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Have you ever wanted to change the world and make it a better place? I suspect that it is not an uncommon “fantasy” since we have so many super hero movies in theaters these days. The reason the super hero scenario is a fantasy is that it deals with impossible short cuts instead of hard work and creative thinking.

In reality, each of us has within us the ability to be a hero, an agent of change who can play a significant role in making the world a better and safer place. This is one of the reasons I so enjoy being a part of ECHO. Every day I work with ordinary people doing extraordinary things to change the future from that of suffering to one filled with hope. Let me tell you about a few:

**Andy and Sulam** are young couple who met at ECHO while Andy was an intern and Sulam a student. They married and began looking for a place to use the gifts that God gave them to help the poor. They accepted a stipended volunteer position in rural South Africa. They were recently offered another position in South Africa with a different organization that paid a nice salary with many other benefits. Logic would dictate, “take the better job!” However, after praying about the offer, Andy and Sulam had a reconfirmation of their calling to the ministry where they were and turned down the “better” offer to continue working with pastors, training them to be both productive farmers and committed pastors. This couple are the real super heroes (without the clamour or cape!)

**Rebecca** is a former ECHO intern who is so uniquely gifted that she could get a job anywhere in the world doing almost anything. She would excel at the position and bring the entire organization with her. Rebecca has chosen to use her gifts instead to work with a small organization in Thailand that provides support to other ministries and as a result is having a multiplier effect that will have global implications. She is an agent of change!

**Sherrill** headed to Zambia immediately after her ECHO internship several years ago and continues to work near Victoria Falls. Part of what Sherrill is doing is teaching farmers to “pass it on” and is seeing great results. The farmers produce chickens or groundnuts and then pass the chicks or seed peanuts on to a neighbor or others in their church to help them produce a bountiful harvest. Sherrill is changing the future for entire families in a very isolated location far from her culture, a real hero.

**Dave and Dana** have been very successful in business and are very generous in using their wealth to improve the lives of others. In addition to helping with cancer cures and other US based efforts, this amazing couple has embraced the needs for clean water in West Africa. However, Dave and Dana recognized that water alone could not address some of the basic needs of the poor in West Africa.

As Dave told me a few months ago, “Stan, we have the potential to eliminate famine in our life time. Between what we are doing with putting in water wells, of which over 80% are still fully functional after 10 years, and what ECHO does with helping people use that water to produce more food, we really can change the world!” “Stan, thank you for inviting Dana and me to be part of what ECHO is doing by establishing a presence in West Africa. We are deeply honored to be a part of this.” Those are the words of real super heroes.

**Tom and Jan** started their engagement with ECHO by sponsoring an intern. This quiet couple not only provided funds to make it possible for a very gifted young woman to spend a year at ECHO but also stayed connected with her after she left ECHO and headed overseas, continuing to invest in her life. Tom and Jan have continued to stay connected with ECHO and are helping in areas that don’t bring lots of fanfare but are essential for allowing ECHO to continue being a resource to those working with the poor. In addition to what Tom and Jan do for ECHO, they have also made a much more personal commitment to me to help me grow into the leader that ECHO needs me to be. It is a whole new level of heroics to dedicate yourself personally to an individual’s life because you believe in them as much as the organization they represent.

These are just a tiny fraction of the stories that could and should be told about the real heroes. You are one such hero as you engage with ECHO, not for ECHO’s sake, but for those around the world who are desperately looking for ways to change the world and make it a better place for everyone.
Mr. Filemon of El Salvador with long bean seed harvest and ripening plantain. Photo courtesy of Mr. Filemon and Charles Haren

West Africa Impact Center Fully Funded!

The need around the world for ECHO’s resources is great! West Africa in particular is home to thousands of people groups simply surviving. Thanks to the leadership giving of some of our generous donors, we are proud to announce the opening of our West Africa Regional Impact Center.

