



Los Altos Town Crier

Los Altos native aims to make a global impact

By Shannon Barry



Los Altos resident Sabah Khan leaves for Zambia next month to manage projects in a refugee settlement.

Los Altos, CA – June 4, 2008 - Everyday life is about to change drastically for Los Altos native Sabah Khan, who will depart for Zambia July 10. Khan will settle at a refugee camp where running water and freedom from disease are luxuries not guaranteed to residents and aid workers.

Khan, 24, is scheduled to work for 13 months at a refugee settlement as project manager for the non-profit Facilitating Opportunities for Refugee Growth and Empowerment (FORGE).

Refugees populate the FORGE staff, and programs focus on long-term, sustainable solutions. Khan said she will work on a half-dozen development projects that could vary from microfinance programs to schools and a library.

While preparing for the trip, Khan developed a sober view of the dangers of life in a refugee community. Ten vaccinations with two more to go and a yearlong supply of malaria medicine were the first indications of the risk. She said that nearly a quarter of the project managers working with FORGE contract malaria despite taking medications, and approximately one-quarter of the refugee population is HIV-positive.

Khan will live without running water, with the closest Internet connection a two-hour drive.

“I definitely feel like I’ll be learning much more from the refugees ... just in terms of being morally grateful for what we have,” she said.

Stanford student Kjerstin Erickson founded FORGE four years ago. It has since served more than 70,000 refugees from seven countries, Khan said.

When Khan graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a philosophy, psychology and economics degree, her first instinct was to join the Peace Corps, but because FORGE is a collaborative with refugees, she found the opportunity difficult to turn down. She will work with a group of approximately 50 refugees on her projects.

The program that is such a natural fit, fortuitously fell into her lap when she was searching on Craigslist. After undergoing three interviews and writing three essays, she won a place on the team going to Zambia.

Khan said she wanted to stretch beyond her work as a paralegal at the U.S. Department of Justice, and to feel as though she was actively making a difference in the world.

Khan has raised 80 percent of the \$5,000 she needs for the trip, and will continue fundraising through October. The support she drummed up for the project surprised her.

“A lot of people say they don’t have the opportunity to give where the person will be held accountable, (but I) will directly work for the program,” she said. And, in some ways, the program will work for her.

“I feel like being from the Bay Area has played a formative role in my upbringing, which has always been to think about the larger world,” Khan said. “I think about how I can repay having lived such a privileged life.”

For more information about the program, visit www.forgenow.org. To donate, visit www.supportsabahatforge.org. Contact Shannon Barry at shannonb@latc.com.