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# AFGHANISTAN SCHOOL.CA

EXTENDING HANDS OF FRIENDSHIP  
**BUILDING A SCHOOL**





# EXTENDING HANDS OF FRIENDSHIP

## BUILDING A SCHOOL

The plan to build a school started on December 15, 2008 when CRCID Chief Administrative Officer Kevin Webb contacted Steve Brown, Past District Governor of Rotary District 5340. From his office in London, Ontario Kevin needed someone with on-the-ground experience in Afghanistan and he knew that Steve and his Rotary Club in La Jolla Golden Triangle, located in Southern California, had already been responsible for building one school in Afghanistan.



Kevin Webb

Steve was invited to give a presentation to the Canadian District Governor Elects who were in San Diego for the International Assembly in January 2009. The International Assembly brings together all 532 District Governor Elects from around the world for training. The Canadian DGE's enthusiastically committed to the project – agreeing to fundraise with Rotary Clubs across Canada, choosing the project to celebrate the Centennial of Rotary in Canada. "Fary Moini and I went to Afghanistan to meet with Mr. Azizi, the Provincial Director of Education in Nangarhar Province on March 31, 2009 and the site was selected," explains Steve. Fary Moini is a Rotarian with the Rotary Club of La Jolla Golden Triangle with a passion for helping the people of Afghanistan.



Steve Brown

A groundbreaking ceremony took place January 3, 2010 and just nine months later a dedication ceremony and grand opening was held September 26, 2010. "Rotarian Fary Moini attended both the groundbreaking and dedication ceremony representing the Canadian interests," adds Steve.

Fary filed this report on Opening Day:

*The ceremony started at 9:15 am with a recital from the Qur'an by a female student. Mr. Mohammad Hanif Gardiwal, Chief Executive of Government to Nangarhar Province; Mr. Allah Dad, Director of the Nangarhar Education Department, and three local elders made speeches, all emphasizing the importance of education in Islam and of equal opportunity for boys and girls.*

*They expressed their gratitude and appreciation and pledged 100% support to Canadians for this generous gift. They said their children will never forget they are sitting inside Canadian classrooms instead of sitting under the trees and rain. Then I spoke in English on behalf of Canadian Rotarians and it was translated to Pashto by a young man named Haroon. The ceremony was ended*

*by cutting the ribbon, visiting the classrooms and the computer center and enjoying some refreshments. We talked and I thanked the elders for their support and participation.*

*They told me they are there for us whenever we need them and again they asked me to send this message to all the people responsible for funding this school: how grateful they are and that they need us to help them to educate their kids for a better and peaceful future. Their local media were all at the school and the next day everybody was telling us that they heard about the event.*



Fary Moini



Opening Day Sept. 26, 2010

Throughout the building process CRCID kept a close eye on the project with reports from Steve Brown who visited the site twice; and from Fary, who traveled to meet with planners and officials four separate times. The man with his ear to the ground throughout the project was Mohammed Ishaq Niazmand, Administrative Assistant Program Manager for the Afghanistan Agribusiness Development Team. Working out of the Borlaug Institute for International Agriculture, a division of Texas A&M University, he had internet communication with CRCID executives, committee members and staff weekly and sometimes daily.



Mohammad Ishaq Niazmand

“During the project implementation and other meetings with the Education Directorate no hurdles were experienced and the Nangarhar Department of Education and the school management officials were very cooperative,” explains Ishaq. Never in danger of missing the deadline, the school was completed six months ahead of schedule. The team worked hard. On average 20 people were working at the school site each day: “We estimate the total skilled and unskilled man days were 5,200 man days,” says Ishaq. “The contractor would increase the number of workers during some days like when they poured the concrete for the roof.”

The school has 20 classrooms and each one can accommodate 40 students at a time. The students do not have individual computers but a computer lab which will be connected to the internet has been planned for the school. The computers will be provided through Rotary International Matching Grant funds.



