

Sedgebrook is a true friend to Bookfriends

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Recently, 18,000 schoolbooks bound for schools in Tanzania were shipped off from the warehouse of Bookfriends International, a not-for-profit based in Wauconda.

"It was a real emotional day for us," said Steve Kutschat, Bookfriends International co-founder. "We had all these pallets with 18,000 books and we worked so hard on that, and now they're gone. But the 10 schools we work with can't wait to receive them and we're glad they're on their way."

Paying that way is Sedgebrook, a retirement community in Lincolnshire, which donated \$7,000 to Bookfriends International to underwrite the shipment of the books.

"On behalf of the staff and residents of Sedgebrook, I would like to congratulate Steve and Paulie (Kutschat, co-founder) on the work they are doing to educate the people of East Africa," said Ian Lee Brown, executive director of Sedgebrook. "The efforts of their organization to collect and ship books to Africa are wonderful and speak volumes of their mission."

The donation stemmed from the work of Phil and Mary Wertz, who live at Sedgebrook. Phil Wertz oversees the 5,000-volume on-campus library, and when he heard about Bookfriends International, he was inspired to start collecting books to send to the schools in Tanzania. During the months of November and December, he and his wife collected more than 350 books, which are part of the shipment now making its way to Africa.

"We donated encyclopedias, books about nutrition and health, textbooks, chemistry books," Wertz says. "Mostly, these were things we weren't using in our library here, but that students could certainly use."

According to Kutschat, Bookfriends International also partners with several local high schools and public libraries for book donations. Shipping the textbooks and library books from America to Africa is very expensive, and accounts for the majority of the organization's costs. Even though the organization is able to ship the books at very economical rates —about 50 to 55 cents per book — it takes thousands of volumes and dollars for a full shipment.

Wertz approached Brown in late December to see if Sedgebrook could make a charitable donation to Bookfriends International to help offset the high price of shipping the books to Tanzania.

“We are so thankful for this donation,” said Kutschat. “As we keep growing and expanding, we’re going to be looking for more corporate partnerships.”

“People who live and work here are committed to giving back to the greater community, and this was a wonderful opportunity for Sedgebrook as a whole to support the work that Phil and Mary Wertz initiated,” Brown said. “It’s exciting to be able to make a donation to an organization right here in the Chicago area whose work has a global impact.”

All told in 2006, Sedgebrook donated \$42,775 to charitable organizations in the Chicago area, including \$5,000 to the Walter and Connie Payton Foundation; \$5,000 to the Glenkirk Foundation; \$5,000 to the Lincolnshire-Riverwoods Fire Protection District; \$3,500 to the Ovarian Cancer Support Network; \$2,500 to the Lake County Community Foundation, and \$2,000 to the Spring Lake Sports League.

Sedgebrook is built and managed by Erickson Retirement Communities of Baltimore, Md.