

READ Nepal receives award

READ (Rural Education and Development) Nepal, a project of Incline Village based READ Global, has received the 2006 Access to Learning Award from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The award was presented on Aug. 21 during a special ceremony at the International Federation of Library Associations' General Conference in Seoul, Korea.

READ Nepal earned the honor which includes a \$1 million award — for its pioneering approach to providing no-cost computer and Internet access to Nepalis, and for its commitment to promoting information and literacy. A non-governmental organization based in Kathmandu, READ Nepal was founded by Incline Village resident Dr. Antonia Neubauer in 1991. She is currently Board Chairperson of READ Global, the international parent organization of READ Nepal.

"It is a tremendous honor to have the efforts of our hard-working team acknowledged by the Gates Foundation," said Dr. Neubauer. "To receive an award that will help sustain READ Nepal as it helps rural communities learn to be self-sustaining is the best kind of synergy."

In Nepal, among the least developed and poorest countries in the world, nine out of 10 people live in rural areas and one in three lives below the poverty line. Only 50 percent of adult Nepalis can read or write. To address the country's educational, economic, and social inequities, READ works with local communities to establish rural community libraries throughout the country that serve as centers for information and learning.

"The success and local support of our program shows the crucial need for greater access to information and technology in the developing world," said Sharad Babu Shrestha, Executive Director of READ Nepal. "Even in the poorest communities we serve, families that can only contribute a handful of rice to sell in support of the library construction are strongly committed to developing new resources that will help their families and communities prosper and grow."

READ Nepal provides seed funding to design, build, furnish, and stock libraries, train librarians, and launch an income-generating enterprise in each community to help pay for

the library over the long-term. Host communities are involved in all stages of planning and implementation and are responsible for contributing at least 20 percent of the start-up costs.

"READ is a model program for countries throughout the developing world because it provides strategies for communities to develop and maintain access to information over the long-term," said Martha Choe, director of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Global Libraries Program. "READ's approach reinforces our belief that public libraries serve a vital function in communities and that by providing access to information and learning, libraries can enable people to improve their lives and those of generations to come."

The community-run, income-generating projects are paramount to READ's success. These community businesses have included a furniture factory, a printing press, a stationery store, a grain mill, a fishpond, as well as ambulance, rickshaw, storefront rental, telephone, and x-ray services. Often the projects have raised considerably more than library operations require and have funded additional community development projects, such as child-care centers, health clinics, and literacy centers.

Now in its seventh year, the Access to Learning Award is administered by the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR). The funds will help support READ's library development projects and will specifically expand its capacity to provide information technology to communities throughout the country.

The award will also help to increase the number of computers available in libraries, support the development of a community Internet network that can reach remote areas not yet served by the existing communications infrastructure, and bring new interactive educational and medical resources to the libraries.

For more information about READ Global and READ Nepal, visit www.readglobal.org.

For more information about the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, visit www.gatesfoundation.org.