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LI teens raise \$280G for water filters, schools in Cambodia

April 9, 2017 By Deon J. Hampton deon.hampton@newsday.com



Eloise Kocay, left, and Emmy Specht, members of Four Girls for Families, greet elementary school children in March 2017, during a trip to Sret village, Cambodia. They are outside the new schoolhouse the girls' fundraising helped build. (Credit: Four Girls for Families)

Sisters Emmy and Rae Specht came home to Bellport from a family trip to Cambodia determined to help address the Southeast Asian country's rural poverty and lack of safe drinking water.

Seven years later, they and two of their friends have raised \$280,000 to build one school and provide clean water for thousands of rural villagers in Cambodia. Now they're laying the groundwork to build another school.

"I had never been to a place that was affected by poverty," Emmy Specht, 14, said of the 2010 family trip where she saw children sitting on empty rice pails begging for money. "We were confused and upset, but we didn't know how to help."

While Cambodia is about 8,750 miles from where the girls live, it remained on their minds.

When they got back home to Bellport, Emmy and Rae, 17, started learning as much as they could about the country and researched ways to help, they said. Their effort was then joined by one of their friends from the private Laurel Hill School in East Setauket — Madeleine Joinnides, 17, of Brookhaven hamlet. Last year, another schoolmate, Eloise Kocay, 15, of Bellport, joined the effort.

The sisters that first year sold handmade bracelets at pop-up stands to raise money, then Bellport businesses owners allowed them to set up in stores. The teens also sold items during the Bellport Day celebration, they said.

They raised \$7,000 doing that, family members said. The money was used to purchase \$12

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