

Village School students lend helping hand to South Sudan

By GREG VINE
For the Athol Daily News

ROYALSTON — At this time of year, it's common for people of all ages to think about helping those in their community who may need a hand with providing a holiday meal for their family or presents for their children to open. Fifth and sixth graders at the Village School have decided their community is the globe and, instead of turkeys or toys, they plan to provide something critically needed some 6,500 miles from Royalston.

Fifth and sixth grade teacher George Bennett said his students have set up a fundraising project to support Water for South Sudan, a charity that drills wells across South Sudan to provide water for villages that don't have any.

As Bennett explained, "The charity was founded by Salva Dut who, at the age of 11, was forced to flee his home in 1985 to escape the endless civil war in his country. He spent years walking across East Africa to escape the widening conflict, and more years in refugee camps, before he was adopted by a family in Rochester, New York, at the age of

"Dut went on to found Water for South Sudan, and the fifth and sixth graders heard his life story retold when their teacher read aloud 'A Long Walk to Water,' the inspiring book by Linda Sue Park," Bennett said.

At the same time, students were completing an art project in which



Fifth and sixth grade students at Village School work on their art projects.

PHOTO BY GREG

they used ink, watercolors, and gouache paint to create picture of a variety of medieval buildings. Their ideas were gleaned from photos taken during a previous class trip to England — a trip this year's fifth and

sixth graders will also be taking in February.

"The pictures turned out so well," Bennett explained, "that art teacher Loren Magruder suggested making cards from the images and selling

them to raise money for charity. The student immediately suggested giving the proceeds to Water for South Sudan, and the class unanimously

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ELECTION 2022

New state voter fraud units finding few cases from midterm

GARY FIELDS, ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE
and SUDHIN THANAWALA
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — State-level voter enforcement units created after the 2020 presidential election to investigate voter fraud are looking for scattered complaints more than two weeks after the midterms but have provided no indication of systemic problems.

gest that the new units were more about politics than rooting out widespread abuses. Most election-related fraud cases already are investigated and prosecuted at the local level.

Florida, Georgia and Virginia created special state-level units after the 2020 election, all pushed by Republican governors, attorneys general or legislatures.

"I am not aware of any signifi-

Paul Smith, senior vice president of the Campaign Legal Center. "The whole concept of voter impersonation fraud is such a horribly exaggerated problem. It doesn't change the outcome of the election, it's a felony, you risk getting put in jail and you have a high possibility of getting caught. It's a rare phenomena."

The absence of widespread fraud is important because the lies sur-

Donald Trump and his allies have penetrated deeply into the Republican Party and eroded trust in elections. In the run-up to this year's elections, 45% of Republicans had little to no confidence that votes would be counted accurately.

An Associated Press investigation found there was no widespread fraud in Georgia or the five other battleground states where Trump disputed his 2020 loss, and so



Castle by Wendell Teeter.

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School

FROM A1

agreed. Salva Dut's story made a very strong impression on all the children in the class, and they are very happy to be able to support his work."

Anyone who wants to support the students and their cause can order packs of 12 notecards for \$18. Order forms can be found on the Village School website, <https://www.villageschoolma.org/support/>. The deadline for ordering is Dec. 2.

Village School Administrator Rise Richardson said the adults had come up with idea of doing the notecards "because we've done that in the past as sort of a fundraiser. But it was the kids who were pretty strong about doing it for this specific charity."

"In our reading program, we really try to work with engaging books, and we really try to make it possible for the kids to get a world view," she said. "We're here in the North Quabbin region, and we know this area and the kids know this area. But what's their experience of the world? It's pretty narrow. So, we try to find them books that are really engaging so they can under-



London Bridge by Lilliana Kurinsky.

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stand other cultures, other ways of life.

"In 'A Long Walk to Water,' the children spend all day just getting water for their families. And, of course, there's a civil war and families are broken up. And so, the kids here, who are in general pretty secure with their family, to read a book like that, it's a real eye-opener. They really feel for these kids and families that are being broken up."

Richardson said books and projects like this, beyond learning, accomplish another important goal.

"What we're trying to do is build empathy," she said.

"We're not a terribly multicultural school; we reflect the culture of this area. So, we want the kids to experience other cultures and to feel empathy; 'Oh, my God. What if I grew up in a desert, or an area where there's a civil war? What would that be like?'"

"The idea is, we're pretty lucky with our lives, and not everybody is that lucky," she said. "It's important to begin this process of giving and being understanding toward others who maybe don't have what we have."

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