professor. "The community and individual adoption of this project has really impressed me."

The entire project has been put together piece by piece with hard work and small miracles, says Tembo.

Workers broke ground on the library in the village of Nkhanga in 2007. The library, set to open sometime in the next two months, will serve more than 100,000 people.

But before that can happen, Tembo estimates that between \$3,000 and \$5,000 was still needed as of last month to catalog books, train volunteer librarians and build bookshelves, 20 tables and 200 chairs.

Half the 3,100-square-foot building will be the library room, while the other half is divided into an office and cataloging room, seminar room and kitchen.

"It's going to be a very good community center," said Tembo.

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Progress And Setbacks

In the last two years, the roof has been completed, walls have been plastered, and the floors have been finished. The windows are complete and carpenters have built nine doors. And nearly 4,000 books are in storage in Zambia waiting to be cataloged.

So far more than \$46,000 has been spent on the project, which will benefit thousands of children in four local schools that currently do not have books for their students.

But the project has not been without setbacks.

Because the site in Zambia is so remote, Tembo says, transportation of materials and construction take a long time.

A handmade kiln had to be built in order to fire 100,000 handmade bricks for the library. Two women carried three to four gallons of water on their heads about one mile, several times to aid in the bricks' production.

"Believe me, it's an experience," said Tembo. "It also shows the human spirit. People there work hard."

Every year, between November and March, construction on the project paused for the "rainy season," when Zambian residents tended their crops.

"If you have not been to many parts of the rural third world, you do not understand the [challenges]," said Tembo. "Sometimes over the years, I've had to pray."

'A Community Project'

Even with its trials and tribulations, Tembo says the project has definitely been well worth the work.

Because the project was a localized effort, Tembo says money was saved and locals were provided with much needed temporary jobs.

"Everybody is enthusiastic because they know it's a community project," Tembo said.

Nkhanga already has schools, a clinic, grocery stores and soccer teams.

Tembo hopes the new building will stabilize the community and encourage more people to stay in the area.

"Bringing a library just adds to the community," he said.

Most importantly, however, the library will help residents further their education — and dreams.

"For the people to become familiar with books is going to change lives," said Tembo, who says the new learning opportunity will help put children on a path to becoming scientists, teachers and doctors. "It has really inspired people's imaginations."

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