



RICK GRAY TREKS TO KABALE, UGANDA, helping to build an orphanage and school at Kabale Trinity College. He's taken five trips to the remote outpost in the southwest part of the country, with a sixth coming up in June. Staying for as much as three weeks at a visit, the cost for the trips has come out of his own pocket, but Rick—seen above, standing with his arm resting on the tractor fender—says it has been as good for him as for the people he's helped. "Every time I go, I come back and realize just how much they've helped me."

Rick Gray

Plant-A-Seed is a nonprofit organization based in Modesto, Calif., where Rick lives and works for Stanislaus Implement and Hardware as a territory manager, selling Massey Ferguson equipment and serving the low-profile market for orchard and grape customers. He's also the CEO of Plant-A-Seed, which in addition to its work in Kabale, has undertaken projects in other locales, such as Haiti and Cambodia, as well as closer to home in Modesto.

One of the main objectives of the faith-based Plant-A-Seed is for its projects to become self-sustaining. For instance, after building a chapel in Kabale in 2006 with his church, Gray continued the work, bringing Plant-A-Seed in on the project to build housing, classrooms and a working farm.

"What started out as [a school for] seven troubled kids from Uganda has grown into a school of 1,500," says Gray. "We have 85% of the kids year-round because it's also a school orphanage." Continued fundraising led to another purchase—a 20-acre field next to the school, which teaches the children about farming practices. Since the land is located near water, they also were able to put in an irrigation system.

The 44-year-old father of one, with another on the way, also helped acquire a tractor for the school through AGCO, which donated an MF435 tractor—a gift he says is making a difference in the lives of many people. Now, he says, they're trying to raise enough money to buy a planter so they can produce large amounts of corn.

"It's a kickin' project, let me tell you," beams Gray about the school. "When you give these kids hope, and you let them know that they can do it, they feel that self-worth and they move it forward on their own. It's like a tidal wave."

Thanks to the generosity of businesses and individuals in Modesto, as well as PBM Supply & Mfg., Duarte Nursery and Flory Industries, Kabale Trinity College is, says Gray, now nationally recognized and considered one of the top schools in Africa.

—Story by Melanie Epp

John Varty &

IMAGINE DRIVING A TRACTOR, and pulling your house behind it, across a country as big as Canada. John Varty and his fiancée, Molly Daley, did and, well, did. They finished the approximately 8,000-kilometer (4,971 miles) trek this fall, all to help educate the general populace about the plight of the Canadian farmer.

As Varty explains, farmers make up less than 2% of the Canadian population. Yet, often policies that greatly affect who they are and what they do are made by the rest of the population. So Varty's self-described mission is to give farmers the platform to share their stories, via news reports about the journey and a documentary or TV show he and Daley hope to make using footage they shot.

Born and raised in Ontario, Varty was the child of parents with deep farming roots in the eastern part of the province—his father's side has been actively farming for six generations; his mother's for four. Yet Varty decided to follow an academic path, eventually pursuing a PhD, focusing on the Canadian grain trade in the 20th century. He's taught such subjects as history, agricultural trade and commodities at McGill in Montreal, Yale in Cambridge, Mass., and McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. He's also written for several Canadian newspapers, often on subjects related to agriculture.

Varty, though, realized something was missing in his life.

And after a serious illness "very nearly finished me off," he says, "I got thinking about things I might do that are a little more adventurous."

And with that, Tractor Canada was born.

Varty drives the MF1660 with Molly riding the house.

