

"Love" Brings South African Choir to Columbia School
The View
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By Mike Fila

Alicia Keys. George W. Bush. Paul Simon. Bono. Jordon Kotter.

The Children of Agape Choir have performed for all five, though one name might not ring with same familiarity as the others.

Kotter, a fourth grader at Pointers Run Elementary School (PRES), recruited the group to perform for nearly 300-hundred PRES students by contacting Ted Geier, president of the Love, Hallie Foundation, and sponsor of the choir's month-long United States tour.

After reading a two-paragraph blurb about the Love, Hallie Foundation in a TIME for Kids magazine, Kotter found herself inspired, and searched the foundation's website to contact Geier.

"The things she said were just very inspiring," said Geier. "She said she wanted to use Hallie's words to get people involved, and I had a good feeling," he said, adding, "and then I got an e-mail back with even more inspirational words, and I knew I had to try and come."

The choir, hailing from Agape Health Care Center near Durban, South Africa, aims to raise awareness of malaria with its "Veto the 'Squito" tour.

The group of nine teens performed a mix of Zulu song and dance at their December 15 show.

After only a week-and-a-half of planning, Kotter said she was excited to finally meet the group, which performed at a summit on malaria for President Bush just the day before.

"I wanted to help, it seemed like the right thing to do," she said.

Geier sat alongside Kotter in the audience. He and wife Sofia started the Love, Hallie Foundation after their 11-year-old daughter, Hallie, was struck and killed by an SUV in 2004. At the time of her death, Hallie was saving up change to help children living with AIDS in Africa – Geier was compelled to continue her mission of helping others.

"It's just great to do something with kids where they can directly take part in the process to make change in their communities and the world. For me, it's just fun to be there," he said.

Pointers Run comes as one of the choir's last stops in the U.S., as the children will be returning to South Africa December 23. The group has visited California, Maryland, Connecticut and New York during its tour.

"The kids take it all in stride – sing, have fun, meet interesting people," Geier said. "They all said, 'Yes.' They wanted to do [the PRES show] for the fun of it."

Having met the Children of Agape, Kotter, a student of Lisa Zang, looked forward to a dollar market that she helped orchestrate for PRES Dec. 22, where, she said, her friends will sell "pins, origami, mints," and other wares, with the proceeds being used to buy mosquito nets to contribute to Geier's "Veto the 'Squito" campaign.

For more information about Love, Hallie or the Agape Children's Choir, visit www.lovehallie.org.