

Pair of Sixth-Graders Do Their Part to Fight Malaria
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Lori Cook

Two sixth-grade girls at Forest Hills Northern Trails School are on a mission. Their goal -- Veto the 'Squito.

Gretchen Mason and Tori Crawford, both 11, want to help children in Africa fight malaria and have been raising money to buy mosquito nets for the beds of African kids.

It's a big goal for these young girls, but they are serious about the task at hand. The girls learned of the malaria crisis while reading a story in their Time For Kids magazine at school. The article described how malaria -- a disease carried by mosquitoes -- kills 1 million people each year in Africa.

Tori and Gretchen were amazed to learn most of those who die from the disease are younger than 5.

"We just wanted to do what we could for the kids we read about," Tori explained. So the girls formed a plan. They developed a fundraising strategy, pitched the idea to their teacher, Dot Hamilton.

Then they presented their strategy to their principal, Craig Mears.

"Gretchen and Tori came into my office with a proposal showing what they wanted to do," Mears said. "We talked it over, and it grew from there."

The girls made posters explaining the need for bed mosquito nets and attached collection bags made of netting to each board.

They hung the posters around the school, and students started to respond.

"We collected money from kids in our class, then kids in the whole school started to give," Tori said. "Even teachers and other adults gave money."

Altogether, the girls collected \$1,100. They were thrilled.

"I'm so happy," Gretchen said. "The bed nets cost \$10 apiece. That means our school will be able to provide 100 bed nets for kids in Africa."

Other benefits

Through this project, the girls have learned many life lessons, Tori said.

"I knew kids in our school would give; I felt confident that everyone would give some spare change, but they gave more than I ever expected," Tori said. "I'm so surprised and thankful."

Their teacher, Mrs. Hamilton, said she is extremely proud of her sixth-graders.

"These students are amazing," Hamilton said. "They did this on their own. These girls really care for others. Sometimes we forget how much young kids can do if given the opportunity. I think it's just beautiful."

Even though Gretchen and Tori may never meet the children who will receive the bed nets, they know their hard work will be appreciated.

"I think we all know it's important to help others," Gretchen said. "Look for different things you can do for someone. Be creative and never give up. Persistence really does pay off."

Resort winner

Congratulations to Devin McKay Kent of Sidney. Devin is the winner of the Grand Rapids Press/Double JJ Resort Family Get Away. She and her family will have a blast playing in the Gold Rush Indoor Water Park. Way to go, Devin!

Family fun

Today: Noon to 5 p.m. -- Sugarbush at the Blandford Nature Center, 1715 Hillburn Ave. NW. Admission is \$3 adults, \$2 students. See great demonstrations on how maple syrup is made and explore the 143 acres of trails at Blandford.

Today: 2 p.m. -- Final performance of "Where the Wild Things Are" and "Flickers" by the Grand Rapids Ballet Company at DeVos Performance Hall. Tickets range from \$15-\$50 and are available at the DeVos Performance Hall box office.

Thursday: 7:30 p.m. -- "The Spirit of Harriet Tubman," a re-creation of her life and heroic efforts in the Underground Railway, at the Gerald R. Ford Museum. Reservations can be made by calling 254-0367.