James and Judith Kovalik, David H. & Dana Dornsife Foundation, James and Louise McWhinnie, Pit & Joy Gill Foundation Inc, and two anonymous donors have committed the pioneer funding for start-up costs as well as three years’ operating budget.

This is ECHO’s third Center around the world, preceded by our Asia Impact Center (Chiang Mai, Thailand) and our East Africa Impact Center (Arusha, Tanzania). Centrally located in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, the launch of this new Impact Center follows two ECHO West Africa Forums (2010 and 2012) that drew enthusiastic participation from every country in the Region and demonstrated widespread potential to impact communities in greatest need.

Subsequent case studies and engagement through the ECHOcommunity.org internet portal have indicated that ECHO’s impact has already reached over 50,000 small-scale farmers and their families.
ECHO's first Caribbean Regional Conference, was held October 29-31, 2013 in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. This Conference, nestled in the heart of the Caribbean, provided a network and training opportunity for those involved in alleviating hunger and poverty in the Caribbean Region and throughout Central America. Offered in Spanish and Haitian Creole, three mornings of plenary sessions featured knowledgeable and experienced speakers. Afternoon workshops and discussion groups led by regional agricultural development workers and experts rounded out the networking experience.

We wanted to take the opportunity to profile one speaker in particular and give you a glimpse into one of the topics that delegates learned more about last October.

Tony Rinaudo and his wife Liz spent 18 years in Niger Republic from 1981 to 1999 where he managed famine relief interventions and a long term agricultural development program promoting organic farming, reforestation, diversified food production systems and community based health. Today, Tony is the Research and Development Advisor for natural resources with World Vision Australia, primarily focused on environmental restoration for food security. He is involved in the promotion of Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) globally through workshops and conferences, training of trainers, media and creation of resource material.

Tony has been an ECHO network member for many years. In fact, he was one of the 36 network members to receive the very first issue of ECHO Development Notes in 1981. In the early years, he tested ECHO seeds in his work in Niger and relied regularly on communications with ECHO to stave off the loneliness of rural agricultural development. These experiences make Tony an excellent presenter, understanding both the struggles and joys of ECHO’s network members all around the world.

His presentation, Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) was first shared at ECHO's West Africa Networking Forum. According to Tony, “From 1984 to 2004 average tree density on Nigerien farms rose from 4 trees/hectare to 50 with some farmers leaving up to 150 trees per hectare. Today, some 5-6 million hectares of formerly bare, windswept farmland have been reforested through FMNR. These changes make a huge impact on food security, income and environmental preservation.” Simply, FMNR is a method of caring for and cultivating existing native tree potential and integrating these trees into the field agriculture system. Already adapted to and presented in the West African environment, many delegates were motivated and equipped to put what they learned into immediate action.
Even though FMNR was developed in the semi-arid tropics of Niger, it has great potential in the humid tropics as well. It is a form of selective pruning which goes back centuries in many climatic regions of the world. FMNR is now being promoted in the Philippines, East Timor, Indonesia, Myanmar and wetter parts of Africa.

The need is great throughout Latin America. According to the journal Biotropica, Latin America has lost nearly 100,000 square miles of forest -- an area larger than the state of Oregon -- between 2001 and 2010.

When asked about his vision for the potential of FMNR in the Caribbean, Tony shares, “My vision for the Caribbean is for a re-greening movement that reverses deforestation trends, builds a sustainable, robust and productive agriculture and contributes to environmental restoration. I see this happening through awareness creation and by building on the indigenous knowledge that is already there, by exploring ways of reviving good traditional practices, by enhancing them and being intentional about promotion and implementation of agroforestry and community management of water sheds."

“I am greatly encouraged each time I present on FMNR and I witness the ‘aha’ moment, when the audience ‘gets it.’ It is invigorating to be reminded that there are so many enthusiastic and committed people of all ages and from many organizations (and in some cases simply working on their own out of conviction) working towards improving the lives of the world’s poor. In particular, meeting the next generation of development workers is very encouraging.”

