



Area students urged to aid Afghan counterparts

Gord Whitehead
Focus

There is more to the Afghanistan story than revealed in news media reports on anti-terrorism conflict and Canadian soldiers' casualties. "Afghanistan is a country that is full of people who are simply trying to live their lives," Dianne Twynstra told her local elementary school's opening day assembly last week.

Twynstra is president of the home and school association at East Williams Memorial Public School, last week's launching point of an Afghan school fundraising campaign that will be aimed primarily at secondary school students in Thames Valley. Speaking as an employee of the Canadian Rotary Collaboration for International Development (CRCID) and past president of the Rotary Club of Strathroy, she described how Canadian Rotary celebrated its 100th anniversary by helping to fund and build a school for children in an eastern Afghanistan province on

the edge of Pakistan.

Partners in the project are Rotarians in Canada and Afghanistan, the Canadian government and CRCID, a not for profit organization. "There are not enough schools for all of the children, they study outside and are exposed to very hot and very cold weather and often there are no desks or computers for the students to use," Twynstra said in a power point video presentation to her East Williams Memorial audience.

Vivienne Bell-McKaig, principal at the school in Nairn, told the assembly, "We'd love to adopt this school. There may be an opportunity to write about how our school compares to that one."

Twynstra suggested that students get their parents' permission to go to the website www.afghani-schools.ca. "You can use our tools to learn about Afghanistan and help us raise money to continue to supply the school with what they require, like sports equipment and vegetable gardens

for food. When this school is fully equipped, Rotary will use funds raised to help other schools in the area with their requirements."

One support route is for Canadian children to buy and wear specially designed "Afghanistan-School.ca" bracelets which sell for \$5.00. "On the website you can write messages for Afghan children," said Twynstra.

In contrast to elementary and secondary school access to everyone and opportunities for advancement to higher education in Canada, poverty sometimes forces Afghan boys to begin work at a young age and school is often a last priority for girls. When the Taliban took control of the county in 1996, girls were forbidden to attend school. Now they are receiving education but must remain covered in long, black gowns and white headscarves.



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Strathroy Rotarian Dianne Twynstra explains to students and staff of East Williams Memorial Public School how they can support the Canadian branches of her service club to maintain a school that Rotary has helped build for children in Afghanistan. Twynstra wears an AfghanistanSchool.ca \$5.00 bracelet that is being offered for sale to students, parents and other supporters. Top, a contributed photo shows the completed school in eastern Afghanistan is expected to accommodate as many as 4,000 students in shifts, Twynstra told the September 7 opening day assembly at East Williams Memorial in Nairn. It is in one of the 'safer' provinces but its exact location is not being publicized in the interest of security.