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Run a Mile in Their Shoes: Girls Gotta Run Foundation, a Stride for
Change

In Ethiopia, it is reported that Ethiopian girls' enrollment in school is among the lowest in the world, and woman and girls are more likely to die in childbirth, due to an early marriage as soon as sixth grade.

Ethiopia also has the highest rate of vaginal fistulas, a tearing of the vagina during childbirth that requires painful reconstructive surgery. This leaves most woman and girls in Ethiopia to quit school and care for their sick or widowed relatives. Think about this for a Second. Could you imagine being in their shoes? Could you walk a mile in their footsteps carrying the weight of providing care for everyone else at such a young age while giving up your own hopes and dreams? I do not think so, but there is hope for the girls in Ethiopia.

Seven out of the 10 top-earning athletes in Ethiopia are woman. Therefore, many girls and their parents see professional running as a viable option to overcome the obstacles in their way and avoid being sold as brides for dowry payment. However, getting running shoes is extremely difficult. But in 2006 a group of artists and committed others came together to form a foundation to raise money to buy shoes for the girls. The Girls Gotta Run Foundation was born.

Dr. Patricia E. Ortman, a Retired Women's Studies Professor and an artist, established GGRF along with four other people. They devote endless hours of time and effort into getting artists to donate work and put on art shows for people to buy the work. Contributing artists must donate about 50 percent of the sale of their artwork, but many donate 100 percent to the cause.

"After reading an article Emily Wax wrote about the girls in Ethiopia, I realized I wanted to do something to help the cause. I started to get a list serve together to see if any local artists would be willing to donate to the cause. Being an artist myself, this was personally rewarding. The idea of starting something to help the girls was not impossible and it eventually came together," said Ortman.

A lot of hard work and time was dedicated into establishing the GGRF, but it all paid off. Art exhibits have been put together and the paintings have been put on display throughout the country to raise money for GGRF. Luckily for us here at Stockton, Dr. Ortman will be coming to the TRLC on October 18, 2007 to talk about the foundation. Also, Laurie Greene, director of the Yoga Nine Studio in Smithville and professor at Stockton will be having an art exhibit at her studio following Ortman's presentation at the TRLC at 7:00.

"The idea of bringing Pat Ortman to campus began last spring during the final presentations by students in the Seminar in Feminist Theory. One student did a presentation about the Girls Gotta Run Foundation and the seminar's professor, Deb Gussman, mentioned that she knew Pat. Several people there decided it would be a great idea to have the Women's Studies Program invite her to campus," said Dr. Mutari, Coordinator of Women's Studies.

The efforts of Dr. Ortman, Dr. Gussman, Dr. Mutari, and Laurie Greene have successfully been able to provide the staff, students, and community at Stockton with an amazing presentation to show people how they can change the world one step at a time. At the presentation, Dr. Ortman will be describing how she decided to create the Foundation and tell us about the Foundation's work. Also, a DVD preview featuring GGR will be shown to get input and criticism for the DVD in the making.

"Our goal was to bring more attention to the work of the foundation and to inspire students and members of the Stockton community to discover their own ways to become active and engaged citizens of the world," said Dr. Gussman.