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UMass groups lends a hand in Kenya

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Collegian Staff

Engineers without Borders helps Kenyan village

When asked what stood out most during their recent volunteer work in Kenya, Christina Stauber and Patrick Border paused for a moment.

It's not that nothing came to mind; rather, they could not immediately choose from their inventory of special moments.

A University of Massachusetts graduate student in environmental engineering, Stauber served as the team leader for an Engineers Without Borders (EWB) student chapter that spent three weeks in July improving drinking water for a rural farming village in the Namawanga area of western Kenya.

Joining her and undergraduate Border, were graduate student Amanda Keyes, undergraduate Patrick Westropp, recent graduates Thomas Chase and Christopher Arsenault, professor of civil and environmental engineering John Tobiason, and professional mentor David Bakuli. Bakuli is a native of western Kenya who knows the local language. He earned his doctorate in industrial engineering from UMass in 1993 and now teaches at Westfield State College.

The trip was the third time the EWB chapter has sent a group to this location as part of the Kenya Water Program. The chapter's goal is to eventually provide a self-sufficient, reliable water supply for over 3,000 people. In this area, crops like sugarcane, sweet potatoes and corn are prominent, but lack clean water sources.

Villagers sometimes walk over two miles to find a source for water, which, if not dry, is often contaminated with animal or human waste. Households can spend as many as five hours in one day getting water.

Overall, Stauber felt the trip was successful in improving the villagers' situation.

"We hit all of our components and goals," she said, which included performing health surveys, educating students about clean water, working on construction projects and measuring the water quality of spring boxes. The spring boxes allow shallow groundwater in the hill to collect behind a concrete structure and pour out of pipes, where the water can be obtained.

Continued...

POLL

This month, UMass Chaplain Kent Higgins was reprimanded by the University for offering credits to students for their participation in the Obama campaign. Should a state university offer credits to students for partisan campaigning?

- Yes -- it encourages educated citizenship.
- No -- it compromises the University's ethic.
- It's all the same to me.

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