

LS&CO. Apparel Warms Hearts in Ethiopia

Last August Pat Plato, a registered nurse who spent much of her career working in the inner city Los Angeles, California, decided to go to Ethiopia because her health care skills were badly needed by those suffering from famine. When she returned, Plato called LS&CO. to thank the company for donating clothes to a non profit organization called Africare Inc.

Plato said that she decided to go to Ethiopia partly because giving money just didn't seem like enough. "As a critical care nurse, I thought I could contribute a lot to the efforts in Ethiopia." She signed up to volunteer with Africare.

So began what Plato termed "one of the most rewarding experiences" of her life. She landed in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, and from there went to Mekele where Africare had set up a 100-bed hospital for adult and child care. Plato ran a critical care ward for children aged five and under.

"The biggest problem," Plato said, was malnutrition. But that was complicated by susceptibility to many diseases. "Americans are so healthy, when we get sick it isn't a matter of life or death," she said. "For



Children in Mekele, Ethiopia wear clothing donated by LS&CO.

the children I treated, even a minor illness could be life threatening.

"Medicine was just one part of the care people needed. The clothes LS&CO. donated were truly appreciated."

"When the shipment arrived from LS&CO.," Plato recalled, "everyone's spirits lifted. For many people it was the first time they'd felt happy in a long time."

Altogether, The Jeans Company (TJC) donated 178,000 garments—mostly shirts, jeans and active-wear—to Ethiopia through Africare. The donations, coordinated by C.J. Du Bose, merchandise manager for Youthwear, Rich Deres, TJC Planning, Rich Fisher, TJC Traffic, Joe Gibbs, TJC Distribution Administration and the Community Affairs Department, included donations from five distribution centers.

"When the shipment arrived from LS&CO.," Plato recalled, "everyone's spirits lifted. For many people it was the first time they'd felt happy in a long time.

"There were all these clothes—boxes and boxes of them. And as we passed them out we witnessed some real transformations. I wish I could tell you what it was like to see the expressions on their faces.

These were children who had never been given anything. They had no toys, so even the labels fascinated them. We'd take the tags off clothes and hand them to the children and the next day they'd be wearing Olympic t-shirts, playing with the tags and beaming."

After two months in Mekele, Plato moved to another area, Massawa, where she worked with the



Pat Plato with two brothers in Hergigio, Ethiopia.

Ministry of Health to help set up a mobile clinic. Twice a week, Plato accompanied a national nurse and doctor to a small village called Hergigio, which had a population of about 1,000.

There they would treat about 100 patients a day. The village needed clothing badly, so they arranged to have some of the LS&CO. apparel sent from Mekele. "The first day after the clothes arrived," Plato recalled, "we passed out t-shirts, then the next time jackets. It got very cold there at night, and people really needed the clothing. By the time we'd given out clothes for the third time, I remember seeing the whole village wearing Levi's® clothes.

"It was very moving. The atmosphere had changed from one of despair to one of joy. As we drove back to town the nurse, doctor and I were all quiet—thinking about how much difference a company can make in people's lives.

"When I left Africa the last thing the nurse I'd been working with said to me was, 'Be sure to tell the people who gave us the clothing how much it was appreciated.'" ■