The Race to India: Non-profit venture for Global Assistance

By Daniel Peake

Edited by Laura Guikeman

Spring Arbor, MICH.—In September 2012, in a joint effort by Alice Teisan of His Wheels International (HWI), Spring Arbor University (SAU) and We Build Hope, a specialized trike able to assist those who lack the ability to use their lower extremities was successfully delivered to Hyderabad, India.

This endeavor marked the beginning of a non-profit relationship between HWI, SAU and We Build Hope, as well as a venture for economical sustainability in Hyderabad. The process to ensure these efforts was long; nonetheless, in retrospect, Teisan and the members of the initiative could call it nothing less than an act of providence.

**On Your Mark…**

Teisan was an avid cyclist in her youth. In her prime, she biked cross-country and in several different continents. But after being diagnosed in 1992 with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS), Teisan was forced to stop cycling. However, in 2005, after years of battling this disease, Teisan said she realized “an illness can only take away your dreams and creativity if you allow it to.”

Teisan was inspired to utilize her passion toward biking by founding His Wheels International (HWI). HWI seeks to give mobility to the millions around the world who suffer from lower extremity disabilities by supplying them with hand-pedaled “trikes.” Today, HWI has developed 21 prototypes, had three production runs, been assisted by more than 500 production volunteers and shipped trikes to five different continents.

**Get Set…**

Teisan and HWI encountered a similar agent of change through Jack Piers of We Build Hope, who partnered with HWI in 2012. We Build Hope is a non-profit organization with a vision similar to that of HWI. They work with Teisan and HWI to help to bring the conceptual models of the Dual Offset Tube Trike (DOTT) to life. In later months, Piers and We Build Hope would play a major role in HWI’s India initiative.

Piers said, “I am committed to working with HWI. It was a hard yet satisfying experience to help in the India Project—that was our first trike with HWI. We hope to make many more.”

Shortly after meeting Teisan and HWI, Piers was diagnosed with stage four lung cancer. Nonetheless, like Teisan, Piers would not allow his health situation to be an obstacle. For Piers, this venture was much more than a simple project. It was, he said, “the answer to my prayers about wanting to serve using the skills I have been given.”

Piers said, “Yes, the cancer caught me by surprise. A couple of years into my new service and now this? But I found we are never given work we can’t do.”

Piers and We Build Hope were not the only helping hand in HWI’s 2012 India venture. SAU also proved to be a major factor in the vision and cause of HWI.

In 2011, Teisan, decided to write a letter to Carla Koontz, her friend and previous cyclist group leader. Teisan told Koontz the mission and progress of HWI, and Koontz, now the Executive Director of Global Studies and Initiatives at SAU, decided to share the trike with some of her colleagues.

On August 10, 2012, Teisan, Koontz and other SAU staff members met to discuss the trike and how SAU could help.

Among the many who attended the meeting, Dr. Caleb Chan, interim dean of the Gainey School of Business at SAU, was very excited about the concept of the trikes. Chan led the SAU Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) to not only raise funds for HWI’s India initiative, but also to create a plan to take those funds and turn them into a self-sustaining business.

“It was a great experience working with Ms. Teisan and Mrs. Koontz for this project,” said Chan. “We hope to create a way where our assistance is perpetuated throughout the community in Hyderabad through the production of the trikes and the teaching of its fabrication to the community to raise employment and trade experience.”

Chan, along with SIFE, hoped to integrate free enterprise principles into disciplines taught to trike recipients overseas. Chan said he hopes their tactics will “build business and self-sustainability while showing the love of God.”

**GO!**

A week after the August meeting, the group decided to have a new DOTT prototype sent to India in September 2012. Coincidentally, former SAU bookstore manager Shar Fortress, was planning to leave for a trip to Hyderabad, India, in a matter of weeks and happened to stop by SAU.

Through her visit, Fortress agreed that if a trike was shipped to SAU in time, she would take it along with her to India.

Piers and his team at We Build Hope were able to fabricate several trikes for different overseas trips, including the India venture, before their respective deadlines. This was the first time that Piers’ team tested their hand at creating the trikes.

The speed of this production was not the only miracle that those on the India project experienced. Fortress also experienced events that she refers to as nothing short of miracles. “I started out with one suitcase and two very large heavy boxes that had parts of the trike, plus I placed the 900 gifts that I had taken along for the women that we would be working with,” she said.

With all this luggage, Fortress said she was astonished when the airline allowed her to count one of the large boxes as extra luggage. At this terminal Fortress only had to pay $75 for all the materials present. When her plane landed, however, Fortress found herself in the inspection of Mumbai airport attendants, who informed her that she would have to pay hundreds of dollars for all the baggage. As her team prayed, she began to explain to the officials the reason behind the trikes and HWI’s mission. After hearing the report, the officials allowed Fortress and her team to leave with all of their equipment free of charge.

With the addition of two new associates, HWI is keeping the wheels of love and kindness spinning. Today, Teisan is confident that God has been behind these events every step of the way, exclaiming that it was He who orchestrated it all. With a new year at the horizon and a bright and globalized future ahead, HWI remains faithful that Christ is not finished with their race.

To learn more about the mission of HWI, visit hiswheels.org.

**Disability affects hundreds of millions of families in developing countries. Currently around 10 per cent of the total world's population, or roughly 650 million people, live with a disability. In most of the OECD countries, females have higher rates of disability than males.** **The World Bank estimates that 20 per cent of the world's poorest people have some kind of disability, and tend to be regarded in their own communities as the most disadvantaged**.