

BUSINESS LEDGER

FROM THE EDITOR

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Taste of a better future

Wauconda flavor company builds schools, helps improve education in Madagascar

You can't go wrong with vanilla. It makes anything -- from ice cream to soda drinks -- taste better.

But it's also vanilla that's driving a Wauconda-based company to make life better for children half a world away.

Synergy Flavors, a global manufacturer of flavors and extracts for the food and beverage industry, is building two new schools in Madagascar. The schools, being built in the towns of Antsirabe Nord and Menagisa, will add to four others the company has already built through a partnership with the local Madagascar Development Fund.

The island country off the east coast of Africa is the world's largest producer of vanilla, and Synergy has been obtaining flavor extract there since 1911, according to President and CEO Rod Sowders. He said the company's presence over the years has led it to become more involved in improving the lives of the Malagasy people.

"In this area of the world, a widespread shortage of materials and access to secondary schooling continue to be challenges," Sowders said. "This initiative is a way for Synergy Flavors to give back to the underserved community of vanilla growers and processors who have been at the heart of our success for decades."

Sowders said the need for new schools was highlighted when he met Brian Donaldson, a former British ambassador

to Madagascar and patron of the Madagascar Development Fund, during his travels to the country.

"He was actively highlighting the need for corporations to become involved in key projects, such as schools, clinics and fresh water," Sowders said. "I saw the need for educational opportunities to be improved, as a way for future generations to lift themselves out of poverty."

The Madagascar Development Fund is focused on improving the quality of life in the country through projects, such as installing clean water systems and building and providing access to health centers and primary schools.

School attendance in Madagascar is the third lowest in the world, behind only Haiti and Afghanistan, according to the United Nations Development Program. Donaldson added the conditions that exist in most primary schools in Madagascar discourage parents from sending their children to school.

"Thanks to Synergy Flavors and the six primary schools they have built so far, 2,622 children are now able to study in decent and acceptable conditions," Donaldson said.

"They (and their teachers) are relieved of the worry and distress of leaking roofs, flooded, muddy classrooms or being sent home whenever it rains. And Synergy Flavors is helping to improve these children's future employment prospects,



giving them the real possibility of a better, more prosperous future."

The two new schools will be completed and opened later this year. In 2016, Synergy Flavors completed construction of two schools near Sambava, and two facilities were built last year in Antohomaro and Farahalana to replace schools that were destroyed by a cyclone.

Sowders notes the efforts are part of Synergy Flavors' corporate social responsibility initiatives.

"We continue to evaluate other projects within Madagascar, and in other key areas around the globe, and hope to have more specific plans announced later in the year," he said.

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