

# Palisades grad helps AIDS-made orphans

*Dan McSherry*

As time wound down in Kenya for a young Palisades graduate, so did funds for the volunteer organization, which she supported. Seeing the dismal repercussions of numerous AIDS-made orphans, unemployment and a staggering poverty line, Sara Holby, 22, of Upper Black Eddy, decided to do something: Sell tea.

Upon returning home, Sara spoke with her mother and sister trying to figure out ways to continue helping in Kenya. "That's sort of when this idea for the tea started. We were trying to figure out something that was a more sustainable way of helping people rather than just handing them drugs and food," said Holby.

Along with her mother and sister, she took the initiative to start the Ajiri Tea Company and the Ajiri Tea Foundation.

Ajiri, meaning "to employ" in Swahili, is the name of the tea that is grown on farms in western Kenya. The tea company buys the tea from a factory in the Kisii district, which is supplied by 9,000 to 10,000 farmers surrounding the district. All of the profits from the tea sales go directly into the Ajiri Tea Foundation, a nonprofit organization, which uses all of the funds to pay for school fees, books and uniforms for Kenyan orphans.

The 2004 Palisades grad studied in Kenya during her college years at Bowdoin College where she majored in history with a focus on African history and environmental studies. After gaining deep affection for the people of Kenya, she decided to go back after she graduated in May 2008. "The people in Kenya are the nicest people I've met anywhere. They are so inviting and welcoming into their culture and their country," said Holby.

She spent 10 months from September 2008 until June 2009 in Kenya volunteering for an organization doing health care work and providing aid for rural areas in Kenya. The organization began to lose funding, which left employees out of work and Kenyans without the food and medicine they had

been receiving.

The Ajiri Tea Foundation's mission is to establish education and employment in western Kenya. "They have to rely on western countries and on foreign aid to help them, but aid isn't necessarily a very sustainable way of helping them because just giving out medicine or food without creating some kind of employment or industry or education for people doesn't empower them and doesn't give them something that will last past the time that the aid is there," said Holby.

The tea creates jobs for farmers and women artisans of the area as well. Twenty-five women of the Kisii district – directly employed by the Ajiri Tea Company – handcraft the tea labels, twine and beads that go with the tea. Every box has a handmade label on it and inside are twine made of banana leaves and beads made of recycled magazines. Holby plans to start buying handmade paper from Kenya. "It's a really exciting way to get involved in the community in Kenya by using the skills that people have there," she said.

Back here in Bucks County, Holby is hitting the streets, going store to store looking for local merchants to carry the tea. "Our goal is to get stores, like Whole Foods, interested in carrying it. We've had success with a lot of local stores. People have been really supportive and enthusiastic about the product," said Holby citing her success in towns like Doylestown, New Hope, Newtown, Yardley and Coopersburg.

Carriers of the Ajiri Tea can be found on the company's web site, [ajiritea.com](http://ajiritea.com). Holby's footwork extends out of Bucks County into New Jersey and New York as well. Recently, she was in Brooklyn, N.Y., adding Blue Apron Fine Foods to the list of Ajiri Tea carriers. "People were really excited about it there," said Holby.

As Holby's charitable creations grow she hopes to set up people to oversee the Ajiri Tea Foundation, employing more Kenyans. For now, though, it's a door-to-door grind for this young humanitarian.