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seasons of giving  •  recipe: peanut butter chaya  •  intern spotlight: Elena Brooks
People make all the difference! This issue of ECHO News highlights the ways that “people” make the difference in the mission and impact of ECHO here in Florida and around the world. Whether it is “picking” seeds that will be planted halfway around the world, serving as a docent for Global Farm Tours, training as a 14-month intern, or leading a seed swap in Cambodia, it is the ECHO people who impact the lives of others.

Among volunteers and staff, some characteristics are essential, such as being competent and knowledgeable. Faithfulness and dependability are certainly valued. But the “difference makers” often possess additional traits – they listen well, care about others and respect their experience, and are humble about their own knowledge and expertise; an inner joy and higher purpose motivates them.

We are surrounded by staff and volunteers — here in Florida and at our Regional Impact Centers around the world – who possess so many of these characteristics and traits. What a privilege! It makes the challenging work of ECHO much more enjoyable, it multiplies our global impact, and it is our prayer that all of this brings glory to God.

Thank you for your partnership in ECHO — resourcing the people who make a sustainable difference in the lives of nearly 2 million men, women, and children in over 168 countries! With joy we celebrate you and the difference you are making around the world.

In joy and thanksgiving,
ECHO exists to follow Jesus by reducing hunger and improving lives worldwide through partnerships that equip people with agricultural resources and skills.

Cover photo: Agriculturalist Juan Garcia (center) gathers with colleagues to discuss problems they are having with soil pests. He is testing and sharing ECHO seeds through Clinica Verde in Nicaragua.

ECHO News is published quarterly by ECHO, Inc.

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Please share your comments about ECHO News. Write: 17391 Durrance Road, North Fort Myers, Florida, 33917, e-mail: info@echonet.org, or call: 239-543-3246.

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25th Anniversary Conference

The ECHO® International Agriculture Conference is celebrating its 25th anniversary! Because of your support of ECHO’s mission, this conference has been inspiring missionaries and development workers for decades.

Can You Spread the Word?
This conference will especially benefit:

• Short-term or career missionaries
• National community leaders and farmers
• Leaders of development/relief-oriented organizations
• University undergraduate, graduate students and professors
• Peace Corps and other volunteers

Speakers share practical solutions to agricultural challenges, personal experiences, and strategies for eradicating hunger and improving lives through agriculture and community development.

Held November 13-15 in Fort Myers, Florida, this conference offers an open exchange of information, connecting the people and ideas that can make a real and sustainable difference.

Find out more at conference.ECHOcommunity.org
Small Seeds, Worldwide Impact

Diving into the Details of the ECHO Florida Seed Bank

Holly Sobetski was an intern at ECHO before spending five years working in Cambodia. Her time spent in Cambodia working alongside people and investing in them was valuable. Now, as the ECHO seed bank manager, she believes she is able to impact lives in a different way. “As the seed bank manager I help support those in ECHO’s worldwide network who are on the front lines. I believe we are sharing hope with many through seeds and training about seed saving,” Sobetski said.

Although seeds may seem small, ECHO’s seed bank at the Global Farm in North Fort Myers, Florida, has a worldwide impact. Each year ECHO grows and harvests 154 lbs of seed, and adds them to the climate controlled storage unit that houses 1,600 different lots of seeds. The online catalog has over 350 different types of seed available to people working overseas with small-scale farmers. And every year ECHO sends appropriately-selected seeds to people working in more than 75 different countries around the world.

When the seed bank first began, it was a much smaller operation. Dr. Martin Price started the seed bank out of necessity more than anything. His goal was to demonstrate techniques for growing crops in difficult conditions. In his research, he found that the crops that had a good chance of thriving in this environment were not available from seed companies. He couldn’t buy the seeds he needed to demonstrate the crops or the growing techniques!

And if he couldn’t find the seeds, it seemed reasonable to assume that small-scale farmers around the world didn’t have access to them either. So, he began collecting seeds. He would bring some back from trips he took, or people from around the world would send him small amounts of seeds. The operation kept growing, and before long he had a decent stock of underutilized crops.

Today, the seed bank is meeting this important niche. It is a repository of genetic material of crops that grow well in difficult conditions.

But it’s really a three-fold ministry. The seed bank doesn’t just stock material. They house seeds, distribute seeds, and teach about seed saving.

ECHO’s seed ministry requires the involvement of interns and volunteers. Four interns are assigned to work in the seed bank for the duration of their internship. The interns are responsible for keeping track of the seed inventory, germination tests to ensure the quality of seeds, mailing out packets, and accession, which is entering seeds and their information into the database.

