

Pair in 'mad rush' to help in India

HAMDEN — Providing clean drinking water to some of the poorest people in the world may seem like an impossible task for just two people. Especially when the pair live in Hamden and the people they want to help are thousands of miles away in India.

But that didn't stop husband-and-wife team Mike Lipman and Cathy Forsberg.

The couple recently attended a meeting of the Rotary Club to share the story of how they started their first water filter workshop in Kolar District, Karnataka, India, in November with little more than an idea, determination and a startup grant from the Rotary Club and a local private foundation.

"When we went to India in November, all we had was an idea," said Lipman, a former Peace Corps volunteer. "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. He was stunned to find all the backyard wells had gone dry because the water table had dropped.

Through research, Lipman uncovered a Canadian technology called a biosand filter, which is 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



Mike Lipman and Cathy Forsberg of Hamden pose with friends in India.

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, and 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 to help build and distribute the filters in India. The Hamden couple's short-term goal is to place 15,000 filters, supplying up to 225,000 people with clean drinking water.

"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 about \$21, 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.

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.

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