

Flatbread fundraiser helps send humanitarian back

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By Phil King

Humanitarian Jonathan Hoffman, who grew up in Waitsfield and now works as a chef instructor at the Center for Technology at Essex, will be honored at an American Flatbread dinner and fundraiser at the Lareau Farm on Saturday, June 7. Hoffman is preparing his second trip to help bring normalcy out of crisis to Haif-Asaid, Afghanistan's Village of Seven Stones.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees will again provide Hoffman with a vehicle and driver/bodyguard. An estimated 25 million refugees remain homeless around the world. At least half the population of the Earth live on \$2 a day or less, according to Hoffman.

The Flatbread dinner is a bon voyage gift from Hoffman's friend and mentor George Schenk, founder and owner of American Flatbread. Donations may be mailed to Direct Aid International, P.O. Box 394, Northfield, Vermont 05663 for which Hoffman has applied for 501(c) 3 tax deductible status.

"I'm pushing myself more than I did for my four previous trips to Kosovo and my trip to Afghanistan last year," Hoffman says. "I have more trepidation because of the war in Iraq and escalating unrest in the Middle East. I have no political or religious motives whatsoever," he declares. "I know that Afghans have serious needs that are not being met and I know I can help. They need more action and less talk."

Last summer Hoffman paid for drilling a well still providing water for 1,000 villagers there, a property he has since turned over to The Village of Seven Stones (a reference to the mill stones used to grind wheat, perhaps as important as water to this agricultural economy). He also had an addition built onto a local elementary school, upgrading the status of village girls previously relegated to learning in a tent.

"Progress toward peace is palpable in the Middle East," Hoffman is convinced, despite news reports to the contrary. "It's time now to work for peace, a movement which has made little progress in the last 30 years."

"I'm not a big peace activist," he says, "but I am an advocate for peace who, as a normal person and a westerner, can bring hope for peace to a small part of the world."

Hoffman started his career as a cook working with George Schenk. Both men were mentored by Zeke and Emily Church at the Tucker Hill Restaurant (now the Steak Place) on Route 17 in Waitsfield.

Hoffman will be traveling again with a letter of introduction signed by Senator James Jeffords whose aides review, research and counsel Hoffman on his trips to troubled corners of the world.

This year he hopes to start school and hospital projects in Gardez and possibly Khost on the Pakistani border. With his Mad River Glen "Ski It If You Can" bumper stickers, he offers Afghans humor and a different perspective on Westerners.

Reference:

<http://65.19.77.69/reporter/extra/3302Hoffman.html>