Volunteers work in the seed bank on Tuesday and Friday mornings. From November to April there are often as many as twelve people that work together to process seeds, which involves threshing, winnowing, sorting, and packaging.
"The volunteers are a really important part of the seed bank. It’s not just about sorting seeds for them, it’s a loyal community centered around the mission of ECHO," said Sobetski. "The work they do is detailed and time-intensive. I often encourage our volunteers in affirming that their work is an important part of the quality control in the seed bank."

The seed bank’s weekly operations rely on volunteers. A few volunteers in particular have blessed ECHO through their commitment and consistency.

Kathy and Carol have been volunteering in the seed bank for 22 years. They were girl scout troop moms, and now that their daughters are grown up, this is one way they continue to volunteer together.

Arthur has been volunteering for 18 years. He is 93 years old, and his main role is to package seeds.

“When I retired I needed something to do," Arthur said. "I just keep coming back to ECHO, because I dearly love being part of ECHO’s mission."

The seeds Arthur often helps package will be sent out all around the world. A development worker has access to 10 free trial packets of seeds every year through ECHO. In total, about 4,000 trial packets of seeds will be shipped from ECHO Florida.

In addition to storing and distributing seeds, ECHO provides training in seed saving practices.

“We teach and train students, locals, and development workers about seed saving and seed storage," said Sobetski. "That process aligns with ECHO’s focus on teaching techniques that will equip people to be self-sustaining."

Recently Sobetski had the chance to travel to Nicaragua and lead several trainings on seed saving. Through hands-on activities and demonstrations, she taught about harvesting and processing of seeds, as well as how to store seeds so that they retain their viability.

“Training about seed saving can equip small scale farmers to meet the challenges presented by poor access to quality and affordable seeds," said Sobetski. "Even though giving away ‘fish’ is a way to help, the results are longer-lasting when people have the knowledge and tools to start their own ‘fishing operations’."

Grafted avocados, originally from ECHO, were distributed to local farmers. For the last five years, over 100 trees were distributed annually.

Above left: Kathy Kreinbrink and Carol Murphy sort amaranth seeds. Right, Arthur Searby, 93, packages seeds for shipping with a household steam iron.
One of the highlights of the trip were several seed exchanges during which the participants swap seeds and share stories of their work. At the gathering farmers brought a packet of their own and took turns sharing the stories of their seeds.

“Seed swaps are energizing. They give the dignity to the participants and show that they each have something to offer the group,” Sobetski said. “I loved hearing about each individual’s history and investment in the specific crop that he or she chose to share.”

After sharing, the actual seed swapping happened! Each person gives away a portion of their seeds in return for sample packets of a variety of other crops in the swap. Some seeds that ECHO had previously sent to Nicaragua were part of the seed swap, and got passed on to even more farmers.

This component of the seed exchange demonstrates perfectly the multiplying effect that the seed bank promotes. The sharing of seeds and information creates a continuous cycle that empowers those in our network. There is a constant swapping of information within the network that benefits and equips recipients all around the world.

One of the biggest benefits of seeds is hope.

ECHO’s seed bank ministry is unique because there are few people saving and preserving these types of crops. If no one saves these seeds, a lot of genetic material could be lost. People lose potential plants, culture, crop options, food, sources of income, and —ultimately hope. ECHO is on a mission to share hope with people through seeds.

“We have this treasure of seeds and crops that could be the next thing that a farmer needs to feed his family,” Sobetski said.

Seed swaps promote the exchange of ideas and seeds between participants, provide a platform for sharing planting material of crops that could fit a need, demonstrate that each person in the group has something to contribute, and encourage networking between people in a community. Top to bottom: 1) Participants of a seed training in Matagalpa, Nicaragua exchange seeds 2) A farmer shares a garlic variety he’s been saving for over 20 years 3) Samples of seed for the swap 4) Bean seeds that improve the soil and are edible 5) A technician describing the seeds he brought. Photo credit Peter Schaller
High school environmental science teacher Ashley Pascale wrote to ECHO requesting help to educate and equip students to beautify Labelle High School’s campus.

Pascale visited ECHO where Retail Nursery Coordinator Charlie Thibodeau guided her on which trees to choose. They discussed what types of trees grew best in the area as well as what would produce in the most timely manner to be given back to the community.

Her class discussed the effects of global warming and the increase of natural storms. This increased frequency and intensity of storms results in greater destruction. The students then brainstormed ideas of how they could help.

