

GOOD DEEDS

international outreach

In Himalayas, a mountain of help

By **MARK I. PINSKY**

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

For longtime Winter Park resident Micheline Kramer, trekking in the Himalayan Mountains in Nepal and neighboring Bhutan for the first time in 1991 provided a welcome contrast to affluent suburban life.

"The thing that seduced me the most was the scenery; the scenery is absolutely gorgeous," says Kramer, 63, a native of Belgium. "What was equally striking was to find out how little those people had, yet how happy they were."

Not all were so happy, Kramer noticed on return visits.

In 1999, the sight of children in rags in Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, and of young Tibetan orphans and exiles in the countryside was too much for her. So with several others from around the world, she established the Himalayan Youth Foundation, a no-overhead organization that supports children in Nepal and its smaller neighbor, Bhutan.

What began as an effort to help six children has grown to 146, with the help of



COURTESY OF MICHELINE KRAMER

Micheline Kramer of Winter Park visits in Nepal. She organized a group to help kids.

about 75 supporters in Central Florida and around the country. In Kathmandu, the foundation supports more than 80 children in the Kailash Hostel.

"We take young children between 6 and 9 years old from remote villages in the

mountains," Kramer says. "None of them has ever had a chance to go to school. We bring them to Kathmandu, and at the hostel we give them lodging, food, clothing, medical care. We also enroll them in one of the best schools in Kathmandu."

At the Choki Traditional Arts School in Bhutan, more than 60 children, ages 12 to 15, learn wood-carving and painting during a four-year program.

Foundation volunteers and friends sometimes ferry aid to the region in duffel bags. A month ago, Rick Rapson of Maitland carried 100 pounds of supplies to Kathmandu — mainly school supplies, clothing and books in English.

"It was great to see these little people's faces light up, because they don't have very much, to see them happy," says Rapson, 64, a NASA engineer. "They don't get many gifts like that very often."

Individual students correspond with donors and sponsors. For information, go to www.hyf-us.org on the Web.

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