

SCHOOLS & KIDS

TURNING DREAMS INTO REALITY

■ Two fourth graders show they can make an adult-sized difference in people's lives

By JOSH KULLA

WILSONVILLE SPOKESMAN

Following your dreams is an oft-cited piece of advice given to people of all ages. But when it comes to a pair of Horizon Christian Schools students, it turned out to be a ticket for success in a very literal sense.

Horizon Christian Principal Judi Smith has been working over the past four years to institute a culture of community service at her Tualatin-based school alongside academics and faith-based values. To that end, she now starts each school year by asking students to conceive and execute service projects.

So when fourth graders Auburn Todd and Alyssa Smith raised close to \$1,000 by selling root beer floats to benefit the Lutheran non-profit organization African SMILE, Smith was more than a little gratified.

That's just the beginning of a story that started with a dream.

"Auburn and Alyssa were one of the very first groups that came in this year," Smith said. "And Alyssa talked about a dream she'd had. The culture we've tried to establish around here is that if you're connected with God, you don't have to be an adult to hear from Him to follow through on a dream or idea that He gives you."

As returning students, Alyssa and Auburn already were looking forward to taking part in a new project. The dream merely pointed them in the right direction.

"I was at the airport," Smith said, describing what she saw in her sleep. "And a man said to me, on the intercom, 'You can go anywhere, where do you want to go?' And I said 'Tanzania, to see the work that was going on with my church.' In my dream I got to see the village we were sponsoring, with its library and school."

When she woke up, a vision of Tanzania remained in her head.

"It was very cool," she said. "But I felt like they needed stuff to learn not just off a chalkboard, but in books. So I went to school the next day and we had a chapel about it and we talked about Egypt and it turned out that



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Horizon Christian Schools fourth graders Alyssa Smith, left, and Auburn Todd raised nearly \$1,000 to help fellow students in the African country of Tanzania.

Auburn had the same idea about textbooks."

Turning a dream into reality, however, remained a daunting task. And Smith doesn't cut corners when it comes to the projects she allows students to carry out.

"I ask them to be adult about booking an appointment with the secretary, which means they're giving up a recess at a minimum," she said. "So they came in on Sept. 10, and it was the first meeting I'd had all year, very little time had elapsed."

After Alyssa explained her dream, however, a plan quickly formed.

"I always give students some kind of a homework sheet or grid," Smith said. "And I say to them, 'If the school's going to follow your lead, you're going to have to be the leader, which means you have some homework to do if this is going to be your project.'"

Parents also have to be on board with the project. While the students are asked not only to do the behind-the-scenes work, they also must go public to raise money and promote the project like any other business venture.

In this way, the students learn firsthand about business, leadership, and entrepreneurship, all on

top of serving others in a selfless manner.

"So, there's a series of meetings in September, and we now have a plan after this to sell root beer floats," Judi Smith said. "But the other thing that happened as we were praying about this, we were contacted and boxes and boxes of math and reading material showed up at school. And we said 'We don't need this stuff.' So the plan was to send this to Tanzania, also."

The plan was simplified by the connection between Wilsonville's Community of Hope Lutheran Church and Alyssa's family, who attend the church. They already were familiar with African SMILES, which is a Lutheran-backed group that actively partners with the church.

"My husband (Dave) is on the (African SMILES) board," said Alyssa's mother, Carrey Smith. "We've gone over every year, and (President) Don (Etzell) is over there for three or four months at a time. He leads the volunteers who come out to help and then he stays and leads the next group of people. The kids at Community of Hope have taken on an elementary school there and done different things for them, and that's why Alyssa knows about Tanzania."

As the plan came together, along with nearly three-dozen other generous student projects, Alyssa and Auburn began to promote their coming sale, give announcements in church and pray, Judi Smith said.

Finally, during the first week of October, the girls set up a small booth and launched their sale.

"The kids just responded," Smith said. "They gave up five days of lunch and recess to sell root beer floats, and with two very generous families that were supplying the raw materials, the kids really responded."

Despite their youth, the girls handled the venture like seasoned veterans. They even started offering punch cards to customers seeking multiple floats at a time.

"We had teachers who bought some and even a mom," said Auburn. "Some people were really generous with the change, even with a \$20 bill. We wanted to help a poor country. And some kids wanted them (floats) on other days, so instead of forgetting, we put X's on the card when they got floats. Both of my cousins did that, and two or three people in middle school did it. The people who bought the most were the middle schoolers."

The easiest part was the first day, Alyssa added.

"We didn't have as many customers then, but it started to get really busy after that," she said. "We raised \$450 from selling root beer floats and someone doubled it and we ended up giving \$900 in just five days. There was a lot of 'keep the change,' there were people who were very generous."

The money and schoolbooks were subsequently sent to the Singida region of Tanzania, where African SMILES is based.

For Carrey Smith, this result is gratifying both as a parent and as a Christian.

"Alyssa is always wanting to do things," she said. "And when the videos come back (from Africa), the kids really want to do more. She just sees what they don't have and what she does have."

Even better, as far as Judi Smith is concerned, the girls' success has merely whetted their appetite for service.

"We haven't got a meeting yet, but, yes, we want to have a canned food drive for local food banks," said Auburn. "We would take food to one in Beaverton, and in Wilsonville."

"And our class got the party for raising the most money." ■