Exhibit helps to empower Malawians

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS By SALLI MCSHERRY

"Journey of Education and Empowerment for Children of Malawi" is a joint exhibit of H.E.L.P. Malawi and Ursuline College at the Wasmer Gallery on campus, 2550 Landor Road in Pepper Pike, through March 30.

Hope, Educate, Love and Protect Malawi has always been about giving a hand-up not a hand out, said Founder Jillian Wolstein, of Chagrin Falls. The project, which started almost six years ago, has blossomed into a community that includes a primary school, health clinic and maternity ward, and a recently built library.

"H.E.L.P.'s vision is to one day see a world in which children from the most impoverished regions of the world can gain the skills they need to lift their families, their countries and themselves out of poverty. We envisage a world where enthusiastic teachers educate students in safe, hygienic and dependable school buildings, regardless of how far it is from a major city or how little it receives in outside funding. And most importantly, we envision a school as an institution that not only teaches students, but the leaders of tomorrow. We believe that through education, even the poorest people in the world have the ability to improve their own lives," Ms. Wolstein said.

Wasmer Gallery at Ursuline College was transformed into a Malawian market featuring wood and metal products along with linens and fabric purses made by students and members of the community. Beyond the walls of a primary education, students learn skills at after-school classes, including tin-smithing, sewing, bead making and sustainable agriculture. Colleen Nakhooda, 6, of Chagrin Falls, looks at a handcrafted wood Mancala game popular with kids of all ages.

"Magazine necklaces" are made by Malawian students who hand roll magazine paper into colorful beads, one of the popular items the organization sells in the United States.

H.E.L.P. Malawian artist Massa Lemu's large colorful abstract paintings are displayed at the exhibit at Wasmer Gallery.

Photographs depicting the children and daily life at Nanthomba School and the community, a project of H.E.L.P. Malawi, were taken by South Russell resident and Ursuline College Director of Alumnae Tiffany Mushrush Mertz, who has traveled there twice on behalf of the college.

Jillian Wolstein, of Chagrin Falls, is the founder of H.E.L.P. Malawi and is pictured with Scott Wolstein, of Hunting Valley, who has been a major supporter of the project.