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Cooperation brings water flowing to Macedonian village

DALLAS-A small village in northeastern Macedonia has water flowing again thanks to a collaborative effort between the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Partnership for the Environment.

Earlier this year, CBF missions workers Darrell and Kathy Smith worked with Terri Morgan of the Texas-based Partnership for the Environment to complete a project that restored the supply of fresh water to the village of Turija, 20 miles west of the Bulgarian border. More than 30 years ago, artesian springs supplied fresh water to the community, but when the lines deteriorated and the distribution equipment failed, the village was left without drinking water.

Volunteers from Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Texas-based Partnership for the Environment helped bring water to a Macedonian village whose springs had dried up.

“The need for potable water in communities across Eastern Europe is severe,” said Morgan, president of the environmental ministry and a former staff member with the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission. Morgan left the CLC to form the independent environmental ministry.

“Collaborating with governments and local businesses, like the Turija municipality and its construction and engineering companies, is an application of the gospel that is deeply gratifying,” she said. “The project allowed our board members to utilize their technical expertise in capacity-building with people who are not usually exposed to a Christian witness.”

The Baptist General Convention of Texas was instrumental in guiding and supporting the work early on in the project, Morgan said.

“In preaching the gospel without words, our board and officers found a

level of interest among Texas Baptists that allowed us to meet human needs in very practical ways," she said.

The village's needs were assessed during the summer of 2002, and the project proceeded with the full support of local governments and volunteer workers. After an initial engineering review, minor changes were made to the construction design by Partnership for the Environment engineers and advisers. The team then completed the project in four stages—they reconstructed the cap on the springs, replaced the existing water lines, installed an air valve and rebuilt the storage/distribution equipment.

"The men of the village worked tirelessly, digging ditches by hand and carrying slabs of broken concrete and were well-rewarded for their labors," said Darrell Smith, who has been working in Macedonia since 1997. "Because the project started so late in the year, it could have faced weather delays from snow and freezing temperatures, but God blessed the work by keeping the temperatures above average and keeping the snow away. Not a single day was lost due to inclement weather."



Despite rugged terrain and the threat of inclement weather, villagers and American volunteers dug ditches, laid pipe and refurbished existing equipment to complete the project.

Because the project was supported with in-kind contributions from the community and outside grant funding, the direct project costs for hardware were less than \$8,000, a savings to the community of thousands of dollars.

But the effort produced more than a hand-out, Morgan said. "When a request is made of municipal authorities and community members to contribute their expertise, a genuine development initiative will take place."

The local people became partners or "stakeholders" in the process, Morgan

said. This allowed for the transfer of newer technologies to the community leaders, equipping them to improve the quality of their communities.

Next, CBF and Partnership for the Environment will work together on a sewerage project in Kamenjane, Macedonia, an area in western Macedonia 50 miles from the border of Kosovo. The population of the area numbers 11,000, spread out among five small villages.

The current wastewater disposal method consists of rock-lined cisterns, a primitive system which causes the spread of disease. The Macedonian national government has neglected the Albanian Muslim population of Kamenjane, compounding the misery of their families.

"This is the most exciting project we currently have in development," Morgan said. "The high rate of disease—especially among children—is closely related to a lack of clean water and sanitation throughout the region. Because the community is Muslim, they face severe discrimination from their own government, even for humanitarian needs. But the opportunity to bring a witness by our actions is a powerful way to demonstrate the love and grace we know as Christians."

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