

'Two Villages' turns three

Rice days

LAURA BUTTON

The Packet - 06/10/08

Students across the province will be chowing down on plain white rice next Wednesday. Oct. 15 is Rice Day,

It's about doing something small that can have global implications.

"We're trying to get to the opposite side of international aid where people feel guilty," says Mitchell. "Enjoy your day - have a spoonful or a bowlful and enjoy it."

But that small bowl will translate into a big deal for Ethiopia . Two Villages is raising funds for a seed bank to be built in the Wollo district, where more than a million people starved to death in 1984-1985.

It will be a simple structure built from local material, but the one-time price tag comes in at \$35,000. Two Villages will raise half, and the Canadian International Development Agency will match it.

The bank will keep seeds safe. In the case of drought or insect infestation, farmers will have insurance against total ruin and famine.

"If this works well this year, it's going to be a model for Africa," says Mitchell.

Two Villages is partnering with USC Canada to make it a reality.

This is the fourth project for the local aid organization, and each one gets a little bigger, according to co-founder Troy Mitchell.

"Two Villages is rolling. Boy, it's wonderful," says Mitchell. "We've grown in people. There are five of us now. We meet often and we work all on our own parts."

Rice Day has been their staple fundraiser, and this year 36 schools have already signed on to dish up the stuff at lunchtime. In exchange to their lunch money, students will get a meal of rice.

"Between parents and caterers and schools themselves, every school has come up with ways to cook the rice, and get the rice," says Mitchell. In Clareville, Rotary donated 40 boxes of rice to the four schools.

With that many schools on board, Rice Day has come a long way since its inception in 2005. Along with Krista Percy, Mitchell wanted to make some small difference to people a world away.

"Myself and Krista had an agreement. Let's do one project. We thought 'if we get this one done, we'll be very very happy'," remembers Mitchell.

But Two Villages is still growing, and Mitchell says they're beginning to look beyond Newfoundland and Labrador's borders.

"Our goal is to nudge this along. If that means Atlantic Canada or beyond, we'll go there."

Mitchell is constantly humbled by the enthusiasm of the students. They don't hesitate to lend a hand.

"They don't even flinch," he says. He says their motto could easily be,

"We're generation Y and we're globally aware."

Despite the global view, Two Villages keeps a narrow focus. They stick to manageable projects and simple fundraisers.

"What we're doing is not big, but there are a few places in the world that are changed," says Mitchell.

All it takes is a bowl of rice.

lbutton@thepacket.ca