“We were coming up with ideas and some of the kids wanted to plant trees and beautify the campus a little bit, so that’s when I reached out to ECHO,” Pascale said.

Pascale knew about ECHO from a class field trip she had taken in college through Florida Gulf Coast University and believed ECHO could help her.

Once the trees fully mature and produce fruit, Pascale hopes that the kids will be able to have fresh fruit for lunch or that the produce can be given back to the community as ECHO first gave to them.

By allowing generosity to grow locally and globally, ECHO is equipping students to help others.
These key hole gardens have been created by ECHO trainees in Kiramutse village, Rwanda, planted near the local church. Ten months ago, two donors were inspired to see if ECHO could help them make a difference in agriculture in Rwanda, and prayed that God would open doors. Since that time they sponsored 4 villagers to visit ECHO East Africa and underwrote the cost of training 30 local farmers in Kiramutse in May. Now there are multiple key hole gardens at peoples’ homes and at the local church. The donor shared, “Thanks so much for all you and the ECHO staff have done. You have been a wonderful encouragement to me, and God has truly blessed this effort richly. Thank you so much.”

In West Africa, Sidiki Ouedraogo learned to make liquid fertilizer which has increased the production of his prized tangelo tree so much that he had to support the limbs.

Follow us on Instagram for pictures of ECHO’s work all around the world. #echofightshunger
Networking with New Neighbors

On July 3, ECHO East Asia welcomed nearly 40 visitors to our new Small Farm Resource Center for a seminar on Forage and Grazing Management given by Dr. Ozzie Abaye of Virginia Tech! We had an excellent morning lecture and discussion with our local smallholder farming neighbors!

Nutrition in Drylands Symposium

ECHO East Africa, Amaranth Institute and World Vision Tanzania held a joint symposium on improving nutrition in dry land areas.

Watch Knowledge and Seeds Multiply

ECHO Asia staff traveled to central Cambodia to assist with training at the Cambodia Seed Saving & Soil Health Workshop - a joint event hosted in partnership with the Royal University of Agriculture, ECHO Asia, and the Sustainable Intensification Innovation Lab (a USAID Feed the Future Initiative). The event brought 95 farmers and extension workers together for a very fruitful event. ECHO Asia staff contributed the seed saving training components of the workshop.
Each person’s acts of service may look different throughout the years, but there will always be some way to contribute.

For the last 20 years, Alden and Sharon Miller have been involved with ECHO in a wide variety of ways and continue to serve today.

The Millers did not ever plan on visiting ECHO. One of their close friends had been talking it up for awhile, but eventually called and scheduled a tour for them. Since it was all planned out before they could say no, Sharon and Alden agreed to visit.

After hearing more about the organization, the Millers fell in love with ECHO’s mission and discovered how they could get involved and volunteer. Since they were planning to move to Florida after retirement, this was a good way to engage with their new community.

Back when ECHO Florida was situated on a couple acres with only one building, the Millers enrolled in a week-long training course to become tour docents. There were extensive training measures when they first decided to volunteer, but they still followed through with every step.

Since Alden had been heavily involved with agriculture and farming his whole life, he enjoyed giving in-depth tours regarding the intricate details surrounding each plant. He was limited to a 90-minute journey with each group of guests, but he soaked up every minute of it.

"It’s just a blessing to be involved with ECHO," Alden said.

Sharon took the docent training with her husband, but quickly realized that she wanted to use her previous experience as a schoolteacher to help in the office.

During her many years of volunteering, Sharon brought about many creative advancements.

She designed and wrote curriculum for an ECHO-themed VBS program, developed and taught a docent course for kids, created an ECHO board game, compiled a farm challenge recipe book, and led children’s tours.
The Millers also continued to promote ECHO as ambassadors at various events and churches.

As time passed and the Millers could not serve ECHO physically as much as they used to, they still visited whenever possible and continued to donate financially.

They decided to set up a charitable gift annuity because they knew it was the best set-up for both of them.

This donation serves as a contract where the Millers receive a fixed stream of income for the remainder of their lives from ECHO. Since they are giving as a couple, ECHO will receive the remainder of the gift after they have both passed.

The Millers said that since they had witnessed every ECHO dollar going to its correct place over their years of volunteer involvement, they chose to donate to an organization that they knew and trusted.

In addition to this long-standing relationship, Alden emphasized the importance of ECHO’s ultimate goal.

“Helping people help themselves is a powerful tool,” Alden said.

The Millers have faith in ECHO’s distribution of their gifts and want to encourage others as they consider which giving methods to pursue.

