

Good Neighbors: Modestan to teach skills in Uganda

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A few years ago, Modesto resident Bette Holleman bought a knitting machine and taught herself to use it.

On Sept. 8, she'll travel to Uganda for two weeks to teach women in a village there how to use the machines so they can sell their wares and earn money for their families. The program is sponsored by Sacramento-based World Harvest Missions, which also is building a school and digging a well for the village. The nonprofit is run by William Kasirye, a native of Uganda.

"My wife is a medical doctor with (Sacramento County) and I am an employee with the state," William said. "We do this (work in Uganda) on a volunteer basis. We're taking about 10 to 15 computers, 10 knitting machines and more than 2,000 eyeglasses.

"Bette will be training the women on how to knit sweaters, clothes and baby hats so they can generate an income for themselves and acquire a skill so they can become self-sufficient. Many of these are widows and refugees."

William connected with Bette through a Web site for the knitting machines. She first traveled to Sacramento weekly to teach other women to use the machines so they could teach the Ugandans, but it became clear several weeks ago that they wouldn't be proficient enough to do the work, so she's been scrambling to raise enough money to go herself.



Modestan Bette Holleman will travel to Uganda for two weeks to teach women in a village there how to use knitting machines so they can sell their wares and earn money for their families.

"If you would have told me six months ago that I was going to Africa, I would have laughed," Bette said. "It's nothing I ever pictured myself doing. I never thought of myself as having the skills to do something like that. It turns out I do have something I can do. Everyone does."

The mother of five children, ranging in age from 4 to 15, said she likes to involve her family in "different kinds of community work." They've helped out with Heifer Project International in Ceres, for example. The organization, among other work, sends farm animals to people in Third World countries to help fight hunger and to set up an income-producing business.

So helping women in Uganda is a natural thing for Bette.

"They'll be doing contract knitting," she said. The plan is for the Uganda women to do work for high-end boutiques in Europe and this country. A similar project in Rwanda "is getting up to \$50 for a single scarf, so we're hoping these ladies will do at least as well. The government has removed all of its duties on exports from Uganda to the United States, so we're hoping businesses here will work with them. But that's a couple of years out. They have to learn to master the machines first.

"I know the ladies in Uganda are excited. I just hope we can meet their expectations," Bette said.

For more information, or to donate money or supplies, check out the Web site, www.worldharvestmission.org.
