

UW-Stout: University library awarded for helping to alleviate book famine in Africa

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Menomonie, Wis. – When University of Wisconsin-Stout’s [Instructional Resources Service](#) began its partnership with [Books for Africa](#), the university donated small quantities of titles, and BFA Founder Tom Warth collected the boxes of withdrawn textbooks in his SUV.

“But now, over these many years, we are needing semitrucks to collect the books,” he said. “Our partnership with Stout has been unique in many respects. No other institution of higher learning has done so much.”

Over the last 25 years, UW-Stout has donated more than 500,000 books to BFA. In recognition of its generosity and commitment to BFA’s mission of ending the book famine in Africa, IRS was recently given the Books for Africa Kilimanjaro Society Volunteer Award.

“It is impossible to measure the impact in Africa,” Warth added. “I like to say 50 young people will benefit from a title over its life span, and if it were not for Stout’s contributions, these are titles that those folks would never see. We all know the ever-increasing cost of college-level material. On behalf of the students of Africa, I thank you, your staff and students.”

BFA collects, sorts and ships books, computers, tablets and library enhancement materials to every country in Africa from its warehouse in St. Paul. Since it started in

1988, BFA has shipped more than 52 million books to help educate students across all 55 countries in Africa. It believes education is the great equalizer in the world and books are the foundation of a strong educational system.

'A tremendous honor'

Director of the Instructional Resources Service Bob Butterfield and Kim Uetz, inventory control coordinator, have worked with BFA for 11 years. Prior to that, the partnership was coordinated by Butterfield's predecessor, Brenda Swannack.

Butterfield and Uetz accepted the society award from Her Excellency, Hajia Alima Mahama, Ambassador of the Republic of Ghana to the U.S., at the University Club in St. Paul on June 8.

The award ceremony was attended by the BFA board, donors, supporters and special guests, including Sharon Sayles Belton, vice president of Government Affairs and Community Relations at Thomson Reuters and the former mayor of Minneapolis.

Later in the day, Butterfield and Uetz were the guests of BFA Board President Mike Essien at the St. Paul Town & Country Club. The luncheon was opened by Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, followed by Belton and Ambassador Mahama.

Butterfield said the ceremony was very humbling. "It was a tremendous honor to be recognized. We have always greatly appreciated our relationship with BFA. They save us time and money by taking books that are deemed unsaleable and would otherwise end up in the trash or recycled," he said.

"It has always meant a lot that the lives of these books go on and are provided to libraries and schools that may not otherwise have books. We have had Stout students from Africa tell us that they had used books in Africa from Stout," he added.

UW-Stout has a textbook rental program for students. In recent years, IRS has increased the availability of digital texts.

Helping to carry on a mission

Last fall, the university donated more than [12,500 textbooks to BFA](#), adding to its half-million-plus count. Staff and BFA members spent half a day loading boxes for transport to the St. Paul warehouse. Butterfield estimated that over the 25-year period, there have been between 30 to 40 staff members and student workers involved in the process.

As the BFA president, UW-Stout Assistant Professor Mike Essien is “doubly proud” of the partnership, and he is looking forward to more opportunities.

He believes it would be less easy for Books for Africa to carry out its mission without the support of IRS.

“I am thankful to IRS, Bob and Kim for their continued support,” Essien said. “UW-Stout helps BFA light up the children’s eyes and takes a child in Africa to places that only books can. It is rewarding for those of us at the university to see our Midwest institution carry on its mission of education to extended locations – directly or indirectly.”

“Our relationship with BFA embodies the things Stout represents – equity, diversity and inclusion, sustainability, fiscal responsibility and furthering education,” Butterfield added. “It is an incredible feeling knowing that by partnering with BFA we can help alleviate the book famine. We have seen not only a piece of Stout going to Africa but get a piece back in the students it has affected.”