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DonCosta Seawell, far right, helped plant 6,875 vegetable gardens for the people of Botswana.



### Food for Botswana: Metro's Seawell Helps Plant 'Never Ending Gardens'

By SHANTAY IOSIA

(Aug. 25, 2004) A year ago, DonCosta Seawell, a senior contract administrator, never imagined he would travel to an underdeveloped country to offer unsolicited help to unsuspecting people.



DonCosta Seawell

But, on June 24, Seawell – along with 83 members of Faith Community Church of West Covina – boarded a plane to begin a journey to Botswana, a South African nation.

The volunteers donated their time and each raised a minimum of \$3000 to participate in "Never Ending Gardens," a program initiated to assist a nation struggling to subsist.

The goal, as envisioned by Bruce Wilkinson, author of the devotional book, "The Prayer of Jabez," was to plant individual vegetable gardens that could feed families for an extended period of time.

### Vitamin-rich plants

The 4-by-4-foot plots of a dozen nutritious and vitamin-rich spinach and cabbage plants, once mature, can feed a household of three to five for about six months. That's because, rather than harvesting the entire plant at once, the families pick the leaves and use them in salads, soups or stews.

Working in pairs, the volunteers

moved through the neighborhoods of Gaborone, the capital of Botswana. Equipped with seedlings, picks, shovels and rakes, they offered to break up and till the hard, dry soil and plant gardens – one for about every three people.

Each team, often helped by neighborhood people, could till and plant 40 vegetable gardens a day. By the end of their four-day mission, the 84-member team had planted 6,875 gardens, lifting the spirits of many families.

"It was the most strenuous, back-breaking thing I have ever done," Seawell says. "But it was all worth it, to see the smiles on their faces. I walked away feeling more blessed than they were."

The unrelenting spread of AIDS throughout Botswana has made it more difficult for the residents to tolerate the famine and resource shortages they have grown accustomed to.

### Too weak to endure

With 47 percent of the population living on less than \$2 a day and 40 percent suffering from AIDS/HIV, many are too weak to endure, or too sickly to harvest food. Botswana loses about 75 lives a day and estimates five infections per hour.

"People built cinderblock homes, used outhouses and did their laundry outside in tubs," Seawell says. "It was pretty bad. The homeless with the worst circumstances in Los Angeles have better living conditions than those in Botswana."

Although the conditions were substandard, Seawell says he doesn't feel sorry for the people of Botswana because of the abundance of joy that surrounded them.

"For the first time in my life, Botswana is at the top of my list of places I'd like to visit," he says. "They have very little, but there is so much to love."



Above, training session demonstrates how to plant the gardens. Below, church members Steve and Deanna till the hard, dry soil.

