

# Hamden couple launches water project in India

Providing clean drinking water to the poorest people of the world may seem like an impossible task for just two people. Especially when the husband and wife team live in Hamden, Connecticut, and the people they want to help are thousands of miles away in India.

But that didn't stop Mike Lipman and Cathy Forsberg.

On Jan. 9 at the Hamden Rotary Club the couple shared the story of how they started their first water filter workshop in Kolar District, Karnataka, India last November with little more than an idea, determination and a startup grant from the Hamden Rotary Club and a local private foundation.

Today Lipman and Forsberg are much in demand. Part of their busy schedule stems from managing a local accounting firm during tax season. An equal tug on their time is staying in touch by e-mail with their Indian project director trying to find ways to increase workshop production and stay ahead of the unexpected demand

for their Bio-Sand Filters.

"When we went to India in November," said Lipman, a former Peace Corps volunteer "all we had was an idea. By the time we left four weeks later, we had a workshop with a project director and six employees turning out 50 filters a week. It's been a mad rush ever since."

The need for Indian families to have clean drinking water struck Lipman in 2004 when he returned after 35 years to his Peace Corps town. Lipman was stunned to find all the backyard wells had gone dry because the water table had dropped. "Household water of questionable quality was delivered to the neighborhoods by a town tanker truck," Lipman said. "There were no wells, no water lines, no indoor plumbing."

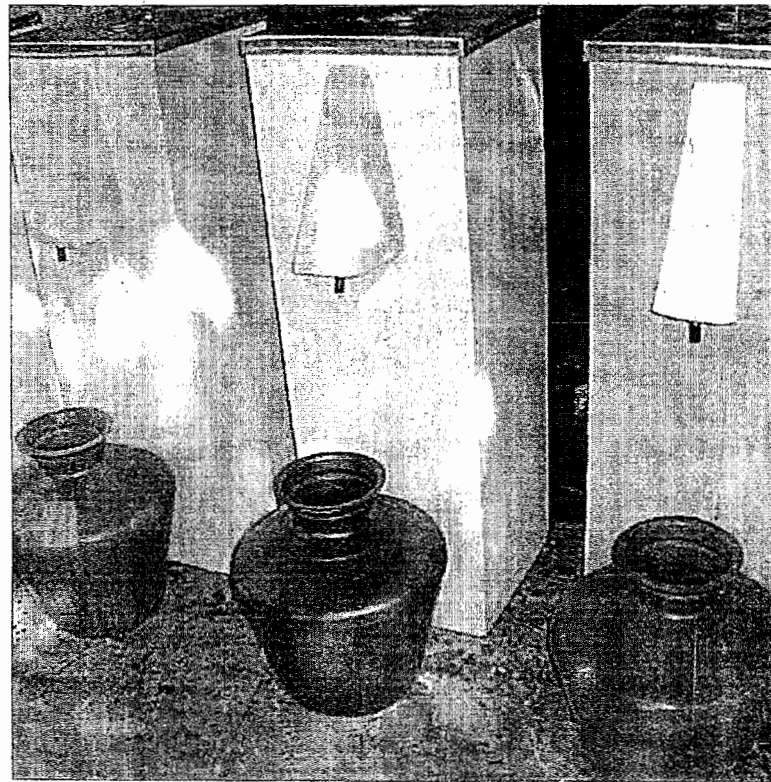
On the plane home Lipman decided to devote himself to finding a solution. Through research he uncovered a Canadian technology called a Bio-Sand Filter. Bio-Sand Filters are

made of cast cement about the size of an office water cooler. Dirty water is poured in the top. The water runs through layers of sand and gravel, and comes out as clean drinking water immediately.

The filters can be built on a small scale at low cost using local materials. Filters don't use electricity or chemicals or have any replaceable parts. That is why one filter can supply clean water to a household for 25 to 30 years with virtually no maintenance.

Lipman and Forsberg established the non-profit South Asia Pure Water Initiative, Inc. to help build and distribute the Bio-Sand Filters in India. Lipman trained in Calgary, Canada at the Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology (CAWST.org), a non-profit agency that provides training on how to manufacture and distribute the filters.

The Hamden couple's short-term goal for South Asia Pure Water Initiative is to place 15,000 filters in the Kolar District of South



Submitted photo

BIO-SAND FILTERS PROVIDE PEOPLE WITH A WATER FILTERING SYSTEM that requires no energy or significant maintenance to remain effective for up to 30 years.



Submitted photo

MIKE LIPMAN WORKS WITH AN INDIAN BOY to construct Bio-Sand Filters to help turn available water supplies into sanitary drinkable water.

India, supplying up to 225,000 people with clean drinking water. At the same time the organization is looking for ways to expand this water filtering technique into other regions of South Asia.

"The need for safe drinking water in south India can be met with these simple, proven filters," Forsberg said. The cost to manufacture one filter is approximately \$21 dollars, yet a filter is sold for \$13 so even poor villagers can afford them. The difference is made up with funds raised by Forsberg and Lipman. "The American dollar goes such a long way in India," Forsberg said.

For each donation of \$25 three families, up to 45 people, can enjoy the benefits of clean water for the next 25 to 30 years.

"Our initial success was greater than expected," said Forsberg, a past president of the Hamden Rotary Club who as a CPA specializes in non-profit organizations. The demand for the filters quickly outstripped the production capabilities of their factory.

"We are scrambling for grants and contributions to ramp up production," said Lipman.

The couple is scheduling talks at local Rotary clubs and other civic organizations to create

awareness for their humanitarian project.

Lipman and Forsberg plan to return to India every six months to expand the program in Kolar District and then into other regions of India. They are planning to introduce a water and sanitation educational program for Indian school children meant to enhance the effectiveness of the filter program.

For more information email Mike Lipman at Mike@LipmanCPA.com or Cathy Forsberg at Cathy@LipmanCPA.com or write to South Asia Pure Water Initiative, Inc., 2832 Whitney Avenue, Hamden, CT 06518.