

Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)

December 11, 2004

Section: SPORTS - HIGH SCHOOLS

Edition: CITY-D

Page: E15

Radnor trio sets up charity to aid Zambia

Ira Josephs INQUIRER SUBURBAN STAFF

Radnor seniors Julie-Anne Savarit-Cosenza, **Hillary Bridges** and Christian Mark sat in a Wayne coffee shop the day after Thanksgiving and discussed their plan to save the world.

In between Savarit-Cosenza's soccer games, Bridges' tennis matches, and Mark's regattas - as well as their numerous other activities - the three have been working on a special mission for more than two years.

They created their own nonprofit organization - the African Education Program. Their goal is to support and serve schools in Zambia, where widespread poverty and AIDS have reduced the life expectancy to 33 years, according to Zambia's Central Statistical Office.

"We want to be involved and make sure we're making a difference," said Mark, 18, of Villanova. "We want to see change."

Tomorrow, from noon to 5 p.m., the three students are holding an African Cultural Fair in their school's auditorium and lobby (the event is not sponsored by Radnor).

The fund-raiser will be complete with African music, dance and food, guest speakers, hair-braiding and information booths.

During spring break in March, the three students plan to directly deliver computers, books and other supplies to the schools.

"They're doing something that kids their age don't do," said Dave Chali, Savarit-Cosenza's soccer coach and a native of Zambia who moved to the United States 10 years ago. "Everybody is involved with charity organizations of some sort. They went outside the box. It's terrific.

"It's totally them, 100 percent. The only thing I've done is explain the situation from the African side, and also from this side."

It was during a sophomore English class that Bridges and Mark watched a documentary about Zambia. They were deeply affected and discussed what they witnessed with Savarit-Cosenza, who, through Chali, knows much of the local Zambian population.

"We immediately started talking about helping Africa," said Bridges, 17, of Villanova. "We feel passionate about it."

Rather than raise funds for an established charitable organization, they decided to create their own.

"We wanted to take the extra step," said Savarit-Cosenza, 17, of Wayne. "If you write a check, you don't know what will happen. We'll see the outcome and make sure something happens."

The group consulted with George Lincoln, a certified public accountant and the father of their classmate, Nick Lincoln. The elder Lincoln helped them incorporate the African Education Program as a registered 501(3)(c) charitable organization with the state and IRS.

"It's pretty unique," George Lincoln said. "When I first met them, I said they might want to affiliate themselves with a church group or become a stepchild of a legal organization. They wouldn't back off.

They wanted to go full-bore. They're all motivated kids for a worthwhile cause. It's a wonderful thing."

Almost every Sunday, they meet for several hours to discuss the details and ideas. All three have played integral roles. There's a Web site, www.africaneducationprogram.org,

which Mark maintains. They have contacted Fortune 500 companies for grants, set up bank accounts, obtained insurance for Sunday's festival, made T-shirts, contacted the Zambian embassy in Washington, and done their best to promote the cause, even sending materials to Oprah Winfrey and U2's Bono.

All the work has not come at the expense of their academics or athletics.

Bridges, a member of the National Honor Society, is a tennis captain, homecoming queen and student ambassador, and mentor. She also runs track and is a member of the Spanish club, student council and drill team. A former ice hockey player, she also works part-time at a clothing store.

Savarit-Cosenza is an NHS member, soccer captain, mentor and camp counselor. She plays soccer year-

round with her under-19 team.

A former lacrosse player, Mark switched to crew last year. He is also a mentor and a member of Habitat for Humanity, and he used to serve on student council.

"These kids are incredible," Chali said. "They're some of the most open-minded kids I've come across. I've been around the world and seen lots of different things. I've been very honored to know them."

Contact suburban staff writer Ira Josephs at 610-313-8002 or ijosephs@phillynews.com.

LINDA JOHNSON / Inquirer Suburban Staff

Planning a fund-raising event to benefit the sick and needy in Zambia are Radnor seniors (from left) Julie-Anne Savarit-Cosenza, Christian Mark and **Hillary Bridges**. All three are also athletes at the school: Savarit-Cosenza plays soccer, Mark is a rower and Bridges plays tennis. They created their own nonprofit organization - the African Education Program - to aid Zambia.

Copyright (c) 2004 The Philadelphia Inquirer