The construction of toilet blocks was included in the building contract but the plans did not include running water. This is just one instance where Fary Moini was able to speak to the officials and make a formal recommendation on behalf of Canadian Rotarians. As a result, the decision was made to have the bathrooms upgraded to include running water. Fary has also made recommendations to install a drinking system for the students, to obtain quotes to install a playing field, and to convert one classroom into a nursery to attract more female teachers. These are all enhancements that could be funded through the newly dedicated Afghanistan School Legacy Fund. This fund is supported through public donations and through a fundraising initiative to sell official campaign bracelets. At just \$5 each including shipping, the stamped medallion bracelets are affordable and popular with Canadian youth.

Before they had this school, the children were studying under the trees for shade and in the courtyard of the school on plastic mats. Even during construction of the school the teachers saw some benefits. Ishaq explains, “Thanks to the building materials on site, teachers could lean their blackboards against steel bars or stones or bricks.” This alone was an improvement in the teaching conditions! However, amenities such as a school gymnasium and cafeteria are facilities that will not be part of the new school. So while Canadian youth can see similarities to their own school experience there are some very big differences as well.



Besides the obvious solution of providing students with desks and classrooms so they could focus on their studies, there were other issues that building the new school resolved. “The school building provided a sound environment for the students. It has contributed to the decrease of sun exposure and to the decrease in exposure to diseases caused by contact with wet land,” says Ishaq. Sanitation is extremely poor throughout Afghanistan. Local food and water sources are heavily contaminated with pathogenic bacteria, parasites, and viruses. “They were sitting in the open air and were always exposed to sun and rain,” he adds.



(Article continued on reverse...]

It is the students' own words that best describe how grateful they are. The following is the translation of three interviews with students at the new school in Jalalabad:

What excites you the most about your new school?

Susan: "The entire school excites us very much. We are very happy about our new building. It is much easier for us to study now, because we are saved from rain, wind, storms and all the noises of the other classes. Now we can learn in peace, paying full attention and we are all very grateful to the people who made this possible."



Can you tell us how you felt about going to school before the building was built?

Rukhsar: "Before there was no building, all the students sat in the yard under the trees and I was not very interested in coming to school regularly, because our school didn't look like a school. One time, one of my cousins took me to her school – it was so nice and she told me about her classes. She said, "One day I will come with you to see your school." I was very ashamed because we study under the trees – how could I take her to my school? I was almost making excuses but now I can proudly invite her to my school and I can show her every part of our new school and I am not ashamed anymore. Thank you!"

What do you want to do – or be – when you are finished school?

Sunbul: "In the future I want to be a teacher. I love teaching and I think teaching is a very neat job and a good way of serving the community, because teachers are the ones who train the doctors, engineers, lawyers and so on. Thank you Canadian Rotarians for this chance you have given us." ■

"It has been said that if you want to touch the past, you touch a rock. If you want to touch the present, you touch a flower. If you want to touch the future, you touch a life. With the opening of this school, we begin to touch the future as many, many lives will be enriched by what they will be taught there."

*PDG David Robinson, Chair, Canadian Rotary Centennial Project Committee*

*Canadian Rotary Centennial Project Committee*

PDG David Robinson, Chair

PRIVP Monty Audenart, Chair CRCID

PDG Steve Brown, Afghanistan Liaison

PDG Raju Paul, Representative of the lead club, The Rotary Club of Calgary Heritage Park

PDG Rod Thomson, Public Relations

Rotarian Frank Cosway, WCS Committee Rotary Club of Winnipeg

#### SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION DETAILS

- The building is 2 stories tall
- Steel forms the framework of the building
- Window frames and doorways are made of Oil-treated wood
- Mud-based bricks and concrete make up the walls
- Interior walls and ceilings are plastered
- Windows are 3mm glass with fly screens
- Blackboards are made of cement, treated with a special paint
- The stairs are steel, and there are wheelchair ramps as well as fire escapes
- The floors are made of compacted soil, concrete and some carpeting
- Interior walls are white-washed; exterior walls are painted in shades of blue and pale yellow highlights the trim. The foundation stones are painted terra cotta and outlined in white.
- Lavatories and fresh drinking water were late additions to the plans
- The lighting uses electricity and the fixtures have water-resistant bulbs
- There are a total of 20 classrooms