

Saturday • May 17, 2003

African mission

Family to trek to war-torn region

By **Marcie Grover**/Reporter Staff

Dennis and Heather Dillon are piecing together the items that will accompany them on their trip to Uganda and Rwanda next month, hundreds of pounds of relief supplies that will travel in regular suitcases.



Tod Rasmussen/The Reporter
Bethany Dillon, of Vacaville, checks a bracelet she made to take on a humanitarian mission to Africa.

The Vacaville husband and wife team will be traveling with their 13-year-old daughter, Bethany, as a part of the Sacramento-based World Harvest Mission's annual East African trek to deliver both spiritual and physical comfort to people in the war-torn region. It will be the couple's second trip with the Mission.

"So far we have a sewing machine, books for teacher curriculum, story books for the children and lotions for treats for the ladies," Heather said. "Our daughter is making witness bracelets to share with the kids over there."

The colorful jewelry helps to keep the wearer mindful of God with specific meanings attached to the colored beads, she said.

Other items that will travel with the 25-member entourage include Bibles, eyeglasses, eye exam equipment, computers, toothbrushes and toothpaste, puzzles, games and clothing.

The Mission's executive director, William Kasirye, is a Ugandan native who moved to the United States in 1987 to attend college.

"Much of what people know of Uganda they have learned just from the news," he said. "I wanted to take people there and show them what they could do, what needed to be done."

Kasirye works in conjunction with Uganda's Makerere Full Gospel Church and Gaba Community Church, as well as other outreach ministries.

Formally established in 2001, World Harvest Mission declares its purpose is to facilitate short-and long-term missions to East Africa, and to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations of the earth.

The mission teams generally spend two weeks in East Africa, where they minister in pastors and church leaders conferences, worship conferences, women's conferences, as well as in orphanages and schools.

When asked how such a large and heavy assemblage of merchandise could be transported half-way around the globe without costing an arm and a leg, Kasirye just flashed a huge smile.

"This is a Faith ministry," he said, grinning. "Donations come in from churches, from UPS, and my travel agent just gave us vouchers for each of us to take an extra piece of luggage." Last year the extra luggage cost the team \$150 per piece. "That's how God works," Kasirye said.

This will be the Dillon's second trip with World Harvest Mission, and Heather said she will be taking "lessons learned" with her this time.

"I found out last time this is no vacation," she said with a smile. The group's exhausting schedule barely allows time for sleep, let alone sightseeing or other tourist pursuits. "We barely had a half hour for shopping," she said with mock-sadness.

The Dillons, as well as others who have made the mission trip, make lasting friends and memories on their African adventures.

He recalled one conference when a man who played guitar approached him during a break.

"He said he really wanted to play the piano, but had no keyboard," Kevin recounted. "I told him God had already gifted him (as a guitar player), and he didn't need to have a keyboard."

Dillon said his new friend had a musical revelation because of that exchange.

"He said, 'Wow, what I'm doing is OK, then,' and that was such a feeling for me," Dillon said.

Heather still corresponds with a woman she became "instant friends" with on last year's trip.

"We started talking and she told me her whole life story right away, and she was asking my advice about marrying this Canadian guy," Heather said. "She dumped the guy, but we still keep in touch via e-mail. I'm her Auntie Heather .. it's a very wonderful relationship."

Kasirye said these kind of interactions are a key component of Mission trips.

"We get off the plane, with the word that Americans love them and are there to help," he said. "When it's time to leave, they know America, and Americans, care."

For more information online, visit www.worldharvestmission.org, or call (916) 339-2684.