

SEW

Busy for God

by Daina Doucet

Who but God could turn one woman's longing to make a difference into an international ministry overnight?

It's 7:00 p.m. Monday night. Wendy Hagar has already rushed home from her work at the PAOC's Western Ontario District office in Burlington, grabbed a sandwich, and is busy directing volunteers who drift in at the Crossroads Christian Communications mission warehouse on Harrington Court. Like any other Monday night for the past six years, Wendy is preparing a shipment of handmade

drawstring bags to send to orphans, widows, school children or the home-

less somewhere in the world—this time to the Dominican Republic.

At the warehouse, bags and boxes bursting with items destined for missions overflow rows of metal shelving. In

a cramped "room" framed by floor-to-ceiling stacks of supplies, 14 volunteers assemble around a large rectangular table. In front of each is a box filled with brightly coloured toys, balls, soaps, hair elastics, notebooks,

pencils, toothbrushes, toothpaste, hotel-sized shampoos, washcloths and flip-flops. "Just pass the bags around and fill them up assembly line style," Wendy instructs. "We'll do 350 bags tonight."

Wendy is a wife and mother, an active member at Glad Tidings church in Burlington, and executive assistant to Donna Thorne, head of Women's Ministries. Her work among people called to ministry kindled in her a deep longing to make a difference in the world for God's kingdom. "I had been working almost ten years with incredible people like Donna, Mark Griffin, Jack Ozard, and David Shepherd. I saw their faithfulness, passion and heart for the Lord, and I, too, wanted to do God's will." This experience, coupled with an

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Wendy Hagar in the cramped "room" stacked floor-to-ceiling with supplies.

upbringing that instilled a desire to serve, launched her on a 40-day fast to seek her own destiny.

February 6, 2000, was the turning point. A missionary to the former Soviet Union was speaking at Glad Tidings. As Wendy listened, compassion and desire to help the poor whose plight he described overwhelmed her. She thought of giving an offering, but suddenly sensed God say, "That isn't enough. I am requiring more of you in missions."

"That Sunday I got out of the boat," says Wendy. "I set a goal to clothe 100 babies, knit 100 mitts and sew 100 cloth bags filled with toys, gifts, personal hygiene items and school supplies for an orphanage in Russia." She describes the day as nerve-racking. "It meant a personal commitment to get serious and give 100 per cent of my life. My stomach was in knots. I couldn't eat. I was so nervous and upset, mustering up the courage to tell my family. They knew I hated sewing! And I knew that if I said I would sew bags and pj's, I would have to do it."

But as soon as she made a verbal commitment, she was free. "Suddenly I was on a roll and couldn't wait to get to the stores to buy materials. I've been on a roller coaster ever since. There's no turning back!"

Enthusiasm consumed her. From the next morning, when she arrived at a fabric store a half hour before it opened, the ministry exploded. "Passion spread everywhere I went. People asked me why I was buying so many things, and I told them. Right away they began to volunteer. Within two weeks they were coming every night. Our house became a manufacturing plant."

The first shipment went out in four months. Instead of 100 bags, Wendy shipped 1725 to Kyrgyzstan, and *Sew on Fire Ministries* was born (www.sewonfire.com).

As the burgeoning ministry expanded, space in the Hagar household shrank. "When nearly all the rooms and the garage were full, Crossroads rescued us with free warehouse space," says Wendy. She adds, "Now we're at the point where we've completely outgrown it."

Since then *Sew on Fire* has shipped more

than 70,000 packages to 72 countries, including the West Bank, Sierra Leone, Tibet, and oddly—New York. At Christmas the Philip Aziz Centre for AIDS and cancer patients in Toronto received 30 bags valued at \$100 each, and 400 of Toronto's homeless received white toques with Calgary Olympics logos.

Volunteers and contributions make it possible. One hundred groups across Canada knit, sew and contribute. An Edmonton group alone has sent 7,000 bags. Locally schools, Brownie packs, kids' clubs, women's groups and church groups are involved. Companies such as Werthers, Colgate, Trebor Allen and Irwin Toys donate skids of their products. A local shoe company contributed \$30,000 in shoes. Friends gave sergers. Cash donations have come from individuals, companies, and fundraising events—a golf tournament and a progressive dinner. Even the Canadian Air Force volunteered. Three years ago they flew 6,000 bags to orphans in Guatemala.

"I'm in awe!" marvels Wendy. "What a 'God thing'! He equipped me and took away stress. I couldn't sew and He gave me skill." But it's also a balancing act. The demands of family, work, church and ministry can conflict. "I just take it one day at a time. I fulfill my word and I don't renege on commitments," says Wendy.

"God is faithful, and I should be too, but I couldn't have done it without my family and my helper, Evelyn Molyneaux."

Wendy has shared her story on 100 Huntley Street and in speaking engagements with 72 audiences. Her excitement is infectious.

"The joy in sending our gifts in Jesus' name is so incredible. There's

nothing more exhilarating than knowing that you are in the will of God and He is working through you for kingdom purposes. Just say, 'Yes, Lord!' when He asks."

Daina Doucet is a writer and editor based in Hamilton, Ontario. She edits the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada's website, www.christianity.ca.

