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UMass groups lends a hand in Kenya

Matt Rocheleau, Collegian Staff

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Construction was focused on building another spring box and improving some projects done by EWB in past visits.

"The work we had done the previous year was well maintained in some places and not so well maintained in others," said Tobiason, who had also gone on the Jan. 2007 trip.

Namely, wooden fence posts installed to protect the spring boxes had rotted or been knocked over by livestock. The group built new fences and mended old ones using steel posts held by concrete.

Although there was work to be done, the trip was also about interacting with the people of Namawanga.

"They are possibly some of the friendliest people I've ever met in my life," said Border.

"While one of us was working, the other would often be found taking pictures and giggling with the children in the village, making sure to display the pictures after taking them so that people could see what they looked like on the camera," reads the group's blog.

The group got to experience the Kenyan culture, eating foods like ugali, mashed bananas, rice, chipati and chicken. Both Tobiason and Stauber felt the villagers were very hospitable and kept everyone well fed.

"The food was excellent. I can't eat the D.C. food anymore after eating there," Border said.

Though the Kenyans spoke English - in addition to Swahili and their local language Bukusu - the difference in accents, as well as culture, made communication difficult at times, said Stauber.

Stauber recalls work being done on a spring box while her group was preparing to pour concrete for fence posts. A villager named Patrick was digging a deep trench and Bakuli was chopping wood. What stood out for Stauber was how cool it was to watch a group with such unique backgrounds working together.

As she described it, she was in Kenya alongside Americans, Kenyans and Bakuli who was returning to his native Kenya from America. Everyone was "putting their whole hearts into the work," said Stauber.

The proudest moment for Border was watching the water begin to come through the pipes on the spring box the group constructed.

"The best thing was to see the work we actually did pull through," he said.

Stauber said another special moment for her was reading the thank you notes given to them by a Kenyan man before the group left. One woman showed thanks by giving the group painted gourds.

Despite the Kenyans' thanks, the group knows there is more to be done. Their main objective is to drill a permanent well, said Stauber, but the group is $8,000 shy of the $20,000 needed.

According to Stauber and Tobiason, the EWB will be returning to the village next year, though no date has been picked. Stauber said several of the most recent group's members, including her and Border, plan to go on the next trip.

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at mrochele@student.umass.edu.

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