

PHILANTHROPY

Africa 6000

INTERNATIONAL

The Erie based non-



By Mark Toriski

John Bongiono provides some water to a thirsty child.



profit organization that is
making a global difference



Doug Pitt (left) and John Bongiono (right)

Six thousand in Africa will die today, tomorrow, and every day after from a lack of a basic human necessity; water. African women and children are spending half a day collecting enough water for their family to eat and bathe. The water that people do procure is black and contaminated with human and animal waste. Conditions across the continent are dire at best, yet there is plenty of fresh water under the ground they walk on. They are lacking the capabilities, funding, and education to obtain it.

“[The water supply] is something that is going to become a huge issue. You think nothing of it when you leave the water running when you brush your teeth but that water could feed a couple of families in Africa for a day,” says Africa 6000 International Executive Director Teresa Murtland from her office in the organization’s headquarters, located in Erie. “If we had 6,000 kids a day dying [in the United States],



that would be considered a crisis. We would find a cure and we would stop it.”

Founded on the sole purpose of alleviating this crisis, Africa 6000 aspires to solve the African water situation by drilling water wells, purchasing and establishing drilling rigs, and possibly building water bottling plants. “Water is a basic necessity. If you don’t have it, you don’t live. What we primarily want to do is become the world’s largest global non-profit working in Africa’s water sector,” says Murtland. “We are going to do this until we can’t go anymore or until there is no longer a need.”

Africa 6000 started last May when Erie resident Joe Prischak couldn’t shake the images he saw of children dying from starvation and malnourishment from a recent trip to Africa. He spoke to John Bongiono, a former Erie resident and founder of World Serve International, about starting a non-profit organization dedicated to solving this problem. Doug Pitt, a photojournalist and brother



By the time you have finished reading this, 20 children will be dead.







to actor Brad, had taken numerous trips to Africa with Bongiono and, like the other men, was overwhelmed by the decrepit conditions. Africa 6000 partnered with the Jolie-Pitt Foundation shortly after its inception.

Tens of thousands of Africans are about to benefit from a gala held by Africa 6000 last November at the Bayfront Convention Center. The organization raised enough money to drill 12 wells in Kenya and Tanzania, to be completed by the end of 2008. Director John Bongiono has used his over 200 visits to Africa to establish personal relationships with many of the continent's presidents and prime ministers, allowing the organization to provide aide quickly. Most of the current work will be done in Eastern Africa. Other regions, such as the Sudan and Darfur remain too dangerous due to the political unrest, though the organization hopes to eventually establish trust within the entire continent.

"We have to go into a country or village and show them what we're doing to establish trust. It's really about building a relationship and accepting their culture, not trying to change it," says Murtland. "We need to bring them the basic necessities."

Africa 6000 hopes to be able to use Pitt's name to attract more celebrities and media attention to the cause, but does not intend to abuse it. They are currently working with the Jolie-Pitt Foundation in organizing nationwide fundraisers in the future, including more in Erie. "We are thrilled to be able to put Erie on the map as home of an incredible world-compassion endeavor," says Murtland. "It is our intent for Africa 6000 to become the largest global non-profit working in Africa's water sector, and this gives Erie and its surrounding communities the opportunity to help save hundreds of thousands of lives. As we continue to grow and raise funds we will be introducing many people to Erie who have voices in the political, entertainment, church, and corporate arenas, including African and American dignitaries and celebrities." *EL

For more information or to make a donation to Africa 6000 International visit www.africa6000intl.org