

Taking off

Ensure for Africa campaign heats up

BY PAULA EVANS NEUMAN

HERITAGE NEWSPAPERS

MELVINDALE — Downriver's response to a pastor's plea for help bringing nutrition to AIDS victims in Africa has been "a beautiful thing," he said.

Thanks to people in Downriver churches, schools and businesses, the Rev. Frank Julian recently shipped 240 cases — two tons — of a nutritional beverage to Gaborone, the capital of Botswana.

The pastor's unexpected mission began when he went on a trip to Botswana to visit another minister in March. The trip was supposed to be about sharing faith.

But in Gaborone, the Allen Park resident witnessed a medical holocaust.

"Sixty percent of the population is HIV positive," said Julian, who is a visiting nurse as well as the associate pastor of Faith Christian Assembly of Melvindale.

He visited schools in Botswana full of orphans and hospitals where the staff was overwhelmed caring for dying AIDS patients.

Fresh graves stretched across the countryside as far as he could see, and the adults he met who

weren't sick attended funerals every day, Julian said.

He was moved as a pastor, as a nurse and as a human being to help in some way. Julian asked Ruth Kgoroba, a Gaborone nurse who spends her days tending to people dying of AIDS, what he could do to make a difference.

She asked for donations of Ensure, a nutritional beverage made by Ross Products Division of Abbott Laboratories Inc.

The dying people she tends are unable to eat solid food, she told Julian, and their lives end in starvation.

Julian came home inspired to help, and his campaign to collect Ensure was launched from the pulpit and in an April 4 Heritage Newspapers story.

"That story really drew participation from the Downriver community way beyond the church," Julian said. "My patients and their families would give me checks."

Many, many others came to the rescue, as well.

Principal Richard Rockwell had Lafayette Elementary School children and their parents in

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Photo by E. L. Conley

Volunteers from Faith Christian Assembly in Melvindale take time to pose for a picture after loading a Towne Air Freight truck with two tons of Ensure for victims of AIDS in Botswana's capital, Gaborone. The nutritional supplement was purchased at wholesale cost with donations from many Downriver residents.

DRIVE

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Lincoln Park take part in a can drive. Allen Park High School's Interact Club collected money for Julian's mission.

Employees at Downriver Catholic Federal Credit Union of Melvindale sent a check. Churchgoers from the Bethel Assembly of God in Lincoln Park got involved.

Pastor Mary Ealy of Puritan Street Church of Christ in Detroit made a generous donation, as did members of Calvary Reformed Church of Southgate.

Workers at the Ford Motor Co. Rouge assembly plant gave money, and Integrated Packaging Co. of Detroit donated the boxes used for shipping.

Students in the Christian Impact Club of Trenton High School

helped Julian's church members package all of the Ensure donated and purchased with the cash donations.

"We had an Ensure for Africa Sunday at our church, and some people would just walk up and give me \$10 bills at different events," Julian said. "They cared! It's been so beautiful — the mobilization of an army.

"I have really been filled with such joy to see this community respond. Downriver people are good people."

The nutritional supplement strengthens AIDS patients and helps them fight the ravages of the disease, Julian added.

He has researched the best way to send Ensure, and the cans — despite their shipping weight — make more sense for Botswana than a powdered version of the supplement that has to be mixed with

water.

"The water is contaminated there," Julian said. "These donations could make such a significant impact on that country. It's to help the dying AIDS victims, but also to educate Americans."

More than 26 million people in sub-Saharan Africa are HIV infected, and Botswana has the highest rate of infection in the world, according to health experts.

The drugs used in America to combat AIDS haven't been distributed to people in Botswana yet, although there is hope that Western donors will make that possible in months to come.

"Why have we not helped that continent more?" Julian said.

Towne Air Freight of Romulus donated its services to help ship the goods, which should reach Kgoroba soon.

But Julian has no intention of stopping his efforts to help.

He continues to speak to groups and churches around the area and to encourage people to donate Ensure or money to buy the supplement for a future shipment.

"Sometimes I look at the situation and I think, 'This is too big,'" the pastor said.

But then he gets another donation from someone and his faith is strengthened anew, he said.

"I'm just the point man," Julian said. "This is just the beginning of what can really help. I think it's going to explode."

To help or for more information about Ensure for Africa, call Julian at 1-313-928-8305.

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