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**LOCAL ROTARIANS INSPECT, EXPAND WATER PROJECTS IN ZAMBIA**

**by BRIAN TROMPETER, Staff Writer | Sun-Gazette Newspapers | Posted with approval of the author.**



Bob Jansen (right) of the Rotary Club of McLean greets the chief of Chalubemba, Zambia, in August during the official commissioning ceremony for a well installed at the community's primary school.

Northern Virginia Rotarians who visited the south-central African nation of Zambia for two weeks in August found that most of Rotary’s water and sanitary projects there are succeeding.

“We want to give them something they can embrace, own and maintain for the long term,” said Bob Jansen of the Rotary Club of McLean, who went on the trip with his wife, Anne.

The Rotary Club of Dulles began the effort in 2006 after one of its members, who had a relative serving with the Peace Corps in Zambia, learned of problems that needed to be solved in that landlocked nation.

Since then, 14 clubs in Rotary District 7610 formed the Strategic Water Alliance to improve water-supply and sanitation efforts in Zambia.

All 14 clubs contributed $2,000 each for this year’s trip, but under Rotary’s structure, that amount grew significantly. Rotary District 7610 contributed matching funds that were supplemented by a Global Grant from Rotary International Foundation, bringing the total to about $90,000.

Rotary International conditions its grants upon partnerships with foreign clubs. The Strategic Water Alliance team has worked closely with the Rotary Club of Ndola-Mukuba on the projects.

Tim Long, a former U.S. State Department employee who had visited Zambia before, had no illusions about what he would encounter when he inspected water projects there for the first time this summer. But he was impressed by the Ndola-Mukuba club’s dedication to the initiatives.

“It was quite a remarkable effort,” said Tim Long, a 10-year member of the Rotary Club of Tysons. “Their willingness and commitment were exceptional.”

As expected, some previous efforts had floundered, but many were thriving, Long said.

“It depended on the involvement of the community,” he said. “That was key, whether or not they took ownership of what was given them.”

This year’s Rotary projects there included repairing or bettering existing water wells and constructing new wells (or boreholes) and latrines.

Projects were completed with Zambian labor under the supervision of Seeds of Hope International Partnerships, a non-governmental organization based in San Luis Obispo, Calif.

The Rotarians paid for their own travel, lodging and living expenses for the Zambia excursion, allowing all moneys contributed by local Rotary Clubs to be put toward the projects, Jansen said.

Trip participants visited 15 Rotary projects that either were finished or being worked on, said Patricia Velkoff, a clinical psychologist and Rotary Club of Vienna member who chairs the Strategic Water Alliance.

The Rotarians also examined ways to make past, current and future projects more sustainable. Since 2006, local Rotary clubs have engaged in 32 projects in Zambia’s Copperbelt Province, most of which involved installing water wells and latrines at schools.

About half the schools built worldwide lack such basic water infrastructure, said Velkoff, whose husband, Ted, is an at-large member of the Fairfax County School Board.

Northern Virginia Rotarians have not made plans for a future trip to Zambia, but may return in 2016, Jansen said. Several Ndola-Mukuba club members have expressed interest in visiting the United States next summer, Long said.

Reaching Zambia is not easy, as there are no direct flights from the United States, Jansen said. In 2013, he and other Rotarians flew from Washington Dulles International Airport to Dubai, then to Zambia’s capital of Lusaka and finally to Ndola. This year, team members flew from New York to Johannesburg, South Africa, then to Ndola.

Known in colonial days as North Rhodesia, the Republic of Zambia gained its independence from Britain in 1964 but retains many British traditions, including afternoon tea. Despite being made up from numerous tribes, the country has been peaceful for several decades and has avoided the ethnic strife that has plagued many other African nations.

“The people are very friendly and welcoming,” Jansen said. “They’re not lazy. They’re just very poor because they do not have a robust economy.”

Jansen, who mentors Virginia Tech’s chapter of Engineers Without Borders, joined the Zambia water effort in 2011 after the university’s club made a presentation before the Rotary Club of Tysons.

Rotary Club of Fairfax member Jill Lehman, a landscape designer who served in the Peace Corps in the Republic of the Gambia in west Africa, said the Rotary team focused on achieving sustainability for its Zambian projects.

Lehman’s grandfather had perfect Rotary Club attendance over a 58-year period, and her father was a Rotarian for 50 years before his death.

“Rotary has been part of our family,” she said. “It was kind of expected that I’d be a Rotarian.”