

# Santa Cruz Sentinel

## Aromas couple honored for efforts in Darfur

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With more than a quarter million Darfur refugees in Chad, James Campbell of Aromas said he traveled to Chad to find a way to create sustainable development in a conflict area -- a daunting challenge.

The genocide in Darfur has displaced many families, forcing them to abandon their villages in Sudan for refugee camps in Chad. In efforts to find a way to aid the Darfur survivors, James Campbell and his wife, Tomo, stayed for three-months in the refugee camps planting trees and improving water supplies. But it was the burst of color they found in the handicrafts made in the muddy camps that sparked an idea they hope will eventually help the refugees.

The husband and wife team is planning to sell woven baskets and plates created by Darfur refugees and displaced Chadians in Goz Beida, Chad, in the American market. Teaming up with the Santa Cruz County nonprofit Rising International and the women who make the crafts, the couple has created a pilot program entitled "End Poverty in Your Living Room," to selling the goods at home parties similar to Mary Kay Cosmetics or Tupperware.

On Tuesday, the Campbells were honored at a Rising International fundraiser as the organization's first "Rising Heroes" for their efforts to create an income-generating project for Darfur survivors. Pizza and local wine were provided for more than 50 invited guests, and baskets, gourds, and tabaks -- woven straw plates made by Darfur survivors -- were on display for a silent auction.

According to Dottie Jakobsen of Rising International, about 80 percent of the proceeds will go to the craft makers, while the remaining 20 percent will go to Rising International for logistical purposes, such as transportation of the crafts. The nonprofit promotes female ownership of craft-based businesses in impoverished areas of the world. Created five years ago, the nonprofit buys crafts directly from the artisans. To date, Rising International has worked in 45 countries.

The organization hopes to use the project as a way to give the Darfur survivors a source of income.

Previously the Chad director of the non-governmental organization International Relief and Development, Campbell recently wanted to return to the conflict area to continue his humanitarian work. From March to July, he and his wife worked on developing concrete wells, catchment basins for water and security for the refugee camps.

"I was always on my toes, very tense," Campbell said. "But I wanted to do something important. It's a crisis of giant proportions."

Hoping to inspire friends and colleagues with their story, the Campbells and Rising International aim to spread the word of their new endeavor.

"We hope that this will become a really big thing," said Campbell. "It's our ongoing goal to help support and generate income for the survivors."



Alia

Wilson/Sentinel

**Tomo and James Campbell pose with baskets and tabaks they brought back from Africa for their income-generating program for Darfur survivors.**

### If you're interested

Call Rising International at  
(831) 459- RISE or visit  
[www.risinginternational.org](http://www.risinginternational.org) to  
sign up to host a home party