

cover

## Novi mom starts charity

by Holly Bowne

What do 87 orphans from Malawi, Africa and a stay-at-home mom from Novi have in common? The creation of a bridge between two cultures—a charity organization known as Touching Hearts.

Michele Dixon has lived in Novi for 25 years. She and her husband, Roger, have two sons, 14-year-old Evan and 12-year-old Alex. Dixon's story began several years ago, when her niece requested supplies for an upcoming church mission trip to a small country in Africa called Malawi. Known as the "Warm Heart of Africa," it is one of the five poorest countries in the world. Dixon flung herself wholeheartedly into the matter, purchasing cases of needed school supplies.

Her surprise over such simple needs as pencils with erasers was soon replaced with sorrow when Dixon discovered that Malawian people were dying every year from

waterborne illnesses. Without access to clean water, Malawians had to drink swamp water along with the animals.

"Here I had a Jacuzzi, and a full fish tank with only one fish in it. I was shocked!" says Bowne.

The Dixons learned that if Chinko, the Malawian village their niece was traveling to, had a pump for a well, the problem of deaths from waterborne diseases would be eliminated. They immediately donated the money for the well. The Dixon's niece returned from the mission trip with a video of the dedication ceremony for the new well.

"The Malawian Parliament was there, people sang songs, and it was all very formal," Dixon said.

Seeing how much the village was impacted by the new well, Dixon felt an overwhelming need to start a charity that would help Malawi even more. So in 2001, she founded Touching Hearts. In 2002, Reverend Max Jawati, superintendent of the Malawi United Methodist Church, came to

Novi, to speak at some local churches. When Dixon met him, Jawati thanked her for the pump, letting her know that if had saved people's lives. He went on to tell her about the high number of orphans in Malawi as a result of AIDS, and shared his dream of giving these orphans a home, food, clothing and most of all—an education.

Then Jawati made a special request. He asked if Touching Hearts would take on this project and if Dixon would be the national director for it. Dixon was stunned.

"I sat there thinking, 'How can I do this? This is such a huge commitment,' but a little voice inside said, 'Just say yes.'" So Dixon agreed.

When the Reverend Jawati left Novi, he left with \$10,000 raised by Touching Hearts. The money was used to create the New Life Center in Dedza, Malawi. Touching Hearts now provides two meals and a snack every day to 87 orphans ages 5-11. The orphans are also bathed, provided with



Michele Dixon's efforts have ensured that these Malawian children have meals every day.

medical care, clothing and an education. Dixon is hoping that eventually, Touching Hearts will be able to provide living accommodations for the children

as well. The New Life Center isn't large enough to house all of the

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Currently it costs \$2,500 per month to maintain the New Life Center. Touching Hearts generates funds with can drives, car washes, penny wars, jewelry parties and even concerts. Dixon is always looking for new ways to raise money.

"This experience has changed me immensely. It's like our hearts are reaching out to touch their hearts. There are no borders or boundaries," Dixon said.

Just the story of how a warm heart in Novi reached out to the "Warm Heart of Africa" to make a positive difference in the world.

For more information, contact Touching Hearts at: P.O. Box 761, Novi, MI 48376, or visit Web site: [touchinghearts.net](http://touchinghearts.net).