

From Mtn. View council to aiding Afghan girls

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Mercury News
San Jose Mercury News

Article Launched:

Former Mountain View Councilwoman Rosemary Stasek has had a wild ride the two years she has lived in Afghanistan. She has trained midwives, formed temporary schools for girls and sweated in *hijabs* in the desert heat.

And, oh yeah, she got hitched. She's back in town sharing the news with friends and relatives.

She's also raising money and sharing her experiences.

In Kabul, she runs a project that trains midwives. Afghanistan has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, according to UNICEF. Many women have trouble getting to hospitals, or they're uncomfortable being treated by male doctors, Stasek said. That's where midwives can help.

But saving moms wasn't enough for Stasek. She said she was concerned that extremist groups such as the Taliban had blown up girls schools. It was difficult for educators to raise money for new buildings because they may be destroyed again.

"My idea in the interim was: Let's put up tents. You don't need a lot of money to do it, and it's quick to put up and, even if one is destroyed, for a little bit of money and a little bit of time, you can replace it," she said.

Using mostly smaller contributions, she has raised enough for more than 60 tents.

Leaders in the Afghanistan's Wardak province opposed the idea because the girls could still be viewed by outsiders, which is taboo, Stasek said. So someone suggested building a mud wall around the tent.

Once it was built, a convoy of leaders from the region picked her up in Kabul and drove her about three hours to get her approval.

"I inspected the mud. It was like, 'Oh yes, very nice mud,' " she joked.

Stasek has been doing a lot of joking, relaxing and catching up while she's in town. For her husband, Morne` DuPreez, it's his first trip to the United States. And Stasek's given him the big tour: a San Jose Giants game, International House of Pancakes and, of course, Mountain View City Hall.

She met DuPreez, a security contractor, at a party in Kabul, and he will meet her parents this weekend. While she suspects they'll be delighted to meet him, they're less thrilled about her living in Afghanistan.

Stasek said she's not tempted to move back yet.

Although in cities such as Mountain View leaders can make an impact on people's lives - through major projects such as a library or senior center - in Afghanistan, she said, "You put up a tent, and it makes a difference."

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

Information about how to help is available at www.stasek.com.

Contact Julie Patel at jpatel@mercurynews.com or  (408) 271-3679 .

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