



**Able & Willing**  
INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION FOUNDATION

**Press Release**  
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## **Walkersville Middle School Helps Schools in Africa**

**(Walkersville, Maryland)** For the sixth consecutive year, the sixth grade students in Walkersville Middle School have raised money to help build schools in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This year they raised \$800, bringing their six year total to nearly \$2,700. The money was donated to Able & Willing, a local non-profit that has been building schools in Congo since 1994.

“We set a record this year by selling candy,” said Julie Dixon, the school’s media specialist who organized the students’ fundraising. “In previous years, students created posters that tell the story of Able & Willing and voted with money for their favorite posters.”

For the last six years Mbuyu WaMbuyu, president of Able & Willing, has visited the Walkersville school to talk with the sixth graders about schools and life in Africa. The students know him as Puma, the name he adopted as a Boy Scout in Congo. Puma told the story of how he grew up in a segregated African city as the eldest child in a family of ten brothers and sisters. His parents and grandparents worked as cooks and limo drivers for a wealthy banker and the family lived inside the banker’s walled compound in the city. This meant that Puma was schooled along with the white children. He went through technical schooling, apprenticed in several trades, started his own business and taught electronics in a technical school before coming to the U.S. in 1994 at the age of 31.

Grateful for his his education and other advantages, Puma vowed to do whatever he could to “pay it forward”. Every year since 1994, Puma has returned to build schools in villages near where he grew up. Today, schools on two campuses enroll over 600 students in grades one through technical school.

Puma showed students slides of typical schools in Africa that have no books or furniture, in stark contrast to slides of well equipped schools built with aid from Able & Willing. Unlike the US, schools in the Congo receive no financial support from the government. Able & Willing’s schools support themselves by charging \$10/month tuition for families that can afford it and by selling goods made by students being trained in the shops of the technical school. Families that can’t afford the tuition have the option to work on building or maintaining the schools in exchange for tuition, and students over age 12 can participate in a summer work and learning programs to earn free education. Another program helps orphans.

“The students asked a lot of questions,” said Jim Carpenter who has accompanied Puma on work projects in Congo and assists him in the presentations. “One asked whether Puma has ever ridden a tiger, though there are no tigers in Congo, but most ask about food and kids in Africa. The students really reacted to viewing pictures of interesting Congolese foods like grubs and crickets and flying ants.”

After talking to three sessions of sixth graders, Puma and Jim met more students in the multicultural book club. One student related the story of Greg Mortenson in his book *Three Cups of Tea*, who built hundreds of schools in Afghanistan. Mr. Carpenter explained the difference between what Greg and Puma are doing. Greg constructs the buildings but leaves their care and use up to the local people, not always with good results. Puma and friends focus on a few schools and return every year to build, monitor, and help improve the quality of education in those schools.

Since incorporating in 2000, Able & Willing has raised over \$550,000, mostly from small donations and with tremendous support from people in the Frederick area. Able & Willing is all volunteer, with no paid employees, and has spent over 95% of its income on programs in Congo. More information is available on the website, <http://AbleAndWilling.org>.



In addition to raising \$800 by selling candy, students created posters that tell the story of Able & Willing building schools in Congo. The artists with the best judged posters are shown here with Puma Mbuyu, president of Able & Willing: (l to r): Jessica Handwerk, Claire Kotchenreuther, Olivia Johnson, Nicole Mehring, Natalie Mills, Kaitlyn Oberhaus, and Brooklyn Pfaltzgraff. Puma holds a poster by Tori Glaspell who was not present. The posters will be displayed in classrooms in Congo, and the money raised will buy material for students in vocational training to make furniture for a new preschool.