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Marshalltown grant provides clean water for Sudan

By Curt Hoff/Marshalltown

Rotary Club of Marshalltown past president Bertie Bolar reminded the club in 2012 that "water and sanitation" is one of the six areas of focus of Rotary International.

Club member Greg Brown had been involved in local efforts on behalf of South Sudan since 2010. Last year, Brown presented a program to the club on these efforts, noting the number of Sudanese families that live in Marshalltown and that the Sudanese leader instrumental in securing peace in that country has an Iowa connection.



Marshalltown Rotarian Greg Brown updated the club on a service project in Sudan.

John Garang, often referred to as the "Founding Father" of South Sudan, received degrees from Grinnell College and Iowa State University. This latter fact may, or may not, be a key factor explaining the prevalence of Cyclone logoed t-shirts in the Fangak area recently visited by Brown! Brown provided leadership for a club service project to provide clean water to the village area of Old Fangak.

Clean water is essential to the flood of refugees who returned to the country when the peace treaty was signed in 2005 after decades of civil war. For years, residents in the remote area have historically drawn disease-laden water from swampy areas or the Zarei River, which flows

through the county. Trinity Lutheran Church in Marshalltown has been involved since 2009 when Sudanese parishioners made the church aware of the pressing need. Last year, Brown joined a group of area church parishioners and volunteers on a trip involving hard labor in 115-degree heat to instruct and empower the local people in the craft of well drilling.

Increasing awareness locally to garner support has been a goal since day No. 1. One of the volunteers who made the trip was writer Mike Donahy who kept readers posted in reports to the *Marshalltown Times Republican*. Additionally, Marshalltown Community College and professor Steve Muntz are donating time and service to produce a professional video about the well project.

As a result of the trip to Old Fangak, 15,000 people are now served by four hand pumped wells instead of two. Brown believes that positive change in this war-torn environment will continue to be dependent upon hard work and entrepreneurial spirit. Marshalltown veterinarian Dennis Drager chairs the club's International Service Committee and took a trip to Texas to learn well drilling techniques. These skills and knowledge will dovetail nicely with this group's



Veterinarian Dennis Drager, a member of the Rotary Club of Marshalltown, announced to members that the club's application for a matching grant with The Rotary Foundation for a water project in Sudan had been approved.

Photo Courtesy of the Times Republican.

efforts and will certainly be tapped in the future. Another club member, Conrad Dejarhin, spearheaded a project involving sales of organic free-trade coffee from Green Mountain Coffee, whereby a portion of the proceeds is earmarked for clean water projects in coffee-producing countries.

All of these efforts embody the 2012-13 Rotary theme "Peace Through Service." As the Marshalltown club ushered in a new Rotary year, incoming president Jeff Vance turned the podium over to Drager for a special announcement. Having already obtained generous donations and pledges from Trinity, Hy-Vee, and the Marshalltown Rotary Club totaling \$22,000, Drager announced that the club had now secured a grant from the District and The Rotary Foundation of Rotary International that will result in over \$100,000 to support this Sudanese project and move it forward. The club responded to Drager and Brown for their leadership and selfless efforts in this service project, by immediately dropping checks or pledge forms into thematic water cans placed at each table. "Today was a good day for the project and the people of Old Fangak County," said Drager.