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Country in W. Africa the focus

■ The Walk for Water fundraiser is set for Saturday at 9 a.m.

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GREAT BARRINGTON - According to Anne K.W. Moffett, who also goes by the African name, Ina, it's all about water in the tiny African nation of Burkina Faso. Moffett travelled to Burkina Faso, a small, landlocked country in Western Africa, last February. In discussions with women there, she learned that the number one priority in Burkina Faso is fresh water. Not shoes. Not cars. Not working cell phones.

"The most basic of needs," she said.

Women in Burkina Faso walk an average of six miles a day to a well with one large 40-pound water bucket that they fill for use all day. It is the centerpiece of their lives.

"It takes up so much of their day," said Moffett. "Something we take for granted is very, very important to these women."

Thus, raising money to drill another well to create another local water source for villagers in one portion of the country is the focus of this Saturday's Walk For Water.

The event begins at 9 a.m. at Searles Middle School and runs until noon. The six-mile walk goes to Lake Mansfield and back. During a portion of the walk, participants will be given a 40-pound bucket to carry to simulate the burden the women of Burkina Faso have every day.

Moffett and her partner, Howard R. Patlis, also known by his African name, Esu, have been working to raise money to help the people of Burkina Faso for several years. They formed the BARKA Foundation, a 501 (C)3 charitable organization dedicated to raising the standards of living in Burkina Faso, one of the poorest countries in the world with a per capita income of about \$1,200 in American dollars, according to the Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Africa.

Barka is an African term meaning "Thank you, please."

They are sometimes asked why they don't help people in their own town of Housatonic. Their answer is that they believe they have been called to do this work, just as many felt called to do work in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, or in New York after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

At any rate, volunteers are encouraged to participate in the Walk For Water. Patlis explained that 100 percent of the donations will be used to fund the well-drilling. Registration for the walk begins at 9 with the actual walk starting at 9:30.

The hope, said Patlis, is to be able to have enough money to begin the work by September.