

# The Berkshire Eagle

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## Barka Foundation for the Berkshires

# Group brings culture, water to Africa

By Jenn Smith  
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GREAT BARRINGTON - The word "barka" means "thank you, please," an African expression of blessing, gratitude and reciprocity. It has become the goal of the Housatonic-based Barka Foundation for the Berkshires and beyond to demonstrate these expressions through both cultural and spiritual exchange between Burkina Faso, Africa.

Its latest effort is the Barka Burkina Consortium, a seven-year project (2008 to 2015) to help Burkina Faso achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as guided by the United Nations.

"Everyone is talking about a global village these days. This is a chance for action," said Ina Anahata.

Formerly known as Anne K.W. Moffett, she and her partner, Esu Anahata (also known as Howard Ross Patlis), co-founded the nonprofit organization in 2006 after spending time living in Fada, a village in the bush of Burkina Faso, and traveling within Ghana.

There, in a place that is considered the third-poorest country in the world, the couple said they became connected to the land they began to call home and the people they called family.

They were moved spiritually and emotionally. Ina recently cashed in a

\$3,500 life insurance policy just to make trips and donations, as part of an impetus to do more. They are planning to return to Burkina Faso as early as the end of this month.

And though their goals may sound lofty or crunchy, the reality is that they're making steady headway.

Last week, during a phone call made from Washington, D.C., the Anahatas said they had met with the Ambassador Paramanga Ernest Yonli of the Republic of Burkina Faso in regards to an international concert called A Celebration of Peace, which they are trying to organize in the capital of Ouagadougou.

"He just said 'Let's go,' and offered to help reserve a stadium and invite the president (of the country)," Ina said.

The couple said that they acknowledge need all over the world, including right here in the United States, they feel personally responsible to aid Burkina Faso. "It's not like there's a soup kitchen for these people," said Esu.

Asked to describe the heart of Barka's hopes, Ina said it includes "peace and water and the indigenous voice."

During a recent visit to The Eagle, Ina and Esu detailed the latter two goals.

"Water is everything in Burkina Faso," said Esu, a former media producer and graduate of Williams College.



Ina, left, and Esu Anahata work at the Walk for Water event their nonprofit group, Barka Foundation of the Berkshires, organized in May.

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Much of the country's surface water supply is not potable. To find valuable drinking water requires drilling or the village women to make a daily six-mile trek to an established water source.

Back in May, Barka sponsored Walk for Water and participated in the global effort called Pangea Day in collaboration with its local consortium partners: Monument Mountain Regional High School, Railroad Street Youth Project, the Colonial Theatre, Pathways to Peace, Healing Winds and GreenAgers/Center for Peace through Culture.

The walk raised \$4,000 of the \$7,000 Esu said would take to drill a well in the Burkina Faso village known as La Petite. Barka aims to raise the rest of the sum to drill and complete a well by Sept. 21, the International Day of Peace, and the day of the concert.

It is a later hope of the foundation, to raise \$80,000 to buy well drilling equipment for the village to give it autonomy.

### 'We're not doing it alone'

The foundation has also invested into the BarkaIVES, an effort to document primarily through film, the cultures where elders and sacred wisdom exist.

"And we're not doing these things alone. We're doing them really collaboratively," Ina said.

Maeve Hitzenbuhler, principal of Monument Mountain Regional High School, said a number of her students participated in the Walk for Water. Ina and Esu visited classrooms at Monument to talk about the topics of microcredit and the World Bank.

In addition to helping the villagers of Burkina Faso find clean water and preserve their wisdom, Barka also aims to create a microcredit program to promote women-owned business.

The effort to furnish start-up fund of a few



Ina and Esu Anahatu organized a Walk for Water event in the Burkina Faso village of La Petite.

hundred dollars is aligned with the U.N.'s eight Millennium Development Goals: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality rates, improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development.

Hitzenbuhler, who has international education experience, favored Barka as a resource for schools. "We're developing minds to be cognizant of their impact in their world, and we're really fortunate to work in the Berkshires, where we

have active community members from all over the world."

David Fleming, executive director of the Colonial Theatre, said working with Barka has been "exactly the kind of partnership for the arts that we were looking for."

Barka was a sponsor of the recent week-long stop of the Tibetan monk tour, "The Mystical Arts of Tibet: Sacred Music Sacred Dance for World Healing."

The two entities will collaborate again in October to highlight the U.N.-directed group in a presentation by the Song and Dance Ensemble of West Africa.

But for now, Sept. 21, the International Day of Peace, is the big focus of the Barka Consortium.

A major partner in this is the non-governmental organization (NGO) Pathways to Peace, which has ties to Monterey via Michael Johnson. He serves as a representative for Pathways at the United Nations in New York.

He is currently advocating for Barka to become an official NGO. He also helped to connect Barka with acclaimed producer Rick Garson (Billboard Music Awards, Fox's America's Party, and a number of other world shows and compilations) to produce the Sept. 21 concert in Burkina Faso. The show will be linked to another effort in South Korea.

### 'It can be duplicated'

Johnson said Barka's efforts are integral in sustaining world peace and humanitarian efforts.

"Just concert and no strong follow-up is a waste," he said, noting that there will be a consortium gathering on Sept. 22.

Johnson added, "The U.N. is looking at this as a model. If this is successful, then it can be duplicated in other countries."

"We just keep getting green lights," said Esu.

Ina couldn't help but gush about it. "We're right on track and it makes me think of how people say they can't do anything. It just goes to show that you can do anything that you put your mind to."

For more information and to see Barka Foundation work to date, go to [theBarkaFoundation.org](http://theBarkaFoundation.org). To volunteer or donate: The Barka Foundation, P.O. Box 69, Housatonic, MA 01236, (413) 446-7466 or email to [inaandesu@BarkaFoundation.org](mailto:inaandesu@BarkaFoundation.org).