



# Plants used as weapon to fight hunger

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By Pat Stemper Vojta

**R**ichard and Susan Eyre of Woodstock are helping curb world hunger by raising rare plants.

As owners of Rich's Foxwillow Pines Nursery, the Eyres have 36 acres of rare deciduous trees, perennials, hostas and ornamental conifers.

Earlier this month, they donated 500 varieties for auction at the Heifer Project International "Graze and Grow" fundraiser in Chicago's Lincoln Park Conservatory. The event, organized by Richard Eyre, raised \$25,000 for the Heifer Project.

"I never thought that I would be the kind of character to fight world hunger," Richard Eyre said.

The Heifer charity provides live animals to people in Third World countries to help them establish herds and livelihoods. Families receiving livestock- ranging from heifers, goats, sheep, yaks, chickens and ducks- are given instructions on animal shelters, animal care and ecologically sound ways to grow feed. In return, the family has to pass on the gift by giving an offspring of their animals to another family in need.

Donations from local residents helped get the fundraiser going. Ginny and Gary Semrow from American Ad Bag in Woodstock donated gift bags, McHenry County resident Richard Hunt contributed a bronze puzzle sculpture, Jim VanHorne & Company Nursery in Wauconda donated nursery stock, the Eyres added an autographed baseball from Sammy Sosa, and Sunday brunch at writer Rommy Lopat's farm in Richmond was offered, Carolyn Collins of Crystal Lake, owner of Carolyn Collins Caviar Company in Chicago, volunteered to help the Eyres, her longtime friends, by coordinating food and beverage donations for the fundraiser.

"I strongly believe that humankind has the spirit that strives to maintain or better themselves when given the opportunity, and Heifer gives them the opportunity," Collins said.

The organization got its start in 1944 by donating milk cows to poor families in Puerto Rico. The idea was to put families in a position to better feed themselves, while giving them additional income by selling milk and milk products they didn't consume themselves.

Over the years, it has expanded the scope of donated livestock beyond milk cows to include 20 kinds of livestock such as water buffalo, llamas, pigs, goats, chickens and even honeybees.

"This is more than a Band-Aid approach. It's a gift that goes on and on with the passing on the gift concept," said Susan Eyre, who this month was named chair of Heifer International Foundation. "Once you give the gift, the whole community becomes empowered."

Richard Eyre became involved with the Heifer Project in 1968 during a stint with the Peace Corps in Bolivia. He volunteered to help impoverished families in Africa, Asia and Latin America by providing livestock and training to care for them.

"The families are proud to live up to their responsibilities," said Richard Eyre who, with his wife, visited Heifer families in India. "You could see by the donation of the animals how it drastically improved these communities. These people have to little land with too low productivity, but through the gift of animals this enriches a family."

Susan Eyre said the Heifer Project gave a family in India a \$200 loan that the family used to buy a camel and a cart. The family then bought a water buffalo for milk and was able to make \$3 to \$4 a day selling the milk. By the fourth year, they owned the first mechanized vehicle in their community.

Rosemary Larson, who heads the Heifer project in Chicago, said a \$30 donation can buy a flock of chicks and \$10 can buy fish fingerlings. Heifers go for about \$500 and a bull averages \$1000.

"I was amazed to learn how simple the solution to hunger is and how easy it is for people to support Heifer Project by purchasing a gift of an animal that would help a hungry family help themselves," she said.