“It was such a strong draw, such a strong program, that it outshined anything else we heard about,” Alden said.

Although they could have set up this annuity through many other organizations or universities, ECHO was their main focus.

“This spoke loud and clear,” Sharon said. “ECHO is the love of our life.”

The Millers acknowledged the incredible opportunity ECHO provides to engage in so many different ways, no matter the gift or talent you have to offer. Since all these avenues are wrapped up in one organization, it was clear to the Millers that this would be where they would want to give.

“It’s a good place to invest your time and energy as well as money,” Alden said. “It’s just a heartwarming, worthwhile project. That’s all there is to it.”

For those who are considering how to leave their own legacy, the Millers would encourage you to invest in something that will make a lasting difference.

“To learn more about how to volunteer with ECHO or about Charitable Gift Annuities, please call Amy Wiggins at 239.567.3341 or reach out by email at awiggins@echonet.org.
“I have donated $10 to ECHO for each of my friends and family this Christmas.” —Jeff K.

GIVE EXTRA-MEANINGFUL GIFTS THIS CHRISTMAS

Help your family focus on what really matters, by helping someone across the world this Christmas. Your gift could train a small-scale farmer in techniques that will help them be more productive through their agriculture for years to come! Or, provide seeds to a family who desperately wants to improve the nutrition of their home garden.

Give gifts that keep on giving for years to come!

BROWSE ONLINE TO SELECT PERSONAL, MEANINGFUL GIFTS:

echonet.org/giftcatalog
Step Into a Farmer Training...

It’s a hot day, even under the shade of the Acacia tree. Bernard “Promesse” Kansie turns back toward the class to explain the next step. He wipes sweat off his forehead before continuing. The class is standing closely together, leaning in to see the next layer of leaves that he is going to put onto the pile. They are learning the technique that will make compost in as little as 21 days. As he has done many times before, he explains the next step and then asks some of the trainees to gather the leaves for the next layer. They are eager to participate, and the lively training has an air of fun, even though they’re working hard in the heat. Mama Aisha had never been invited to learn a technique like this hands-on. She also wasn’t often included in other trainings that the men attended, but these trainers had encouraged her to come.

ECHO trainers are different.

On a completely different continent, Ratakarn “Wah” Arttawuttikun spreads out small bowls full of various fruits and vegetables for her workshop. Participants are going to help her remove the seeds, some of which they have never seen before. The wet seeds have to be rinsed and dried, and the dried seeds have to be sorted and all the stems removed. There’s a lot of small steps, but the payoff is worth it to have a healthy batch of seeds that will last a year or more.

Mathieu learned how to make liquid fertilizer and has started a small business...

ECHO trainers are different because the knowledge and skills they share are practical and useful to those they are teaching, and can be put into practice immediately. They connect personally with the groups and listen to their challenges and struggles. Then, months later, they care enough to follow up.

Mathieu Pare is one of the trainees that is incredibly thankful for ECHO’s trainers. Mathieu learned from ECHO how to make liquid fertilizer and has started a small business selling the highly-sought-after fertilizer to his friends and neighbors. The pride is evident on his face when he shows his work to visitors.

ECHO training has made a difference in Mathieu’s life, and he’s excited to share what he’s learned with others.
I’m Elena Brooks, the current semi-arid intern. I’m from Pensacola, Florida, and studied Environmental Studies with a focus in urban planning at Florida State University. While in school, I developed a love for agriculture and for world missions. As a way to explore this newfound interest, I spent my summer in Kenya working on a local ministry’s farm, getting my first taste of living overseas and agricultural mission work. This was also where I was introduced to ECHO! My time there confirmed that this was the path I wanted to pursue, and the ECHO internship seemed like the perfect next step.

During my internship, I have seen significant growth professionally, personally, and spiritually. The hands-on training has equipped me with a rich agricultural skill set that I feel like I could take anywhere in the world; the staff has selflessly taken time to equip us as development workers and missionaries; and the tight-knit community has encouraged and challenged me in my walk with the Lord. The ECHO internship has been one of the most formative experiences of my life, and I feel well prepared to be able to start my career overseas using agriculture and the Gospel to improve lives.

After my internship finishes in November, I have been invited to do a 6-month “Field Experience” at ECHO’s East Africa Impact Center in Tanzania, serving as a technical advisor. The knowledge I’ve learned these past 14 months about dryland farming, nursery management, and biogas digesters will be put to the test as I partner with our East Africa team in addressing food-security issues. After my field experience, I hope to plug into an agricultural project somewhere in Africa or Central Asia, joining Christ in the redemption of His creation and His people.

