

# From Austin to Sudan

## *Humanitarian Aid Down to a Tea*

When Awad Abdelgadir came to Austin in 1988 to attend graduate school, he left behind a village in Sudan that was decades removed from the technological comforts he enjoyed in America. Though he stayed in the U.S., he never forgot his home and his culture.

Awad immediately started working to fund projects in his village, Az-Zawrat. The farming community of about 3,000 is located on the beautiful and historic bank of the Nile River. Unfortunately, however, the river is polluted and infested with parasites, and many of the village's children were constantly sick and missing school due to the contaminated water. A source of clean water was imperative, but Awad was faced with a daunting cost for the project: nearly \$50,000.

Determined to help his village, Awad took note of the lack in America of good quality hibiscus tea, a non-caffeinated beverage brewed from dried hibiscus flowers, which grow in the rich silt of the Nile river valley. He first took his idea for Nile Valley Herbs Hibiscus and Hibiscus Mint tea to Wheatsville Coop and Whole Foods, who were crucial in supporting his business from the start. Next came Central Market, a variety of Austin restaurants and coffeehouses, and a website from which individuals from all over the country order Hibiscus tea.



Awad also enlisted the help of the South Austin Rotary Club, which pledged \$18,000 toward the water project. This amount would later be matched by Rotary International. Another \$6,000 was raised by Nile Valley Herbs and the donations of Austinites and others. With the money, the village was able to drill a deep well for clean water, and install a pump, water tower, and tank. In its next phase, the project provided pipes to each house in the village. Whereas once women had to carry water on their heads several times a day, safe drinking water is now provided through taps in homes throughout the village.

With the proceeds from the sale of Nile Valley Herbs tea and donations, Awad has installed solar panels in the village community center, and paid for the construction of a dike to protect the villagers from the yearly flooding of the Nile River. He has provided for the construction of a school and the maintenance of that school and two others. Leah Goetzel of Austin spearheaded an effort at Casis Elementary School of collecting school supplies for the village, and

raised funds to build a classroom which has been dedicated in the name of Leah and her family. John Dromgool's Natural Gardener, an Austin gardening supply store, and Botanical Interests, in California, have donated seeds for distribution among the village farmers and among the women, who plant vegetables and flowers in the courtyards of their homes.



The most recent project is to build a health clinic, which the village sorely needs. The clinic will emphasize health education and preventive medicine, such as vaccinations, prenatal care, well baby care, and medical testing. Downtown Austin, Westlake, and other Rotary Clubs have raised over \$100,000, enough to fully equip the clinic. Now, the Mother Maryam Foundation is seeking funds to construct the clinic. This clinic will provide healthcare to more than 17,000 people in several surrounding villages.

If you are interested in helping the people of Az-Zawrat, you can send a donation check payable to the Mother Maryam Foundation, c/o Steven Hake, 1306 Guadalupe St., Austin, TX 78701. The Mother Maryam Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit charitable organization. All donations are tax-deductible and everything goes toward the project; all administration of the Foundation is volunteer.

To learn more about Az-Zawrat village projects or to order Nile Valley Hibiscus tea, please visit [www.nilevalleyhebs.com](http://www.nilevalleyhebs.com). Look for Nile Valley Hibiscus tea at local stores and your favorite local restaurants and coffeehouses.