“Latin America has lost nearly 100,000 square miles of forest -- an area larger than the state of Oregon -- between 2001 and 2010.”
The word network as we know it today is less than 70 years old. It is no coincidence that the concept of an extensive group of people connected by a particular interest or cause has emerged around the same time as the world’s communications revolution.

As a network dedicated to connecting those who are working to end hunger, ECHO understands this concept well. ECHO also recognizes that networks develop with technology. The growth of ECHOcommunity.org bears witness to this.

Since its launch in October 2011, ECHOcommunity.org has become the hub for ECHO networking. Members share resources, participate in regional groups and forums, contribute to blogs and stay on top of ECHO conferences and workshops through the event calendar.

“I see ECHOcommunity.org as a tool that opens up a host of new opportunities to network creative solutions to hunger,” Tim Motis, Director of ECHO’s Ag Tech and Research Department said. “Networking has always been a key element of our efforts to identify and disseminate information on proven practices that really make a difference in the lives of small-scale farmers. ECHOcommunity.org helps us do this more effectively, giving us the functionality needed to build an international community of change agents actively engaged in helping small-scale farmers produce food under difficult growing conditions. It is exciting to see the growth in ECHOcommunity.org, and I think we have only just begun to tap into its amazing potential.”

Years ago, when ECHO Network members wanted to connect with others working in their areas, they wrote to ECHO asking for names and addresses. ECHO, wishing to protect identities, would forward those requests by mail or email to any appropriate connections, asking them to reach out to the original person and make a connection. It was effective, but cumbersome.

Today, a network member can log onto ECHOcommunity.org and search by country or even by city immediately. Our software identifies network members on an interactive map, helping people to connect with others working in very similar situations.

This year, ECHOcommunity.org has seen unprecedented growth. The number of total active members grew from 3,121 in December 2012 to 6,115 in December 2013. These members are coming from 165 countries around the world.

New features at ECHOcommunity.org are making communication simpler and more efficient. Responses to technical requests—the heart of our ministry to network members—are completed within a day of receiving them.

As always, ECHOcommunity.org functions as a prime repository of information. We are building on that foundation to increase the capacity for members to creatively network sustainable solutions to hunger.

“I see ECHOcommunity.org as a tool that opens up a host of new opportunities to network creative solutions to hunger....I think we have only just begun to tap into its amazing potential.”

-- Dr. Tim Motis
Transition at the ECHO Asia Impact Center

From a Strong Past to an Exciting Future

Four years ago, the ECHO Asia Impact Center was just a dream. Through God’s leading and teamwork, we now celebrate four fruitful years and a successful leadership transition.

After a 15-year career in community development in Thailand, Rick and Ellen Burnette took the pioneer leadership role of ECHO’s first Impact Center. The last four years have allowed for exponential growth in the resources and services offered to the poor in the region, through ECHO. Last year, with prayer and God’s leading, Rick Burnette accepted the position to head ECHO’s Agricultural Department in Fort Myers, Florida. The leadership role of ECHO’s Asia Impact Center has been passed to Dr. Abram Bicksler, formerly the Research Advisor to the center. Abram has been joined by Boonsong Thansrithong, Agricultural Program Manager of the Center, and Rebecca Garafano, Office Manager. Abram has been active in the Impact Center since its inception, and we are very excited to see how the skills of the ECHO Asia team will continue to be used to reduce hunger and improve lives in Southeast Asia.

In just the last 12 months, the team at ECHO Asia has been incredibly active with research and educational opportunities for small-scale farmers throughout Asia:

- Staff and interns completed a year-long test of the effects of vacuum storage on seed viability. They submitted a paper to Experimental Agriculture Journal which was published, and they published their findings in ECHO Asia Notes for our Network Members. Abram also presented a poster paper at the Upland Conference in Hohenheim, Germany concerning the research.

