

Danville youths raise \$100,000 for soccer in Africa

By Eric Louie
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 01/11/2010 12:00:00 AM PST

DANVILLE — Brothers Garrett, 18, and Kyle Weiss, 17, grew up in a large, two-story Danville home with a backyard vineyard for their dad's home winemaking hobby.

Their comfortable lives are far different from those of many in the African villages they have come to know, where water is scarce and sometimes the best hut to stay in may have half a roof until the owner can afford more.

But a chance meeting with a group of African fans at a World Cup soccer game changed their lives. They found common ground in the game they all grew up playing, and in 2007 the young brothers set themselves a goal they thought was near impossible — to raise \$100,000 to bring soccer fields and equipment to children in Africa.

This month they reached that \$100,000 goal, and they have no intention of stopping. So far, with the help of a small group of fellow teens, their FUNDaFIELD nonprofit has built five fields — two each in South Africa and Kenya, and one in Uganda — and provided uniforms, balls and other equipment. They also have money now to build a second field in Uganda, and they have begun collecting for a third.

"Everywhere you go you see how soccer impacts

their lives," said Garrett Weiss, a freshman at USC. The brothers and others in their group have now visited Africa twice, to see the countries where their money has gone, and often find avid fans with knowledge of teams and players from around the world.

"It's so worth it," he said.

In some areas, the brothers said, children only have makeshift soccer balls made of bound plastic bags the size of softballs.

The brothers' effort was inspired by a trip to the 2006 World Cup in Germany. Tickets were hard to come by, they said, so when they got the chance to see Iran versus Angola, they took it though they weren't rooting for either team. There they saw a small, but enthusiastic group of Angolan fans.

"The fans were just crazy," said Kyle Weiss, a junior at Monte Vista High. "They were telling us how this was the greatest experience of their life."

Seeing the importance the game for those fans, the brothers thought about collecting money to send balls to Angola, but then decided to go larger with fields. They had planned to build fields in Angola but looked elsewhere because of instability following a civil war there, and found other countries also had poverty and similar issues.

The fundraising is done in many ways, but mainly through their Web site, fundafield.com. The site has a section with the group's name, with each letter broken into 10,000 squares to form a mosaic that for \$1, a donor's initials can be placed on. There have also been bake sales and spare change collections.

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About 25 youths, mostly from Monte Vista High with others from area schools, have been actively involved. Others have been inspired to help, such as a student club at Monte Vista that has donated money, said Jack Michel, 16, of Alamo, a Monte Vista junior.

Garrett Weiss said they want to keep involvement in FUNDaFIELD to middle and high school students. Their intention has always been to have kids helping kids. Taking on that role will be sister Kira Weiss, 11, a sixth-grader at Los Cerros Middle school, who recently raised \$22 through a popcorn sales event.

Jeremy Goldberg, founder of Global Youth Partnership for Africa, one of the groups that facilitated some of FUNDaFIELD's projects, said besides the large amount of money the group has raised, the members have a work ethic that makes them special.

"This is absolutely unique," said Goldberg. Unlike some other youth efforts, he said the FUNDaFIELD kids have plans beyond the immediate future. "They are in it for the long term."

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