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High school students spur Angola Project

Ironwood Ridge trio devised aid for African kids

By **Andrea Rivera**

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Somewhere in Angola little boys and girls are running around wearing Ironwood Ridge High School T-shirts.

Ironwood Ridge seniors Emily Pirzynski, Sara Peterson and Kim Didra have something to do with putting those T-shirts on the backs of Angola children.

Almost two years ago, the three Oro Valley teens attended a Covenant Conference — where they raised money for Sudan — in Knoxville, Tenn., and were inspired to find a way to help others.

So during their junior year, the girls organized The Angola Project as co-vice presidents of the People Club to collect school supplies and other goods for children living in Angola.

In conjunction with Rise International, an organization that builds schools in Angola and was founded by Pirzynski's aunt, the students of Ironwood Ridge and others from the community shipped a cargo container to Angola. It contained Ironwood Ridge T-shirts, other clothing, school supplies and soccer equipment.

"It was amazing," Pirzynski said. "People got really excited because they could see that they were actually making a difference. It was a tangible way to make a difference. You could bring in a soccer ball and in a couple of months it would be in the hands of an African boy."

The teens will attempt to repeat that result this year.

The People Club and other schools and organizations, such as Copper Creek Elementary School and the Tucson Soccer Academy, began collecting items Jan. 22 and will start to fill the container Feb. 9. People are invited to drop off items and help pack.

Teachers, churches and businesses also are involved.

To spread the word to students, the teens made a presentation at an honors breakfast last semester and gave another presentation to the entire Ironwood Ridge faculty.

"We got so much positive feedback from teachers," Ironwood Ridge Assistant Principal Rex Scott said.

Scott said students, including the three friends, juggle lots of activities and he marvels at how they fit in helping the community.

If you go

What: The Angola Project 2008.

When: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday.

Where: Grace Community Church, 9755 N. La Cholla Blvd.

Why: To collect items to ship to Angola through a partnership with Rise International.

Suggested items to donate:

Three-ring binders, spiral notebooks, crayons, chalk, chalkboards, erasers, folders, paper, pencils and sharpeners, colored pencils, pens, Portuguese/English dictionaries, soccer balls, ball pumps, soccer shirts, uniforms and shoes, winter clothes, shoes and blankets.

Did you know ...

Angola borders the Atlantic Ocean and is in southern Africa between Namibia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A 27-year civil war ended in 2002 and it's estimated up to 1.5 million people died during the fighting between the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola. Another 4 million people were displaced during the civil war. More than 12.2 million people live in Angola.

Source: CIA — The World Factbook

"It was a tangible way to make a

"If they can find the time to also do something on behalf of people who live in circumstances we can't even comprehend, all of us can find the time."

Once packed, the 20-foot-long, 8-foot-wide and 8-foot-high container will be loaded onto a tractor-trailer and hauled off to Houston, where it will be loaded onto a ship and delivered to Angola.

Some notable donations so far include \$2,008 from the high school's student government; an anonymous donor provided the container and will cover the cost of shipping. That donation is worth \$10,000, the girls said.

"We really wanted to give the community something they could get involved with and be passionate about," Didra said. "To expand our walls outside of suburbia and see what else is out there is really important for high-school students, as well as everyone."

People Club sponsor and Ironwood Ridge teacher Sheryl Mahnken said the Angola Project is one of the club's more ambitious undertakings.

"It's a wonderful project," she said. "It's quite an endeavor. Our whole mission at Ironwood Ridge is to think globally as well as locally."

The club sponsors monthly events to change the atmosphere around campus. A toy drive last year netted 627 toys for the Brewster Center.

There are about 110 members in the club, including its co-presidents Pirzynski, Peterson and Didra. The girls were co-vice presidents during their junior year.

"If you want a smile, you can get it at the People Club," Mahnken said.

The teens want their project to encourage others to get involved.

"If everyone did something like this, just imagine what could happen in the world," Peterson said.

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Emily Pirzynski, Ironwood Ridge senior and co-founder of the Angola Project

● *Editor's note: This story ran in the Jan. 31 Northwest edition of the Star.* ● *Contact reporter Andrea Rivera at 806-7737 or*

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