

LA JOLLA LIGHT

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Entrepreneurs start company for charity

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By Dave Schwab (daves@lajollalight.com)

A group of local entrepreneurs has a visionary scheme to help the poor in Third World countries by starting a branded, bottled drinking water company, NIKA, and diverting proceeds to a charitable cause.

The first shipment of NIKA bottled water went out March 1.

"NIKA in African means 'to give,' " said company co-founder Jeff Church, a successful Rancho Santa Fe businessman who has paired with La Jolla Mike Stone to form the new company. Following a trip a couple of years ago to poverty-stricken sub-Saharan Africa, the two men decided to do something with their children, who attend La Jolla schools, to make a small difference in the world.

"We felt the largest impact we could make was helping people get on the rung to climb out of poverty," Church said, noting that 4,000 people a day die in Africa, mostly children, because of a lack of clean water. "That's a pretty staggering number - the size of La Jolla." So the two successful chief executive officers came up with the idea for starting NIKA, a nonprofit, to generate funding for charity.

"All the profits for the sale of the water will focus on building schools and wells, bringing clean sanitation to specific projects around the world," Church said. "NIKA hopes to solve the water requirements of thousands of families."

Portrait painter Stephen Bennett, whose work is featured on NIKA's water label and trucks, appeared at a recent reception at La Jolla Country Day School to help kick off the charity campaign.

He was joined by former Chargers quarterback Drew Brees, who is donating a school in Kenya to the cause. The New York City-based artist showed "Uniting through Portraiture," an exhibit first featured at the United Nations in January.

This week, Bennett is conducting portrait workshops with students at Country Day, Francis Parker and O'Farrell Community schools.

NIKA has also signed on as the main sponsor for Project Concern International's first San Diego Walk for Water, a 5K walk set for 10 a.m. March 22 at De Anza Cove.

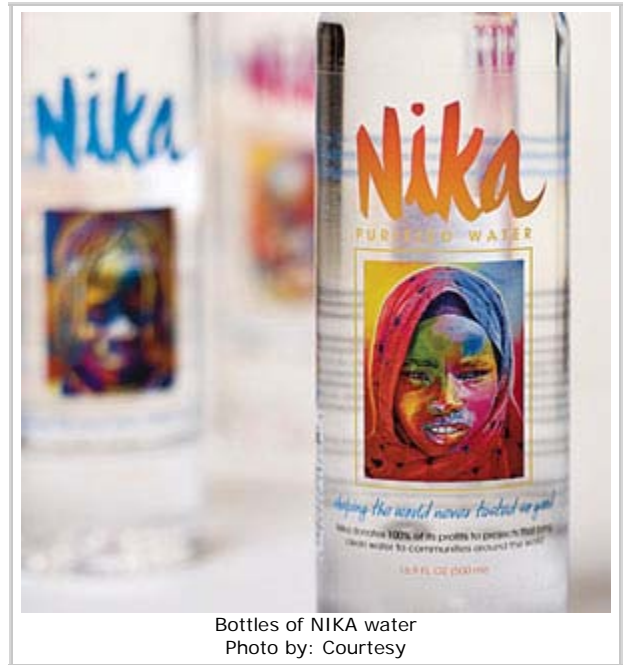
Students are being recruited to help sell and promote NIKA. They'll also be making a significant contribution to the environment.

"Every bottle we sell of NIKA, we're going to buy a bottle back that gets recycled," Church said. "We're going to pay kids 3 to 5 cents a bottle."

Church pointed out that bottled water is a \$12 billion-a-year industry domestically.

"If we were able to shift just 1 percent of that, we'd be able to donate several million dollars a year to poverty alleviation," he said.

For more information, visit www.nikawater.org.



Bottles of NIKA water
Photo by: Courtesy

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