

## **96-year-old thinks globally, acts locally;**

### **John Wrixon of St. Lawrence is not afraid to weigh in on international aid projects**

#### **EVERTON MCLEAN**

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ST. LAWRENCE — John Wrixon is not a typical fundraising volunteer. He writes letters by hand to solicit donations, he tells kids inspirational stories about Abraham Lincoln and he gets them to eat rice for lunch, saving money so they can send it to help children in poor countries.

Wrixon does all this at the age of 96.

Since July, the resident of St. Lawrence on the Burin Peninsula has been doing his best to raise money for the building of a school in the village of Kartaha, Nepal. Between knocking on people's doors, sending letters and organizing fundraisers in schools, Wrixon has become one of the biggest contributors.

The project is part of the Two Villages organization that originated in Clarendville. It matches a small community in Newfoundland with a larger charity organization to fund humanitarian work in lesser developed countries. The organization has already built a school in Nepal and given children in Zambia the opportunity to attend school.

This year, Two Village organizer and co-founder Troy Mitchell helped communities on the Burin Peninsula take part in a similar project. Kim Slaney, a social worker in St. Lawrence, spearheaded the fundraising campaign, but she said it was her friend Wrixon who really took it beyond what she expected.

"He was the first to donate to the project. He donated \$300 of his own money," said Slaney. She said he then began handwriting letters asking people he knew for funds towards the project.

"The next thing I know the money is starting to roll in, and I said to him, 'You're making me look bad.'"

Wrixon said his motivation came from thinking of the opportunities the children in Nepal were missing without a school.

"Because I love children, when I saw their little faces I couldn't help but do what I can," he said. "Just imagine yourself not being able to sign your name to a cheque."

Wrixon said he places a stronger emphasis on education. He draws from the example of Abraham Lincoln to tell children how, through learning, a person can do anything they choose.

"He was born in a log cabin in the south, and his mother knew how to read and she taught him to read," he said. "But he was so thirsty for knowledge that he went on to become president of the United States, just because his mother taught him to read.

"How do we know what's going to come out of this school? Doctors, nurses, secretaries?"

Wrixon's fundraising has kept him busy and interested in life. He said he gets great pleasure from having a purpose through the project.

"It fills a vacuum, an empty place. When I started doing this thing it made a lot of difference in my life. Every morning I wake up and say I have something to live for," he said.

Wrixon said part of what he does is in memory of his wife, Mae, who died in 2006 and whom he cared for many years. He said she was an influence in his life, setting an example of generosity.

The project needed more than \$9,000 to build the school, a total that has been reached. Recently, the ground was broken for the building. When Wrixon saw the photos, he was elated.

"It makes me so happy," he said.

But he isn't slowing down now that the project is done. Wrixon keeps visiting the health centre where Slaney works and volunteering to lift the spirits of people being treated. He lives in a seniors complex nearby, and he helps members there where he can. And he said he's ready any new project Slaney throws his way.