



PETER D'ALEO
E.R. volunteer

TRAVELING THE GLOBE

*Extending African
refugees a hand*

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FORGE-ing ahead

E.R. resident to work with African refugees

By MIKE SCHNITZEL

The Meheba refugee camp is a sprawling complex. According to a December 2003 World Refugee Academy report, a United Nations supported not-for-profit organization, there are approximately 32,000 refugees in the 700 square kilometer camp located in northwestern Zambia, 75 miles from the nearest town.

The refugees, most of whom had to leave their countries because of civil war and unrest, are from Angola, Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi. There are no paved roads and all electricity at the camp comes from generators. There are no phone lines - all communication to and from the camp is by radio.

This June East Rockaway resident and Boston University sophomore Peter D'Aleo, 19, will be among a group of 12 students traveling to this threadbare camp as part of the FORGE program.

"We're always pleased when a student is involved in these types of activities," said Colin Riley, director of media relations at Boston University. "It's an opportunity to become involved and active."

The FORGE program was founded in 2003 by Stanford University student Kjerstin Erickson for the purpose of using university students from western countries as "a mechanism to mobilize and harness the potential of youth as catalysts of social change," according to a statement on their Web site.

D'Aleo became interested in the FORGE program after a friend of his became involved last summer. "Our focus will be on expanding the feeling of community [at Meheba] to give them

a better life," said D'Aleo. By fostering a sense of community and cooperation at the camp, D'Aleo hopes to create an atmosphere that will help the people create a stable economy and achieve social progress at the camp. "Ideally, we'd like to empower the refugees to be able to leave the camp," said D'Aleo, "but we understand that they'll probably be there for awhile, so we try to build a sense of community there." D'Aleo said that students on the trip will be creating their own projects to assist the refugees, with many of those projects having an educational theme. D'Aleo's project has an entrepreneurial spin to it, which he hopes will help contribute to an economy within the camp.

D'Aleo and another group member will be building bread ovens around the camp. According to D'Aleo, bread is considered a delicacy in the region of Africa where Meheba is located, and the ovens will provide the camp with the opportunity to make an ample supply.

"We're looking to make these ovens part of a refugee market where people can work making the bread and where we can sell the bread to other refugees," said D'Aleo. "Starting up a small business like this in Meheba will be a

great way for the community to take part in something important.”

D'Aleo said that the main dietary staples in the Meheba region are rice, beans, and cabbage. Bread is a food that is culturally acceptable and will help to provide more of a balance for refugee meals.

The FORGE program selection process was fairly grueling, with D'Aleo submitting an application and answering questions on his greatest accomplishment, loss, personal interests, and ideas for programs he wanted to work on with FORGE. Following that, D'Aleo was interviewed by people from the FORGE program. The purpose of the interview was to observe his enthusiasm and leadership capabilities.

“They like to have a group of leaders and followers, so that they can work together and everybody compliments each other,” said D'Aleo.

After the interview, D'Aleo heard nothing for a month and then one day the phone rang—he had been accepted.

D'Aleo said when he heard the news, he grinned from ear-to-ear: “I had a clean slate,” said D'Aleo. “Everything that was wrong didn't matter anymore. I was going to be doing something that I could say would make a significant change in people's lives.”

D'Aleo has created a blog Web site where people can learn about his trip and the current situation in Zambia. To visit his Web site, go to <http://forgeafrica.blogspot.com>.

CHARITABLE DONATIONS FOR CHARITABLE WORK

As part of his project, D'Aleo will have to raise \$4,500 for his trip to the Meheba Refugee Camp in Zambia. A down payment of \$1,500 is due by Feb. 15, with the balance due by June. As of Monday, D'Aleo had collected \$633, mostly donated by friends and family. If he is unable to raise the money, he will not be able to go on the trip.

All of the money donated will go towards building and educational projects at Meheba. “Whether its \$1 or \$100 it helps,” said D'Aleo. All donations are tax deductible.

Also, donations of laptop computers would be appreciated for the project. They will be used as part of an effort to set up an internet system at Meheba and teach the refugees how to use computers.

If you are interested in helping D'Aleo, send cash or checks to:

Peter D'Aleo
181 Carman Avenue
East Rockaway, New York 11518

Checks should be made out to FORGE, with D'Aleo's name appearing in the memo section of the check.