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## Kenya mission serves people who 'have nothing'

By MARY BROWNFIELD

HOME IS on Mission Street, but Richard and Janice Skow spend most of their time in one of the most remote, and poorest, parts of rural Kenya, where they operate the Segera Mission, a 26-acre compound that includes a medical clinic, a school, food and water supplies and programs aimed at caring for widows and orphans and feeding the hungry.

The overwhelming task leaves them little time for fundraising, but now realtor Marta Karpel is launching an effort to raise money and awareness for the mission.

She met the Skows at one of her open houses for an Alain Pinel client. Knowing she was active in Freedom Fields — a group dedicated to removing

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PHOTO/COURTESY MARTA KARPEL

Janice and Richard Skow (above) spend an incredible amount of time, energy and money helping people in a remote, impoverished area of Kenya. The Segera Mission (upper right) includes a school with 147 students, whose homes can be tiny, crude shacks (right).



## Water district takeover of Cal Am proposed

■ But is promise of much cheaper water for real?

By KELLY NIX

INSTEAD OF taking its plan for a public takeover of California American Water directly to voters — who overwhelmingly rejected a similar idea five years ago — the group behind the latest attempt to gain control of Cal Am wants the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District to buy the water company.

According to a press release from Ron Weitzman, president of Water Plus, the group “believes that the water district is the appropriate public agency to purchase Cal Am and that the appropriate time is as soon as possible.” The water district should even use “eminent domain” if Cal Am doesn’t cooperate, Weitzman said.

He predicted that water bills would be vastly lower — \$49 per month on average, instead of \$141 — after a public takeover of Cal Am and is asking for a public workshop with the water board to get started on the buyout.

However, MPWMD board member Bob Brower said Thursday he’s skeptical of the idea that buying Cal Am would offer customers drastically lower water bills.

“It’s a wild assertion that I believe can’t possibly be substantiated by the math,” Brower said.

In an April 6 proposal to the MPWMD, Water Plus highlighted what it says are the benefits of the water agency taking over Cal Am, including more local control.

“Only through the purchase of Cal Am by a public agency can the

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## Park district offers ‘workshop’ but critics keep up the heat

By CHRIS COUNTS

IN AN effort to move past the controversy over recently retired general manager Joe Donofrio’s salary and pension, the Monterey Peninsula

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## KENYA

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land mines in former war zones — they asked her to apply her skills to their mission. Karpel was interested but first wanted to see the mission herself, so she made the trip there in January.

“They are spending their own money and working 20 hours a day, and there’s so much to do,” she said. “I went to see where the money goes, how the workers are organized and how efficient they are, and what the process is — that’s why I went there.”

Born in Poland, Karpel immigrated to the United States when her country was still Communist, and she has traveled to Cambodia, Argentina and Peru. She thought visiting Africa wouldn’t be all that far afield from her other journeys abroad.

“But guess what? Africa is very, very different,” she said. “There are very difficult conditions. For this particular mission, they are in the middle of nowhere.”

Segera is located 26 miles from Nairobi, but the road can be an hours-long drive during the rainy season. The area has no stores, water supply or medical services.

“Nothing,” Karpel said. “That’s why at this mission, they have everything on site.”

The Segera Mission, founded in 2002 by Janice Skow’s late father, the Rev. Carlton Gleason, has generator power for a few hours each night and cell-phone reception in one particular spot.

“This is the poorest part of Kenya,” Karpel explained, which makes the inhabitants prone to stealing food and whatever else they can get. While the average Kenyan earns about \$3 per day, residents in the area surrounding the mission, on average, take in less than \$1 per day.

Karpel praised Janice Skow’s dedication to keeping her mission operating, constantly dealing with tasks and challenges, including having to patiently explain to inhabitants why they shouldn’t steal. She also admired Skow’s willingness to honor local traditions and cultures, including having tea and cookies in bug-infested huts.

“As much as I was thinking I’m tough, I couldn’t do it,” she said. “But that’s what she does.”

But what struck her most was the people, nearly 1,000 of whom flock to the clinic monthly for treatment of skin diseases, malaria and numerous other medical issues.

“You can see the sadness in these people — the suffering,” she said. “There are so many diseases. In Cambodia, there are plenty of land-mine amputees, but they didn’t have this sadness that these people have.”

The 26-acre mission serves a 400-square-mile area in which about 10,000 people live, and it has 26 employees on the payroll. Workers at the clinic have delivered “hundreds of babies that would otherwise be delivered on the floor of mud huts with no sanitation,” according to Karpel, who reported the area has “one of the highest mother/infant mortality rates in the world.”

The mission’s school has taught some 1,000 kids and has a current enrollment of 147, and nine orphans and more than 17 families live on the mission property. It distributes more than 50,000 meals to school children per year and ensures almost 300 widows and orphans receive about 30,000 meals per year, as well. In addition, the mission’s water supply provides 7,000 to 10,000 liters per day to inhabitants. It also offers a program aimed at empowering women through education, nutrition and health care, and job training.

During her visit, Karpel met many of the children and adults the mission serves and was moved not just to help raise money for

Segera, but to contribute, too. For \$35 per month, she is providing clothing, shelter and food for a small child she met during her visit. “The boy is 8 years old, and because he didn’t have food, he looks like he’s 2 years old,” she said. “So, obviously, you could not just walk away from that.”

She plans to help Segera at home by making presentations to local Rotary clubs, organizing a fundraiser for the end of the year, printing brochures and generally getting the word out. She also encouraged supporters to visit and donate via the website, [www.segeramission.com](http://www.segeramission.com).

“It’s never too late to create extraordinary things,” Karpel said.



During her January visit to the Segera Mission run by a Carmel couple in the poorest part of Kenya, realtor Marta Karpel met many children, including the 8-year-old boy on the right, whom she decided to help clothe and feed.