

World Dance for Humanity

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Santa Barbara nonprofit **World Dance for Humanity (WD4H)** is accomplishing its goal of improving lives across the world, and this week the nonprofit is delivering three cows to a Rwandan community, donated by the congregation at Montecito's All Saints-by-the-Sea.

"It allows our local community to be intimately involved in the evolution of genocide survivors in Rwanda," said World Dance founder, anthropologist, and aid worker Janet Reineck.

Reineck founded WD4H in 2010, in an effort to host local dance classes for people wanting to have fun and get in shape. Now offering five classes per week in Santa Barbara, the nonprofit donates every penny from class proceeds toward their humanitarian projects in Rwanda, where the group is helping 7,705 people in 20 rural communities left destitute by the genocide.

The beneficiaries receive school stipends, livestock, training, and support for small businesses – the resources they need to survive and succeed, Reineck explains. The dancers who help support the projects have also visited the communities, and recently 11 World Dancers returned from two weeks in Rwanda.

"They are now more passionate than ever about the potential for Santa Barbarians to make a difference in the world," Reineck said, adding that the Rwandan people often express their gratitude through dance, which is an immediate connection to her volunteers. "When we arrive, they are already singing and dancing. Dance is an equalizing force; there is no white and black, or African and Americans, we are just women dancing like crazy!" she said.

The organization encourages the dancers to volunteer and help with humanitarian projects, and last year, the congregation of All Saints-by-the-Sea became involved when they sponsored three cows to be donated to one of the Rwandan communities. The cows, which the villagers named Grace, Betsy, and Holy Cow, have already had calves, and are bringing much-needed milk to the village. The All Saints congregation is kept informed of the cows' progress and recently donated three more cows, which were delivered this week.

The organization recently appointed Montecito resident Debra Geiger as president of the governing board. Debra has been a resident of Montecito for 30 years, and she began dancing with World Dance in 2013. While raising her two daughters, Debra practiced law and volunteered at Legal Aid, and she is also vice president of a private charitable foundation that supports local and national non-profit agencies.

Peter Haslund, sits on the board and is president emeritus. "I don't know of any other philanthropic endeavor that more directly affects the lives of desperate people more effectively or more immediately than WD4H. The driving force is the ability to provide a sense of hope where none existed, a sense of encouragement where only conflict prevailed, a sense of security in place of chaos, and a sense of a positive future for all, regardless of tribal affiliation," he says.

Reineck is busy gearing up for one of the biggest events in which her dancers participate: Thriller, a global occasion that happens the Saturday before Halloween. At exactly 3 pm on October 29, hundreds of zombies will rise from the lawn of the Santa Barbara Courthouse Sunken Gardens to perform Michael Jackson's iconic dance. This will be the seventh year World Dance is hosting the event locally, and it will include Flashmobs around town.

"It's a fantastic opportunity for men and women and boys and girls of all ages and abilities to take part in an amazing dance experience," Reineck said. Individuals, schools, dance studios, and community groups are all invited to join in. Practice is already in progress, with all event proceeds going to WD4H's Rwanda Education Fund and the Westside Boys and Girls Club.

For more information about all of World Dance for Humanity's classes, projects, and events, visit www.worlddanceforhumanity.org.



World Dance for Humanity founder Janet Reineck during a recent trip to Rwanda



One of three cows donated last year to Rwanda genocide survivors by the All Saints By-the-Sea congregation; three more were delivered just this week