Hello, below are questions for the Alpharetta lifestyle magazine piece on the Rotary Club of North Fulton's trip to Swaziland. Please forward to other Rotarians so they can provide their own answers as well.

Why did the the Rotary club decide to go to Swaziland?

We first learned of the plight of the peoples of Swaziland through a Roswell based charity organization named Heart for Africa. Swaziland has the highest incidence of AIDS in the world at 42.6%. Many children have been left without parents. In 2009 Heart for Africa obtained 2,500 acres of land to be used for a large-scale land development project to be used to support orphans and vulnerable children across the country. The project would be supported by farming activities to take place on the land.

In 2010 the Rotary Club of North Fulton along with the Rotary Clubs of Carrollton, Carrollton Dawnbreakers in Georgia worked in partnership with the Rotary club of Mbabane Mbuluzi Swaziland to contribute a John Deere tractor to be used to farm the land.

In 2012 the Rotary Club of North Fulton won approval for a $200,000 grant from the Rotary Foundation to build a dam. The dam was completed in 2014 at a cost of $400,000.

In 2015 we competed with 69 clubs in our district for one of three $20,000 grants in honor of Kathy Myers. Our proposal was to construct a water storage tank at Project Canaan in Swaziland. In July 2015 we were awarded one of the grants and moved forward with the construction of the water storage tank.

The purpose of our visit was to bring a plaque designed for the dam and to dedicate the 132,000 gallon water storage tank.

When was it decided to go and how long did the process take to coordinate the trip?

It was decided that should we win one of the competitive grants for our water storage tank proposal we would go.

Who was selected to go? Was it a rigorous selection process to go on the trip? How many people went on trip?

All of the Rotarians from the club were invited to go, knowing that only a few would be able to do so. There was a twelve day commitment and also a financial commitment to going. Four Rotarians and the spouse of one Rotarian made the trip.

How many days was the trip?

Twelve days.

What part of Swaziland did you go to?

We visited Project Canaan which is located in Sidvokodvo Swaziland. We also visited the Rotary club of Mbabane Mbuluzi for a Rotary dinner meeting on Thursday evening.

What projects did the club members help with in Swaziland?

See above. I understand there were also some additional projects that members who have been with Rotary longer than myself can discuss with you.

What types of things did club members do with Swaziland natives for "fun" or "leisure"? Did they play cricket together, play cards in evening or other relaxing activities?

We spent a lot of time with the babies and young children. We read with the older children and took a walk from their school to the dam project for picture. We have lots of pictures to share with you. The children enjoy soccer and I taught a group how to play baseball.

What are your thoughts on Swaziland natives? What is their native language? Any native cultural traditions that stick out in your mind?

The natives are very kind and often reserved. They enjoy laughter and humor. Most of the people enjoy song and dance, the women sing. I had several occasions to record the women singing and watch the children sing and dance. Their native language is sisWati and many of them speak English.

How do you think the projects that club members did impacted the area?

The impact of our projects is quite significant. Project Canaan has three dams. When we arrived two dams had water levels too low for the pump house to pump. Our dam was still pumping water so the farmers still had water for the crops. This is the tail end of the dry season so hopefully the rains will come and fill the dams back up. (I was told it only takes two good rains to fill the dams back up.) The tractor has also greatly helped with their farming activities. Our club also contributed funds for development of housing and clothing for children and the community.

What are some of your best memories from the trip?

The fellowship. The five of us really had an opportunity to bond on this trip. Every day was an experience beyond belief. It was a great joy to see the wonderful impact that our Rotary club has had on this community and it is joyous to see people working to create such a wonderful opportunity for these children coming from extremely unfortunate circumstances to include, food, love, housing, and education. It was heartbreaking to hear stories of the orphaned children and heartwarming to see how the children have adjusted. Still heartbreaking to see the children who haven’t adjusted and most likely will not be able to due to their particular circumstances.

What is the next trip for the Rotary Club? How can people get more information either if they want to join Rotary Club or if they want more information?

We also have involvement in an autism center in Kingston Jamaica. There is talk of trip there in the spring. We also hope to get back to Swaziland again soon!

Please send links to pictures or videos.

Thanks,
Neha