

CHICAGO LAWYER®

CLOSING STATEMENT

BREAKING AWAY

Jill Webb provides girls in Zambia faster way to school through bike donations

BY ADRIANNA PITRELLI

Most of the time Jill Webb can be found at her Chicago law firm working long hours on personal injury cases.

But her passion for helping others doesn't stop there.

Webb, principal attorney at Jill M. Webb LLC, spends much of her free time volunteering with World Bicycle Relief — both in Chicago attending fundraising events and in rural Africa delivering bikes.

"My favorite part of volunteering with the organization is the impact we are making, in particular, to school girls in rural Africa," Webb said.

World Bicycle Relief supplies bicycles to people in rural Africa — mostly young girls — for easier transportation to and from school. Schools apply and work with the local villages to determine which children should receive bikes. The villages then turn that information over to World Bicycle Relief.

"They're not just a gift to the student," Webb said. "There's a requirement that the student has to use the bike to get to and from school. So the student's family can't just use it for their purposes. And if the villagers find out that the student isn't being able to use it to get to school then the village has the right to take the bicycle away from the student."

Without the bicycles, young girls, according to Webb, are forced to walk up to 5 miles each way to school.

When it comes to a family making a choice to have their daughter spend hours walking to and from school or doing house chores, often the girls go without school.

But with the bicycles, they are able to get to school faster, so they can get an education and get work done around their home — which can potentially help lift her family out of poverty.

"Providing a bicycle instead of walking can reduce their time by half," Webb said. "It can also give these kids an hour, or even two hours back in the day to study or do chores, because in rural Africa, there's no real electricity. So everything has to happen when the sun's up."

The bikes — known as buffalo bicycles because of how durable they are —

can be purchased for those in need with a donation of \$147.

Over the summer Webb was able to travel to Zambia — where only 4% of the rural areas have access to electricity, according to usaid.gov — to deliver bikes with her husband and 10-year-old son. In just one day, Webb and the organization distributed more than 200 bicycles to students in a school that has 1,600 students and 22 teachers.

"To be able to take a trip like this with my family — to see and experience life in rural Africa and to help distribute bicycles that we raised the funds for — was truly rewarding," Webb said. "My husband and I, and our son, are better citizens of the world as result of this trip with World Bicycle Relief."

Webb said that because of the long hours attorneys put in, they often sacrifice time with their families and forget about the rewarding aspects of charitable work. Her trip to Africa, however, allowed her to do both.

"Rather than think about the differences among all of us, I really came to appreciate that all people are alike in wanting an opportunity for education, or health care, or work," Webb said. "Life is short. Having time together like this as a family is so precious."

But the impact Webb's trip had on her went beyond that. She was pleased that no one wanted a handout and it opened her eyes to what other parts of the world are like.

"All they wanted was opportunity — it wasn't like 'We want free food or we want free water' it was more of 'We want an education and we want an opportunity to better ourselves,'" Webb said. "As progressive and liberal as I think I am, I still live in a bubble in Chicago. It was so eye-opening to get outside and see other parts of the world and just the huge need for something as simple as transportation."

Although Webb's trip is over, the impact it had on both herself and her family is one that she says will last a lifetime. Until she can make a trip back to rural Africa, Webb plans to continue to volunteer with World Bicycle Relief, which includes attending the organization's annual fundraiser on Nov. 14.

editor@lawbulletinmedia.com



WORLD BICYCLE RELIEF®

To Donate Visit: worldbicyclerelief.org/donate/