- Workshops were held in Cambodia, India, Myanmar and the Philippines, with total attendance of 180 participants from all over southeast Asia.

- Field trials were completed regarding the performance of tropical vegetable fern and cover crop and vegetable varieties. A moringa trial and a biochar trial were also established.

- An earthbag house was constructed in order to study village-appropriate seed saving techniques.

- ECHO Asia staff and interns responded to 148 technical questions through the ECHOcommunity.org website.

- 172 individuals or organizations submitted requests for seeds, resulting in 3,149 sample packets of seed and 158.7 kg of bulk orders being distributed across Asia.

We are excited about the future of ECHO Asia, and the impact that it will have on lives in southeast Asia. Building on such a strong past, we look forward to a bright and life-changing future for ECHO’s first Regional Impact Center.
It’s citrus season! From Calamondins to Pummelos, vitamin-packed citrus fruits are an important nutrient resource for ECHO’s network.

Honoring Bob Hargrave for 10 years of service to ECHO! L-R: Bob Hargrave, Ellen Hargrave and COO Tim Albright.

ECHO International Ag Conference

The ECHO International Ag Conference was held during the week of Dec 9 – 13. This 20th Anniversary Conference brought in 168 delegates. The traditional prayer of (27) nations finished off our time together.

Follow us on Instagram for pictures of ECHO’s work all around the world. #echofightshunger
South Africa Research

L-R Joy Longfellow, past ECHO intern, and Melissa Miller just arrived in South Africa for the next phase of our research program at Ukulima Farm. They are taking over for Brandon Lingbeek and Chris D’iauto who recently finished their assignments.

Welcome Back Event

Seasonal volunteers were welcomed back with in-depth refresher tours by Russ Luther and Andy Cotarelo on Dec 3rd and Jan 9th.

Aquaponics Demonstration

With the help of ECHO’s Tropical Agricultural Development Course, the AT Department constructed an aquaponics system that holds 2400 gallons of water, has 128 square feet of grow space for plants, and will house a minimum of 100 tilapia.
Jim and Judy Kovalik grew up in Johnstown, PA, a small, conservative town east of Pittsburgh. Like most Eastern and Southern Europeans who settled in that area, the Kovaliks’ relatives worked in the steel making, railroading, and coal mining industries that characterized the region.

Judy, her brother, and their parents were active in a Grace Brethren Church. Jim and his parents were faithful members of the Johnstown Christian and Missionary Alliance Church. In both churches there was a regular emphasis on worldwide missionary involvement. Their parents hosted missionaries in their homes and regularly supported missions projects. God also used missions courses and conferences to keep missions in the Kovaliks’ minds during their college years. Judy’s personal contacts were primarily with missionaries in the Central African Republic. Jim had church friends who would become C&MA missionaries. One of those friends was Jim Albright who, with his family, served in West Africa for many years. God would continue to use Jim A’s influence in Jim K’s life years later.

From 1973 to 1991, when the Kovaliks lived in Wheaton, IL, they were active in the local CMA church, where Judy served on the Missions Committee and Jim provided hands-on help with all mission-related projects. The church enjoyed an added blessing each year as several different furloughing missionary families participated in the church’s activities, providing an ongoing reminder of worldwide missions activity and an exciting annual missions conference.

After eighteen years in Wheaton, the Kovaliks sensed that God was directing them to return to Johnstown, where, with His help, they were able to operate their home-based business and provide care for their four elderly parents for 17 years. In January 2008, the last two of their parents went to be with the Lord. That fall, Jim attended his first ECHO Annual Agricultural Conference along with his boyhood friend Jim Albright. It was at that conference that Jim K met Jim A’s son, Tim Albright, who was to become the Chief Operations Officer of ECHO. He also met Robert Sanou, a Burkina Faso national, who was the Director of ACCEDES, a church-sponsored relief-and-development organization there. Through these personal contacts, Jim and Judy were able to contribute to furnishing a women’s center and constructing a guest house in Burkina Faso, and to provide scholarship funds for attendees at the 2010 and 2012 West Africa Forums which ECHO sponsored in Burkina Faso.

