Support for Teenagers In a Village in Rwanda

A gala is often just a chance to have a nice evening and donate some money. For Barry Segal, a dinner led to a life-changing mission to help children in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Mr. Segal, 77 years old, attended a meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative six years ago and at the organization's dinner, happened to be seated next to Anne Heyman, the founder of the Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village, which is home to roughly 500 Rwandan teenagers orphaned by violence, AIDS and the 1994 genocide. The organization works to educate and provide support so that the children will become self-sufficient adults.

He recalls that it was an interesting dinner and he kept the evening in the back of his mind for about two years. Then, as another company acquired Mr. Segal's company, Bradco Supply, a building materials supplier, he came back to that dinner and his conversation with Ms. Heyman. He had started to think more deeply about his philanthropy.

"We had taken some equity partners in the business and we were going through a transaction. I said to my wife, 'We're just going to have a lot of confusion now, let's go away.' So we called Anne," he recalls. A few weeks later, Mr. Segal was off to Rwanda.

And so began Mr. Segal's $1 million multiyear commitment to fund Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village through his independent Segal Family Foundation, which is based in Watchung, N.J. On Monday, Mr. Segal will be honored at the Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village gala and will announce another gift of $50,000.

On that trip to Rwanda, he saw first-hand the dramatic differences in living conditions between urban and rural areas. Upon his return, he started doing some reading on the region and began talking to people involved with other innovative projects in countries from Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Liberia.

Over time and in addition to the Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village, Mr. Segal began funding other organizations throughout Sub-Saharan Africa.

He credits Ms. Heyman as the person who "got us started in this whole thing and we're very happy to be involved."

Now, his family foundation supports more than 150 grantees and this year will give away some $6 million. His guiding focus for the foundation is to "do things right and for others to see what we're doing and do it on a bigger scale."

Mr. Segal says he isn't a passive person. "I have to stay in motion," he explains, "and it kind of bothers me when I see things that should be done that are not being done. It's overwhelming to fix the problems in Sub-Saharan Africa. But you have to start someplace."

A version of this article appeared May 21, 2012, on page A22 in the U.S. edition of The Wall Street Journal, with the headline: Support for Teenagers In a Village in Rwanda.