

Taking Hope to the World



WHY EVERYONE SHOULD BUY HOPE SPRINGS WATER

By Toni Garrard Clay

Hope Springs Water started, as all things do, with an idea. Family doctor Ted Mettetal, a veteran of medical mission trips to developing countries, had observed firsthand the terrible toll unclean water consumption takes on the human body. What if, he thought, someone sold bottled water and used the profits to help people gain access to clean water? What if he — a family doctor in Athens, Texas — started just such a company?

It's been four and a half years since the resulting launch of Hope Springs Water. In that time, 100 percent of the profits from water sales, coupled with individual donations and proceeds from fundraisers, have been used to dig or reclaim approximately 25 wells.

"We've been involved in water projects in 10 countries over the past few years," said Mettetal. "That's been good, but now we're really focusing our efforts on two places: Belize and Ethiopia."

Hope Springs Water has an agreement with the Belize government to reclaim 30 water wells in the Toledo District of southern Belize. Health officials provide guidance as to which existing wells most need to be reclaimed.

"The water there is very caustic and causes galvanized metal to rust, which gives the water a nasty taste and causes stomach cramping and other problems. So they just go back to drinking the contaminated water from streams," said Mettetal. "We're going in and pulling out all that galvanized



Bruce Hinds (left) and Ted Mettetal work to recover a well pump in Nicaragua.

metal and replacing it with stainless steel, PVC and brass." All wells are hand-pumped.

When the push toward digging wells in developing countries really took hold in the 1980s, galvanized steel wells were common. In addition to rusting, those same wells require specialized equipment and a small crew of workers to pull everything out when repairs are needed.

"What we use now is an open cylinder and PVC (plastic pipe), which allows just two easily trained local village people to repair a well without special equipment. That makes a huge difference," said Mettetal.

"We not only reclaim or install wells, we teach people how to repair them," said Jimmy Leatherwood, who serves as vice chairman of Hope Springs Water's board of trustees.

The Hope Springs team has been making trips to Belize as funds, manpower and seasonal weather patterns allow. So far, eight or nine wells have been reclaimed toward the 30-well goal.



In Ethiopia the focus has been on digging fresh wells in the school yards and church yards of villages. In the past, Hope Springs has paid to have wells hand dug. (“They can only go as far below the water table as you can dip your head under water and use a shovel,” said Mettetal.) The work takes two weeks or more, and it’s not uncommon for the well walls to eventually collapse and cave in.

The alternative is paying to have a well properly drilled. Though drilling is certainly preferable to hand digging in terms of depth and longevity, it’s also much more costly — to the tune of many thousands of dollars.

A solution was provided this past spring in what Mettetal says is clearly divine providence. A Forth Worth man named Joe Robertson purchased a water drilling rig a few years ago with the intention of using it to raise money in Ethiopia to be funneled into his own nonprofit efforts. His intentions were never fulfilled, and for two years, the rig sat unused in Ethiopia — until Robertson became aware of Hope Springs Water’s efforts and donated the rig.

“Now we can drill a well in a day and have it pumping water a day or two later,” said Leatherwood. “Those wells are going to be there for a long time.”

The rig sits in the bed of a sturdy F-450 Ford pickup, which gets them just about anywhere they need to go. The goal is to dig 14 or 15 wells during the upcoming dry season in Ethiopia, which runs approximately October through April.

“We want to train an Ethiopian crew to carry on the work when we’re not there,” said Leatherwood. “We’ve already identified a couple of young men who we think could do that.”

Meanwhile, back at home, the Hope Springs Water team would like to see the bottled water sales grow. Higher sales means more money to put into water projects.

Hope Springs Water is available throughout the Brookshires grocery store chains. In Athens, it’s also available at Anderson Drug, Gibson Drug and the Athens Thrift Store. An intensive effort has been under way this summer to reach out to civic organizations, businesses and churches in communities served by Brookshires to increase the awareness of the good that Hope Springs Water does and boost sales.

“We’re trying to do more to encourage people to buy Hope Springs Water,” said Mettetal. “Lots of people are interested in doing good and helping to save lives. There’s no easier way to help save lives than to buy Hope Springs Water. That sounds almost too simple, but it’s true.”

If you regularly buy water — for your family or your business — make it Hope Springs Water. If you’d like to make a donation toward their water projects, mail it to PO Box 1567, Athens, TX 75751. To learn more, visit hopespringswater.org or email info@hopespringswater.org.

