

WESTCHESTER COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL

Profits & Passions

profiles of people that do exciting things outside of their business



Stephen and Elizabeth Alderman

The big cure

By BILL FALLON

Elizabeth and Stephen Alderman were considering an endowed college chair, maybe a vest park or a playground to remember their son. The needs of hundreds of millions won out instead.

Though he worked in Midtown for Bloomberg L.P., Peter C. Alderman, then 25, was killed on 9/11 at a conference at Windows on the World. He remains a most remarkable man – perhaps unique – affecting change and saving lives by the tens of thousands from the hereafter.

Absent the faith element generally reserved for the efficacy of the deeds of the dead, Peter Alderman has lowered a ladder into hell itself and offers a way out to those trapped there.

To date, 60,000 victims of wholesale violence have received help in his name. Victims of war, of rape, of torture, of indoctrination to the ways of war as children – some languishing, some lashing out, none thriving – now have the hope of real lives thanks to Peter Alderman's namesake foundation. Those victims number 400 million around the world, which is why Dr. Stephen Alderman, Peter's father and a retired cancer specialist, says, "We don't have time to screw around. We evaluate as we go, using public health techniques to see the impacts and the successes."

The Alderman family is at the core of the effort: Stephen and Elizabeth; Peter's sister Jane, 35; and his brother Jeffrey, 38. Donations amounting to \$200,000 to \$300,000 per year come mostly from individuals. Peter's friends and coworkers founded the ancillary Friends of Peter Alderman Foundation, which hosts a pair of fundraisers each year, including a recent ping-pong tournament that earned \$3,000 to repair a foundation clinic roof in Cambodia. "It costs about \$50 to cure someone in Cambodia and a little more than that in Uganda," Stephen says.

Besides a pair of clinics in Cambodia, the foundation has founded three more sustainable clinics in Rwanda and Uganda. A training seminar in Uganda next month promises to train another 40 doctors and psychologists.

In the next five years, the foundation wants to build 12 new clinics. Its success and vision netted a "Best Foundation" nod from Barron's in November.

The damage of psycho-trauma festers if untreated and makes abusers of the abused, a vicious cycle without end, according to Stephen and Elizabeth. Perhaps 1 percent of those in need get treatment.

The clinic at Siem Reap, Cambodia, treats the 30-year-old damage of Pol Pot's genocide. The Siem Reap facility has spawned a second clinic at Soutr Nikum; the two possess 400,000 potential patients in their catchment area. A billion people – one in six on Earth – are victims of "torture, terrorism or mass violence through civil war, ethnic cleansing or genocide," according to the foundation; 40 percent endure severe traumatic depression and need the sort of help Peter Alderman is offering. In East Africa alone, the 240 million souls affected by systematic violence outnumber victims of AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined, the Aldermans say.

"These people can be cured," Stephen says.

Foundation workers utilize a three-part formula of spirituality, altruism and work to achieve results.

"This isn't Park Avenue psychiatry," Stephen says. "Park Avenue psychiatry is not going to work on anybody in Africa. The treatment must be culturally sensitive."

Of the original 303 IRS-sanctioned 9/11 foundations, only 27 are still in business, including Peter's.

Elizabeth says the foundation limits its focus with success in mind: "We want to get mom back to taking care of the kids. The husband back to work. And the kids back in school. When people can function, they begin to feel better about themselves."

The Aldermans say 80 percent of those traumatized can return to productive lives.

The treatment is codified via programs from Harvard and Johns Hopkins medical schools, but it plays out with local accents. The village shaman with her knowledge of roots and even of the soul is very much in the mix with the foundation's training. Doctors are trained two at a time from, say, Cambodia, or Uganda, or Chile, all too familiar with terror. The training takes place in Orvieto, Italy, and incorporates skills for teaching more local doctors, midwives and psychologists when doctors return home, a pyramid scheme that has

turned the 37 trained doctors into a cohort of more than 300 in 13 countries, including at the functioning clinics in Cambodia and in Africa; another clinic, in northern Uganda, will open in July. World hotspots like Iraq and Afghanistan also now host foundation-trained specialists and their home-minted associates.

The foundation combines three efforts to achieve its goals:

- Training indigenous care givers;
- Forming public-private partnerships with government, religious and medical institutions; and
- Leveraging the first two to begin the healing.

If their task is daunting, the Aldermans, trim and smart and sipping iced tea on a warm afternoon, appear up to the challenge. They have set a goal of \$500,000 this year from their home-based foundation. “This is what we do now,” Stephen says.

“For most people, death is the end,” says Elizabeth. “Peter’s death has brought life to thousands of people.”

The Web site is www.Petercaldermanfoundation.org.