

Manhattan student raises \$300,000 for war-torn Liberia

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Wednesday, June 10th 2009, 11:02 PM



Adams for News

Actress Uma Thurman (right) introduces Eugenie Iseman (left), 17, the head of StudentRescue; a group that raised \$300,000 to help citizens in Liberia.

The needs of Third World nations hit home like a hammer for 17-year-old Eugenie Iseman last summer as she told a Liberian teen about the wonders of New York and the waterways that surround it.

"Which river do you wash your clothes in?" the teen asked.

"I could barely find the words to explain we didn't wash our clothes in any rivers because we have machines to do it," the willowy Brearley School senior said.

Eugenie and some friends were in Liberia for 10 days last June visiting clinics, schools and other facilities in the rural West African town of Karnplay as part of an International Rescue Committee program.

One clinic, she said, "had no electricity and no running water. Pregnant women walked miles to give birth in a dirty room with very little medical attention."

So Eugenie came back to her home on the upper East Side determined to do something to help the people she had met more than 5,000 miles away.

With a group of friends, she organized Student Rescue: N.Y.C. Students Rebuilding Liberia.

Thursday night, she raised \$300,000 during an event at Butter Restaurant in NoHo.

The money will go to IRC to build a new and well-equipped clinic in Karnplay, a region devastated by 10 years of civil war.

Many of New York's movers and shakers turned up at Butter to show their support and praise Eugenie, her friends Maddy O'Hagan and Daniel Shimoy, and 17 other kids from local high schools they enlisted in their cause.

"Eugenie has a very special passion for human rights," said friend and mistress of ceremonies Uma Thurman. "We are so proud of her."

Singled out for their work with and for the IRC were Daily News Chairman and Publisher Mortimer B. Zuckerman, hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons, recording artist Trey Songz and George Rupp, former president of Columbia University and current head of the IRC.

Among the many benefactors of last night's fund-raiser were Thurman, Simmons, Kevin Bacon, Tom Brokaw and Abigail Disney, granddaughter of Walt Disney.

One guest, Liberian native Ayouba Swaray, who came to the Bronx thanks to an IRC refugee program, said he felt grateful that New Yorkers are working to make his homeland a better place.

"We can dream of a better world, but if there is no opportunity, then it's impossible to realize these dreams," said Swaray, a Marble Hill High School of International Studies graduate.

Thanks to the help of people like Eugenie, he will be able to attend Allegheny College in Pennsylvania this fall.

The IRC has been a leader in humanitarian relief for 75 years.