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PRESS RELEASE
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ReCycle North to Donate Wedding Gowns to Help Fight AIDS in Uganda



Photo Opportunity: Reverend Samuel Mutyaba of the New Life International Christian Center in Waltham, Massachusetts will come to ReCycle North on Saturday, May 20 to pickup nearly 100 wedding gowns that are being donated to help fight the spread of AIDS in Uganda.

Last month, ReCycle North coordinated a \$98 wedding gown sale to convert a very unusual donation – 200 brand new wedding gowns – into funding to support its poverty-relief programs. Although the event was a huge success, raising about \$12,000 for the Burlington non-profit, ReCycle North still had more than 100 wedding gowns at the end of the day. ReCycle North now plans to donate the remaining gowns to a church in Uganda as part of a public education campaign that promotes marriage as a means to prevent the spread of AIDS.

AIDS is a huge problem throughout Africa including Uganda. According to AVERT (an international AIDS charity) the prevalence of AIDS in Uganda peaked at about 15% in the early 1990's and exceeded 30% among pregnant women living in Ugandan cities. Unlike neighboring African countries, however, the prevalence of AIDS in Uganda has actually declined over the past 10 years to about 4% at the end of 2003. Many credit this encouraging trend to a well-timed and successful public education campaign supported by the Ugandan government and at a grass-roots level. Specifically, *the ABCs of HIV Prevention* encourages **A**bstinence before marriage, **B**eing faithful in marriage or any sexual relationship, and always using a **C**ondom when having sex.

The New Life International Christian Center in Waltham, Massachusetts contacted ReCycle North requesting a donation after seeing the gowns posted on craigslist. The Boston-area church has a sister church in Zanna, Uganda called Omega Healing Center where the pastor is promoting marriage in an effort to encourage couples to be faithful. In 2004, the church coordinated a high-profile mass wedding for 49 Ugandan couples. Cheering crowds greeted decked-out brides and grooms as the couples filed into the church and waited their turn to exchange vows. Following the ceremony was a huge reception which included music, dancing and a 60-tier cake. The event, dubbed “The Big One” was so popular that the pastor has organized a repeat performance. “Biggie Two” will unite 79 couples on Saturday, July 15. Brides will be offered to wear the gowns donated by ReCycle North. CNN plans to cover the event.

ReCycle North obtained the original donation of nearly 100 wedding gowns last fall from Annette and Bunny Beard after their St. Albans bridal shop, Brides Way, went out of business. Then, Nicole Roberts of Fiori Bridal in Essex Junction offered to donate another 100+ gowns. “We had every hope of selling all 200 gowns at the sale,” explains Wendy McArdle, Marketing Director at ReCycle North, “But there are only so many brides in Burlington. I think we simply maxed-out this market for 2006.” McArdle researched various options for the remaining gowns, including eBay, gown rental businesses in Las Vegas, Filene’s Basement, and even donating the gowns to established charities in New York and Oregon that specialize in fundraising by selling used wedding gowns. None of these options could accommodate ReCycle North’s need to move the gowns in a timely fashion. McArdle ultimately decided to try posting the gowns on craigslist in the Boston market. “We were thrilled to find the Ugandan connection,” says McArdle. “It’s heartwarming to think that these gowns, which have already benefited our organization and hundreds of Vermonters, will now touch the lives of people halfway around the world and help their campaign to prevent the spread of AIDS.”

The Reverend Samuel Mutyaba will travel from Waltham, Massachusetts to Burlington, Vermont on Saturday May 20 to pick up the donated gowns. He plans to transport the nearly 100 gowns back to Boston where they will be packed up and shipped to Uganda. “We are so grateful for this donation,” claims the Reverend. “Our prayers have been answered.”

For more information, please contact Wendy McArdle.

Statistics relating to the prevalence of AIDS in Uganda was obtained at <http://www.avert.org/aidsuganda.htm>

For more information about “The Big One” visit <http://myuganda.co.ug/entertain/details.php?unique=66>

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