“We knew God was putting this on our heart to invest as we saw years of work in Burkina, and now [we were] witnessing the birth… of the West Africa Regional Impact Center through ECHO”

Having been impressed by the worldwide scope of ECHO’s vision and agricultural-based ministry, Jim and Judy subsequently attended two ECHO conferences. In 2012, the couple moved to a retirement community in central Florida, which has enabled them to spend time at ECHO learning more about its vision to establish regional impact centers.
in key locations around the world. When they learned of ECHO’s interest in establishing such a center in West Africa, they felt that the Lord had already prepared them to make a financial pledge. At a luncheon with Tim Albright and David Erickson, the Kovaliks made a four-year commitment that would enable ECHO to begin moving forward with strategic plans.

Jim and Judy have seen over their lifetime that God has provided wisdom and direction as they have sought His guidance. “We are stewards and managers, not owners, of the resources God has made available to us. We are more than grateful that God directed us to partner with ECHO in helping to make the West Africa Regional Impact Center a reality,” Jim shared.

They also realize that it has been through lasting personal relationships that God has worked in directing their steps, especially in relation to ECHO. At present, Tim Albright serves as ECHO’s COO, and Robert Sanou has recently been appointed to serve as the first Director of the newly-established West Africa Regional Impact Center. “We are so glad to be involved in this important effort and are trusting God to use ECHO to make a positive, lasting impact on an extremely needy region!”

ECHO’s West Africa Impact Center will bring life-saving resources closer to these boys, heading to their fields for a day of working the land.
Philanthropy & Stewardship at ECHO
celebrating the generosity & faithful legacies of our family and friends worldwide

The ECHO family is pleased to announce and launch the founding year for ECHO’s Legacy Society from January 1 to December 31, 2014. The purpose of the Legacy Society is to honor the gifts and legacies of our family and friends with appropriate displays of gratitude and stewardship for their charitable plans that provide for ECHO’s mission.

Your charitable planning may have already qualified you to be a lifetime & founding member this year and we simply are not aware. We would be grateful to hear from you, or work collaboratively, and in confidence with you and your advisors toward making such a gift possible, appropriately recorded by your wishes and beneficial both for you and ECHO.

You can become a member of ECHO’s Legacy Society by one of the following ways:

- establish a gift plan that returns a regular stream of income first to you or loved one(s) such as a charitable gift annuity or charitable remainder trust,
- name ECHO as an outright, successor or contingent beneficiary of your estate, testamentary will or living trust
- include ECHO as a charitable beneficiary of your financial or individual retirement account
- remember ECHO as an alternate or successor beneficiary of your life insurance policy

To learn more about ECHO’s Legacy Society and charitable plans that benefit you, your loved ones and ECHO’s mission, contact Melodie Turish, Vice President of Development via email at mturish@echonet.org or 239-567-3327.

In Memoriam: The ECHO Family asks for your prayers over the surviving families of these special friends as we pay tribute to their wonderful generosity and lives of service on behalf of ECHO:

Michael S. Kennedy & Paul J. Ludwig
Mr. Filemon (right) and his sons, in Rancho Grande, San Vicente, El Salvador, are harvesting the first crop of long bean seed provided by ECHO. They will be multiplying these seeds once more before they begin distributing to other families living in Rancho Grande, Taura and San Carlos. Production was prolific. They have kept records and promised to send data on yields when all seeds are harvested.
Hi! My name is Aimee Wegescheide, the current Semi Arid intern at ECHO. My story begins on a hobby farm in rural Missouri, filled with many animals, plants, and a loving Christian family. In undergrad, I studied at College of the Ozarks and completed a degree in Conservation and Wildlife Management, with minors in Field Biology, Agriculture, and Studio Art. After college I felt called to use my interest in agriculture on the mission field, and God allowed me to serve in Uganda with the African Children’s Mission for three months. This time was a huge blessing but also a wake-up call that I needed some training in tropical agriculture!

