

# FEATURES

The Paper

3B

## Uganda visit changes life of West Hall grad

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Erica Granger expected to see a different way of life when she went on a mission trip to Uganda. But she didn't expect the trip to change her view of her life after returning home.

Granger, a model and nursing student from Gainesville, took a two-week mission trip to Uganda with Gainesville-based Helping Hands Foreign Missions in May. She spent 11 days volunteering and serving as a missionary at the organization's Village of Eden, a 133-acre self-sustaining complex being developed to provide schools, homes, churches and a hospital for orphans and locals in need.

She said the experience was bigger than she could have imagined.

"I definitely came back a different person," the 20-year-old said. "I knew it was going to change me, but I didn't realize how much."

Granger said she wanted to help with a medical clinic at the village since she will begin nursing school in August on the Dahlonega campus of the University of North Georgia. After caring for her first patient, Granger said she feels more motivated and sure of her desire to become a nurse.

"The hospitals there are so different," she said. "If you have a cold or anything, you have to pay up front to see a doctor or go to the hospital. The majority of people are living in poverty and they can't afford it. ... So when organizations or churches and mission teams come over and set up medical clinics, people just will walk miles just to be there and be seen."

Granger, a 2010 West Hall High School graduate, said the experience was very difficult to handle medically and emotionally. She noted the clinic often lacked the equipment or supplies it needed. An abundance of flies also made cleaning wounds difficult.

"Working in the medical clinic you saw some disturbing things," Granger said. "But you're just trying to love on those kids while you're trying to help them."

Stan Bell, executive director of Helping Hands, said the village can help more people after the first phase of the medical clinic is complete. Construction on the medical center will begin after the organization's annual gala fundraiser in August. Money raised from the gala will go to the clinic.

Bell said he is still working out the details of this year's gala but information will be available on the organization's new website, [helpinghandsmissions.org](http://helpinghandsmissions.org).

Initially, the medical center was going to be built all at once, but Bell said the need for the center is urgent. He explained even a small space at first is better than nothing.

"Many children have passed away from lack of medical care from simplest things," Bell said. "Malaria, it's a very treatable disease if you catch it in time. Waterborne diseases are something you can help with and basic malnutrition is a big problem there."

When the center is complete, it will have a surgery suite, a dental clinic and patient rooms.

Granger visited a nearby hospital to check on a baby who was previously seen at the clinic. She described the hospital as a "shack" and was surprised to see how it compared to hospitals in the U.S.

"It has metal bed posts and no air conditioning, just windows and bugs," Granger said. "It was awful."

Granger noticed the thin baby lying on a hospital bed and asked about the child who "just looked like death." She learned the child had malaria and was being tested for HIV. At 2 months old, the baby weighed only 6 pounds.

"I just remember rubbing her little feet and her little head and it was so sad," Granger said. "You know when you're about to cry and your throat tightens up. They asked me to pray for the little baby, but I just couldn't because I knew I was going to start crying. We just had to say she's in God's hands and they were treating her as nice as possible."

The day after Granger returned home she learned the baby died.

Granger said while she certainly experienced moments of sadness on her trip, she brought back some very happy memories too.

While serving at the village — home to 16 orphans and two widows — she played games with orphaned children, led a women's conference, participated in a small business class and walked to nearby towns to visit families in their homes. She said it was amazing to watch what the ministry did for the lives of so many people.

After witnessing the lives of people who have far less, Granger said it difficult to come home to such abundance. While she thought she'd be happy to return to air conditioning and modern conveniences, Granger said she felt angry at first. She said everything seemed "meaningless" to her. The people she'd met walked miles barefoot to get anywhere while people at home were driving cars.

Returning to her jobs as a model and at a retail store was also unexpectedly difficult.

Granger said she loves her work and feels blessed to have it, but both jobs require her to look her best with makeup and appropriate apparel.

"I didn't wear makeup when I was there," Granger said. "At first I was like 'Oh my gosh, how am I going to go without wearing makeup.' Then I come back and I'm looking at my face with makeup and I'm just disgusted with myself. I'm wearing these clothes. Then I just really had to think. I'm blessed to have these things. It's that abundance, enjoy it. But don't take advantage of it and use what we do have and share it with others."

But the nursing student said she is trying to keep what she felt and experienced "alive and connected." She hopes her experience might inspire others to give back or at least realize the blessings in their own lives.

"If you're having a bad day and you're looking your worst, trust me it's OK," Granger said.



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A former shadow box gets a new life with chalkboard paint and drawer pulls, creating a central location for keys, mail and messages.

## Back to the future

### Repurposing vintage furnishings becomes a marketable passion for local blogger

BY DANA TOWNS  
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Have you ever thought about restyling a handmade wooden "bone box" from the Department of Human Anatomy in Rochester, N.Y. into a coffee table?

Maybe you should.

According to Forbes, Americans spend on average over \$80 billion on new furniture every year, with the last recorded annual spending in 2009 reaching \$88.8 billion. The highest grossing furniture stores include big-name stores such as IKEA and Haverty's, each offering furnishing lines with pieces that are identical across the nation.

Nancy Zukusky, who runs a booth at the Flowery Branch Antiques Market as well as her own blog and web commerce Etsy page under the name, SassyTrashAntiques, thinks that repurposing antiques is a better idea.

"Ultimately you could save big bucks while having the satisfaction of creating one-of-a-kind pieces for your home," said Zukusky.

Upcycling, or repurposing old, or unwanted items is eco-friendly, and



Dana Towns The Paper

What was once the top of an antique column now serves as a planter for this fern.

easy on the wallet said the owner of Eclectics, a consignment shop located in Flowery Branch.

Eclectics' customers are constantly repurposing items to make them fit into their personal style. One customer bought a wall art piece simply for the frame, for a fraction of what the frame alone would have cost at its retail price.

Switching out little details on furniture can make all the difference when restyling say the experts, and is an easy way to change the look of a piece in a few minutes.

Popular design-focused web pages such as Pinterest and Etsy are great resources when searching for creative concepts and when looking for stylish, repurposing ideas said Zukusky.

Pinterest, which states on its website that it "is a tool for collecting and organizing things you love," has over 25 million users, all whose

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Once an unwanted table, this piece was transformed into a game gathering place with a new paint job and some decorative wood work on its corners.

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