



Expedition To Distribute 20,000 Moringa Tree Seeds In Tanzania

Church World Service Among Sponsors of Outreach Along "Burton & Speke" Route

"Go out of your way a little to make a difference, and big things happen." That is the counsel of Henry L. Rigali, a member of Second Congregational Church in Palmer, Mass., who has done just that.

Mr. Rigali's curiosity about something he read in a Sunday church bulletin insert in April is about to bear fruit – literally – in Tanzania, along the most famous route in 19th century western exploration of Africa, the 1,000-mile trail blazed by Sir Richard Francis Burton and John Hanning Speke in 1857.

A dozen hikers – Mr. Rigali and renowned expedition leader Jim Owens among them – will meet in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, June 1. Over the next three months, their expedition will retrace the steps of Burton and Speke's attempt to solve "mankind's last great geographic riddle" – locating the source of the Nile. The expedition has required several years of planning and is believed to be the first effort in history to retrace the original Burton & Speke path on foot.

Along the way, the expedition will distribute 20,000 Moringa tree seeds, along with instructions for planting, harvesting and using the tasty, highly nutritious leaves, pods and flowers of this indigenous resource against malnutrition. "We don't expect every seed to grow," said Mr. Rigali, "but we will distribute enough seeds to plant 100 orchards of 100 moringa trees each. That's 10,000 trees spread across 1000 miles of rural East Africa, in places where people need it the most."

All because Mr. Rigali, in church on April 2, noticed the "One Great Hour of Sharing" insert described Church World Service's work to expand cultivation of the Moringa Oleifera tree.

CWS documented the tree's dramatic effectiveness against malnutrition, especially among infants, children and mothers, in a 1997-99 pilot project conducted in clinics across southwestern Senegal, where the Moringa tree grows wild. As a result, Senegal's government is promoting Moringa as part of the national diet.

Church World Service, the humanitarian ministry of the (U.S.) National Council of Churches, and its Senegalese partner AGADA now are expanding Moringa cultivation across Senegal, to other West African countries and beyond. There is no doubt that the tree will grow well in Tanzania. In fact, the 20,000 seeds are being supplied by Optima Ltd., a company based in Arusha, Tanzania.

"Optima has Moringa plantations in Tanzania and has the goal of developing significant Moringa growth by 2006 on farms, large and small, in Tanzania," Mr. Rigali reported. "What they are lacking is the ability to get the plant into the rural and remote areas of Tanzania. We'll walk 1,000 miles through rural and remote areas. It's a nice complement to what they are doing."

Back to April 2, 2000. Mr. Rigali took the bulletin insert home, logged onto the World Wide Web and did a keyword search for information about the Moringa tree. The more he learned about this scruffy looking, fast growing tree the more he liked it – especially the fact that it is in full leaf at the end of the dry season, precisely when other foods are the scarcest.

Moringa leaf powder conserves well and is easy to use in porridge, biscuits, sauces served over rice or couscous and other recipes. Mr. Rigali said he also was intrigued that Moringa leaf powder helps purify contaminated water by settling the particulate matter.

Mr. Rigali – an attorney and avid outdoorsman who first met Jim Owens on a 1998 hike along the Appalachian Trail and agreed to provide legal counsel for the upcoming Burton & Speke Expedition – started to explore whether the expedition might distribute Moringa tree seeds to villages along its 1,000-mile route.

He asked his pastor, the Rev. Jeff Erb, a long-time supporter of Church World Service and of CROPWALKS which raise funds to fight hunger worldwide, to get more information from Church World Service.

Pastor Erb called William E. Wildey of the CWS/CROP Office in Ludlow, Mass., who made the connection with CWS/CROP's main office in Elkhart, Ind., and in turn with Lowell Fuglie, CWS West Africa Director, who supplied information about planting, harvesting and using Moringa products and pointed the way to Optima Ltd. for the seeds.

"This walk across Tanzania is helping plant thousands of Moringa trees, which will produce food for generations to come," commented Mr. Wildey of CWS/CROP. "The thousands of Americans who walk in CROPWALKS every year also are helping plant Moringa trees and other seeds of hope through their fund-raising efforts."

The Moringa seed component of the Burton & Speke Expedition has led to Church World Service signing

on as an expedition co-sponsor and has enlisted many other partners along the way. Partners include Boy Scout Troop 161 in Palmer, Mass., and the Second Congregational Church's sewing circle, the Cut Ups, who are collaborating on production of 100 colorfully labeled 6"x9" seed pouches, each with 100 plastic sandwich bags (rolled tight by the boys) to be used as plant starters. Optima Ltd. will have the 20,000 seeds waiting for the hikers in Dar es Salaam.

The group's motto is "Kindness Matters" and it is their intention to share that kindness as they travel. The expeditioners will distribute items including soccer balls, ball caps, t-shirts, and containers of bubble makers. The YMCA in Springfield, Mass., provided 1000 ballpoint pens bearing the expedition motto in both English and Swahili to be given away.

The expeditioners, who are all qualified in advanced wilderness first aid, will also distribute a considerable supply of medical equipment, including disinfectants, sterile bandages, antibiotics, anti-fungal creams, and snake bite kits.

Mr. Rigali will walk with the Burton & Speke Expedition for about two and a half weeks before breaking away to climb Mount Kilimanjaro. On the eve of his departure for Tanzania, he reflected, "Anyone can make an impact on the quality of life for people by sharing kindness and having a little creativity.

"Sometimes we get so caught up in the here-and-now that we don't see the opportunity right in front of us. But if we are in our right mind, we see the opportunity and pick up on it."

-end-

Contact: [NCC News](#)

[NCC Home Page](#)
[NCC News Service Index](#)