Before my acceptance to ECHO, I attended Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary for Master’s level classes. Then, in January of 2013 I arrived at the ECHO campus!

My time at ECHO thus far has been the best year of my life. I’ve learned an amazing amount of tropical plant identification and uses, and am experiencing an incredible Christian community of people. One of the highlights has been learning about grafting several species of tropical trees in the production nursery and even seeing one of my first grafts sold in the retail nursery. Teaching people overseas grafting techniques could impact their lives in an amazing way! Producing their own fruit trees could provide income and much needed nutrition in diets. Another highlight of my time at ECHO has been the educational seminars that interns attend weekly where we have studied a wide array of topics including beekeeping, community development, water purification, cookstoves and vermicomposting, just to name a few.

As this exciting year comes to an end, the question of, “What’s next?” is heavy on my mind. I have a strong desire to minister to people through agriculture and to use my interests and education to glorify God. I am confident that the time and education that ECHO has invested in me will be used by God for the rest of my life, no matter where He leads me next.
New AT on the farm!

Recently ECHO has made some large additions to its collection of Appropriate Technologies (AT). From Thailand we have purchased a small scale electric hammer mill which will chop vegetative matter to a fine consistency. Also attached to this is a rice mill, which will de-hull rice as well as separate the bran and germ from the grain. All three components (hulls, bran/germ, and grain) are separated but kept for different purposes. One of those purposes is to gasify the rice hulls, and this will be accomplished with our new rice hull gasifier stove, also from Thailand. This will allow cooking to be done using hulls which are commonly a wasted resource. The result of the stove is cooked food AND charred rice hulls, which make a great soil amendment. Another new arrival from Thailand is a banana stalk chopper. This machine is powered by an electric motor and will quickly slice a full banana stalk into very small chunks with relative ease. These chunks of banana stalk can be stuffed into a container with salt, molasses, and rice bran, and sealed to ferment. After a week or two of fermentation this can be fed to pigs as a quality, probiotic feed.

Our most recently constructed demonstration is our new aquaponics system. An aquaponics system raises fish in a tank, transforms their manure into usable nutrients, and grows plants in that nutrient rich water. This system can be a very efficient way to raise fish in a small area.

We look forward to working with all of these new technologies, discovering their weaknesses and strengths, so we can share that information with our network, and ultimately give more options to the farmers that need them.

Do not let the unusual appearance of Annona fruits deter you from this tropical delight! On the surface, they look like pale-green or red stoneaged artichokes, covered in bumpy protrusions. Inside, you will be delighted by the white creamy flesh, rich and sweet, with numerous brown-black seeds scattered throughout. (These seeds must be removed before processing the fruit since they contain a toxin.) The custard-like flesh is pleasantly aromatic, with a delicious blend of mild acidity and sweetness. Annona fruits are consumed fresh or processed into refreshing beverages, milk shakes, sherbets and ice creams.

The Cherimoya, native to the tropical highlands of Peru and Ecuador, is often considered to be the finest member of the Annona family. One of the most widely distributed members of the Annona family is the Sugar Apple, native to Central and South America. The Atemoya, a natural hybrid of the Sugar Apple and the Cherimoya, is able to withstand more heat than the Cherimoya, and it is slightly more cold resistant than the Sugar Apple. Bushier, larger, and also deciduous, Atemoyas are attractive trees that may attain heights of 25-30 feet.

Annonas are very attractive landscaping trees with excellent dessert fruits. If you are interested in Annona trees, call ECHO’s Nursery Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. or Saturday 9 a.m.-4 p.m. at 239.543.3246.
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