I look at my time at ECHO like a greenhouse—a safe place where plants can grow and flourish before they enter the world. It’s an environment where we have an incredible group of people committed to seeing us not only survive, but also thrive. My internship has given me the space and the time to establish roots that are strong, deep, and confident. I am almost ready to move out of my safe greenhouse and into the world, to be planted in a new place where I can use my strong roots to bear fruit that will impact lives, communities, and—ultimately—eternity.
Are You Intentional About Your Legacy?

People like the Millers inspire me (see page 9). I remember the first time I ever talked with Sharon on the telephone. Although she was about to leave for a summer vacation, she was calling to ask for ECHO information she could share with her church’s mission committee that fall.

Their intentionality, in each season of their life, is what inspires me most. When volunteering as docents didn’t fit their stage of life anymore, the Millers became champions for ECHO within their church. During their retirement years, they planned how charitable giving could stay a priority.

For the Millers, a charitable gift annuity* was a good option. They wanted to generate a fixed stream of income while also supporting a cause they care about deeply.

If you are passionate about equipping families to lift themselves from hunger and poverty, we can help you explore how to leave a legacy gift to ECHO. A ‘planned’ gift does require some planning – but it does not have to be complicated.

Simple Options
Did you know that you can name ECHO as the beneficiary of your life insurance policy? To set this up, all you need to do is fill out a simple beneficiary designation form. You can even assign multiple beneficiaries and percentages, if you prefer. For example, you can decide that 75% of your benefit goes to your family, and 25% to ECHO.

Not Just for the Wealthy
Even a small checking or savings account can be used to make a meaningful gift that will advance ECHO’s mission. Without restricting cash flow during your lifetime, you can designate the funds remaining in these assets to pass to ECHO upon your death. (This option allows for multiple beneficiaries and percentages, too.) Your financial institution can provide the form needed to name ECHO as the beneficiary of your banking accounts.

*Higher Payout Rates
For the first time in six years, the American Council on Gift Annuities (ACGA) has increased payout rates for charitable gift annuities. These higher rates, effective July 1, 2018, make it a smart time to consider establishing a charitable gift annuity.

Recipe: Peanut Butter Chaya

1 cup of peanut butter
1/2 cup of milk (or water)
3 tablespoons of oil
1 medium onion
1 clove of garlic
1 cup of chopped vegetables (to taste, carrots, potatoes, peppers)
1 cup Chaya leaves, fresh (or any other leafy green)

1. In a non-aluminum pan, boil water.
2. Add the clean, coarsely chopped Chaya leaves and continue to boil uncovered for 15 minutes. Strain leaves and discard water. Chop.
3. In a small bowl, add milk (or water) little by little to peanut butter and stir, forming a thin paste.
4. Sauté onion, garlic and vegetables until cooked.
5. Add the peanut butter and the rest of the milk (or water), mix and simmer on low heat for two to three minutes.
6. Add the cooked Chaya, mixing well and simmer for 2-3 more minutes.

Serve with rice or fresh tortillas.

Chaya, or Mayan spinach, is a plant native to Central America with incredible nutritional and culinary characteristics. For more information on cookbooks, like the one that includes this recipe, call ECHO’s Global Bookstore at 239.543.3246. 

If you’d like more information about any of these options, please call ECHO’s Director of Advancement Amy Wiggins at (239) 567-3341.
in their own words...

At a seed exchange in 2016, James and Jennifer Kahurananga met with a farmer from Mbeya, a southern region of Tanzania. The Kahurananga couple received from the Mbeya farmer seeds from a local variety of corn. They also received cuttings of Chaya and Canavalia from the ECHO Seed Bank.

A year later, the couple invited ECHO staff to their home to see the success from their experience at the seed exchange. Although they are living in the city, they have used every inch of green space in their property to grow food. The Kahurananga's have Cow pea, Canavalia, Orange flesh sweet potatoes, bananas, Cassava, celery, onions, cherry tomatoes and Chaya. The couple told us they have given around 200 cuttings of Chayav to their neighbors, family and friends. Jennifer Kahurananga says they have not purchased tomatoes at the local markets in almost a year since planting cherry tomatoes, adding that they have plenty of greens and bananas to eat as well.

James Kahurananga shared, “I have benefited so greatly from the seed exchange, exchanging seeds is so helpful. Even if a type of seed is not available at the store, we have so many types of seeds that are native that we can be sharing with one another. These native seeds are better, more resilient, they improve the environment, and best of all, they taste better!”