

Group designs T-shirts to benefit refugees

NEWS | Brian Moon

Last Saturday, the Mudge House library was louder than usual as students in Carnegie Mellon's chapter of FORGE silkscreened 100 T-shirts to benefit African refugees.

FORGE, which stands for "Facilitating Opportunities for Refugee Growth and Empowerment," is a non-governmental organization dedicated to helping refugees all over the world. Founded in 2003 at Stanford University, Carnegie Mellon's branch was established last year by Kate Edgar, a sophomore industrial design major, and Jen Johnson, a sophomore anthropology and history major.

FORGE mainly focuses on providing educational programs within refugee camps, such as mentoring programs for orphans. The organization also works to promote human rights and provide recreational programs.

There are currently at least eight chapters of FORGE nationwide.



MAX JORDAN

Sophomore biology major Jeff Meek creates a shirt at FORGE's event

The silk-screening was the first big event that Carnegie Mellon's chapter planned and held independently from the larger chapter at the University of Pittsburgh, though students from both universities attended.

"The goal of this event is to raise awareness and provide funds to buy blankets and education material for refugees, mostly Congolese, in Africa that are currently staying in the camps of Zambia, including the Meheba refugee camp," Edgar said. "The profits will be used to buy blankets and provide educational support for refugees in Zambia. We hope to raise more funds at the Baridi Night and buy blankets for 500 families."

Baridi Night (Baridi means cold in Swahili) is a major fundraising event held by FORGE chapters in Pittsburgh, Boston, and Los Angeles.

Pittsburgh's Baridi Night will be held on April 13 at the University of Pittsburgh.

Africans living in refugee camps need blankets and educational material most urgently, according to surveys conducted in Zambian refugee camps. Although blankets were provided when families moved into the camps, they have since become worn out. FORGE's current mission is to provide new blankets and replace the worn ones.

Students who participated in Saturday's event created their own uniquely designed T-shirts with paint and four basic silk screens. After designing the T-shirts, students could purchase their own or those of their friends. The price of a T-shirt was equivalent to buying one blanket for a family. Many students made more than one T-shirt and also donated money separately from buying a T-shirt.

The remaining T-shirts will be sold next week. The shirts will contain tags that have information on the refugee camps, Edgar said.

Students who participated in the event reacted positively to the experience.

"I wasn't aware of this issue before. I stopped by after seeing the posters that were put up around campus, but now I know a lot more," said Poamrong Rith, a sophomore design major. "It is much more personalized than usual shirt-selling events. It gives you a chance to show creativity, and it is actually fun. There is a lot of dedication in each shirt and each one is special."

The event, which was planned to last from 1 to 5 p.m., lasted longer than anticipated due to the time-consuming processes of designing and silk-screening. However, many non-FORGE participants worked overtime to design more shirts.

The members of FORGE hope that selling the shirts and organizing Baridi Night will raise awareness of refugees in Africa and all over the world.

“I believe [the silk-screening] gives more personal connection to the Zambian refugee issue while statistics and facts are often flat,” Edgar said. “Even if they do not buy any T-shirts, they help the good cause by participating in making T-shirts. They will actually be able to explain what these shirts mean and how it will help the refugees.”