

Megen owner starts nonprofit to rebuild home village

Funds sought for projects to help Nigerian town

BY LUCY MAY

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From the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center to the renovation of Fountain Square, Evans Nwankwo's Megen Construction Co. has been part of building some of the region's most complex and high-profile projects.

Now Nwankwo is taking on a far bigger challenge: helping to rebuild his home village in Nigeria.

To do that, Nwankwo is launching NuWay Foundation, a nonprofit aimed at creating sustainable developments and projects to improve the lives of the people of Awa, the village in southern Nigeria where Nwankwo lived until he was 19.



Nwankwo

"If I am blessed, I get a sense of obligation to become a blessing for those who are less fortunate," he said.

NuWay will team up with Back2Back Ministries, a local organization best known for missionary trips to Mexico, and Self-Sustaining Enterprises Inc., a Mason-based nonprofit that has been working in northern Nigeria to help poor residents there.

The new foundation will hold its first fund-raiser Dec. 1 at the new Oscars Event Center at Jungle Jim's Lifestyle Complex in Fairfield. NuWay is seeking a minimum donation of \$1,000 to

attend and hopes to raise between \$300,000 and \$500,000.

That money will be used to build a facility in Awa to host visiting missionaries and others from the United States and serve as a base of operations for NuWay.

The challenge is daunting. Nigeria is home to more than 130 million people and is one of the poorest countries in Africa. Ninety-percent of its people live on less than \$2 a day, and the country has the third-largest HIV/AIDS population in the world.

Well aware of the grim statistics, Nwankwo said he has been thinking for years about what he could do to help. About two years ago, he decided it was time. He began talking with his wife, Catherine, about forming the foundation and, over time, began recruiting board members.

Ronald Bell, a partner with Squires, Sanders and Dempsey LLP, joined the board and donated his legal services to help establish the nonprofit.

"Many nonprofits' models are based simply on getting money and giving it away," Bell said. "This is about empowering people and teaching people how to improve their lives."

Nwankwo named the foundation NuWay to honor his grandfather, Nwankwo Uche, a former village chief who believed in helping people become self-sufficient.

Nwankwo's goal for NuWay is to do the same. He points to the successes that Self-Sustaining Enterprises has had in Jos, a village in northern Nigeria where



COURTESY OF SELF-SUSTAINING ENTERPRISES

NuWay's strategic partner, Self-Sustaining Enterprises has a microloan program which helped 12 AIDS widows, above, buy a water pump, and a man, right, purchase a corn grinder to help his family support itself.

SSE has been working.

There, SSE made an interest-free micro-loan of \$1,200 to 12 AIDS widows. They used the money to buy a water pump that helped them irrigate more land. With the proceeds from their large crop, the women fed their families, paid back the loan, bought seed for the next crop and had enough money left to buy sewing machines and start a tailoring business.

Another family used a \$120 loan to buy a fish farm. Every six months, they grow and sell their fish for more than four times the initial loan amount, allowing them to be self-sufficient.

Chuck Proudfit, president of SkillSource and a NuWay board

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Evans Nwankwo
President, Megen
Construction



member, said the strategy of partnering with Back2Back and Self-Sustaining Enterprises sets NuWay apart from other startup nonprofits.

"In the business world we talk all the time about strategic alliances. But in the nonprofit world, that's a fairly foreign concept," said Proudfit, who also is CEO of SSE. "This is creating a strategic alliance from the beginning."

With SSE's experience in northern Nigeria and Back2Back's success in staffing missionary work with volunteers, NuWay should be able to make a difference quickly once its facility is built in Awa, Proudfit said.