Journey to Malawi exhibited at Ursuline

By SALI McSHERRY

Malawi may be thousands of miles away in southeast Africa but it's close to the heart of Ursuline College in Pepper Pike.

Sending over a couple of retired sewing machines two years ago was the impetus for a relationship between the organization Hope, Educate, Love and Protect Malawi, founded by Chagrin Falls resident Jillian Wolstein, and Ursuline College.

The two entities are hosting "A Journey of Education and Empowerment for Children of Malawi" with an exhibit, market and gala in February.

The exhibit, which begins Feb. 3 with a reception at O'Donnell Wasmer Gallery from 5 to 8 p.m., will highlight experiences of individuals from Ursuline who traveled to Malawi in 2010 to teach people there how to sew and to help with ongoing projects. The reception is free and open to the public.

A gala will be held at the college on Feb. 9 with proceeds going to the education fund at Ursuline College and H.E.L.P. Malawi, which is dedicated to sustainable education in impoverished African regions.

The gala, to be held 6 to 10 p.m. at the Wasmer Gallery and Daley Dining Hall, will feature a viewing of the exhibit, dinner, live auction, music and dancing.

"H.E.L.P. started almost six years ago with the idea that quality, sustainable primary education was possible in remote areas of Africa. Oftentimes when aid dries up, the projects dry up as well," Mrs. Wolstein said. The communities served end up worse off then before they have become dependent on the provider. H.E.L.P. was started to try to change that culture, she said.

"Instead of giving a student a shirt, we teach them how to sew."

Representatives of Ursuline, who have been amazing partners, have been to Africa twice to implement this program along with donating sewing machines, cloth fabric, yarn, thread, buttons and more. "We believe in giving a hand up, not a hand-out," Mrs. Wolstein said.

Besides a quality primary education, students have an opportunity to participate in after-school classes that teach them a skill. "We teach sewing, tin-smithing, bead making and sustainable agriculture. These products are then sold, and the income generated goes back into the project to buy supplies and pay the instructor," she said.

Visitors to the exhibit will glimpse a world thousands of miles away. The photography exhibit will showcase some of the experiences Ursuline Fashion Department Director Connie Korosec, Director of Alumnae Tiffany Mushrush Mentzer, who has been there twice, and student Anne-Marie Gurko had at the Malawi school with their guide Jessica Lowe of H.E.L.P. Ms. Mushrush Mentzer took portraits of the students that she will share. She also gave them prints so they would have school pictures they could keep.

Malawian artist Massu Lemu, who now lives in the United States, will exhibit his large abstract paintings. And drawings by Malawian students depicting what love means to them will be displayed. The gallery will be transformed into an authentic looking Malawian market where there will be wood and fabric products and magazine bead necklaces for sale.

While we are worlds apart, we are really the same," Ms. Mushrush Mentzer said. Her hope is that Ursuline will send over education, art and nursing students to the school and clinic in Malawi to learn and help.

"The skills that our students and community have acquired from Ursuline will not only equip them with a marketable trade, but will also help them sustain a higher quality of life," Mrs. Wolstein said.

For more information on the exhibit or tickets to the gala call Ms. Mushrush Mentzer at 440-646-8370.