

## **UWO campus community gives back, globally**

by **David Williams - Friday, May 28, 2010**

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/2761/uwo-campus-community-gives-back-globally/>

What does it take to get donated textbooks to Djibouti?

Staff, faculty and an alumnus of the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh recently learned the answer to that question: connections and compassion.

When Lt. Col. Michael Hert '83 and MSE '85, serving with the 418th Civil Affairs Battalion in the Horn of Africa, learned of a need for medical books at the University of Djibouti, he went to his alma mater for help.

Hert approached Tom Sonnleitner, the University's vice chancellor for administrative services and a fellow member of the Oshkosh Mid-Morning Kiwanis Club, an international service organization.

"Education and health are a big priority for the government of Djibouti," said Hert, who, as a civil military liaison officer, works with U.S. Agency for International Development and the U.S. embassy in coordination with the government of Djibouti.

During the course of a conversation with Sonnleitner, Hert mentioned the African university's call for books about women's health, pediatrics and any other health topics.

On behalf of UW Oshkosh, Sonnleitner accepted the mission.

"I thought it would be a wonderful way for the University to connect with our many veterans and an alumnus while casting a wider net in support of international education," said Sonnleitner, a veteran of the U.S. Navy.

Sonnleitner made a phone call to Jenna Graff, the director of the Office of International Education, who in turn made some queries around campus. Eventually, she connected with Patti Vanderloop, an assistant clinical professor in the College of Nursing, who dropped off about 70 books.

When Sonnleitner called Hert, who was home on leave in Oshkosh to meet his first grandchild, Hert was hardly surprised to hear the mission was a success.

"Tom is a can-do person who makes things happen. I never doubted he and UW Oshkosh would come through," said Hert, adding that he has always had a heartfelt connection to the University, having grown up in Oshkosh and graduated from UWO.

Hert's son, Christian Hert, is a member of the Army Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) at UW Oshkosh.

**Gifts across the globe**

The Djibouti-bound medical books are but one example of how faculty, staff and students at UW Oshkosh continue to make a difference in others' lives around the globe.

In fact, the reason Vanderloop had so many books on hand was because she already had been collecting them from College of Nursing faculty to take on her upcoming trip to Uganda.

"I took 70 books to Uganda, and I had about 70 more that could not fit in our checked luggage, which also contained a number of healthcare donations," said Vanderloop.

The 13 nursing students accompanying Vanderloop to Uganda each gave up the option to bring an additional bag of their own in order to transport the supplies. In addition to Uganda, the College of Nursing routinely takes trips to India to expose future nurses to contemporary issues and events in foreign nations while giving students valuable international clinical experience and fostering the commitment to act.

Many of UW Oshkosh's study abroad groups incorporate a "giving-back" component, with students often collecting the materials themselves and members of the campus community making donations.

"Our students like to be able to give back, so we work to get the suitcases and program-specific supplies," said Graff, adding that while there are no specific requests at the moment, the Office of International Education always collects suitcases. "They must have latches and be able to carry 50 pounds or more. Wheels aren't necessary, and it doesn't have to be new. It could be Grandma's old suitcase from the attic."

In some cases — as with Lt. Col. Hert — the motivation to make a difference beyond America's borders lasts long after graduation.

"The people of Djibouti have a real thirst for education," said Hert, who will return to Djibouti May 29. This donation will have a ripple effect. The knowledge will just continue, and that's a great thing."

"Something that might seem small can have a long-range, powerful impact," he said.

- For more information about studying abroad and the Office of International Education, visit [www.uwosh.edu/oie](http://www.uwosh.edu/oie).
- For more information about ROTC, visit [www.uwosh.edu/military\\_science](http://www.uwosh.edu/military_science).

*Photo: From left, Deanna Singstock, administrative assistant for administrative services; Vice Chancellor for Administrative Services Tom Sonnleitner; Staff Sgt. Christian Hert, a UW Oshkosh student, holding his daughter, Katrina Hert; and Lt. Col. Michael Hert '83 and MSE '85.*