



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 12, 2019

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The Most Generous Town in America?

Is there such a thing as a “Most Generous Town in America?” If there is, the title might well go to Brevard, NC, population 7,609. The citizens of Brevard just raised \$6,013 to build a medical clinic to save the lives of birthing mothers and babies—in Nepal.

The clinic is already under construction in the remote village of Memeng in the Panchthar district in Nepal. Similar clinics are reducing the number of mothers dying in childbirth by more than 90%, and the number of babies dying by more than 95%. The data are from the Nepal Ministry of Health.

Brevard is at the edge of the Nantahala National Forest in the Smoky Mountains, about 100 miles west of Charlotte, NC. One of its claims to fame is having more waterfalls than any other county in the state, 257. It is a modern-day idyll.

The idea of helping birthing mothers and babies in Nepal was the brainchild Brevard resident, Catherine Chapman. Chapman had heard about how people could give \$1 to help fund a developing world project. The organization sponsoring the projects is a California nonprofit, One Dollar For Life (ODFL).

“The idea is that if everybody will do just the smallest bit, the effect is enormous,” said Chapman. She had seen how ODFL had built classrooms and water wells, computer labs and latrines, in some of the poorest countries of the world, all of it funded from thousands of one dollar donations.

Brevard mayor, Jimmy Harris, liked the idea and began rallying townspeople. “We are a small town, but we are a real community,” Harris said. “We all understand that we are not smaller, but bigger when we help others.” The townspeople liked the idea.

Local merchants put boxes on countertops, inviting residents to “round up” their purchases, so that the change to the next dollar went to help fund the project. Local artists created works and auctioned them, with proceeds going to the cause.

“It took a while for the momentum to kick in,” said Chapman, “but once people started to see progress on the project, the excitement became real.”

The birthing clinic, in the Himalayan mountains in eastern Nepal, serves some of the most remote and rugged terrain in the world. A mother going into labor might have to walk three days through high mountain passes to get to competent medical help.

This is one of the reasons Nepal has one of the highest rates of maternal neo-natal mortality (women dying in childbirth) in the world. The new clinic reduces the walk to get medical help from days to hours.

One Dollar For Life was founded by a teacher at Los Altos High School in the San Francisco Bay Area. He wanted to show his students the good they could actually do in the world, *provided* they each did the smallest bit. He created a method where everybody could join in a project to help others by donating just one dollar.

Since its founding in 2007, ODFL has completed 107 small-scale infrastructure projects in 13 of the poorest countries in the world, all from donations as small as one dollar.

Mayor Harris commented on why that method worked in Brevard. “No matter how poor you are, if you live in America, you are rich compared to the poorest people in the world,” he said. “We’re not a dollar shorter for helping someone else, we’re a dollar taller.”

Chapman, the mayor, and other townspeople plan to challenge surrounding towns to do similar projects. Chapman echoed ODFL’s motto to suggest the portent: “Even the greatest waterfall starts with a single drop of water.”

ODFL has raised funds from private foundations to cover its operating expenses — phones, literature, web site, etc. As a result, every dollar donated goes into a donor’s designated project.

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ODFL is a registered 501c3 nonprofit. To learn more, visit odfl.org.