

IT ONLY TAKES A SPARK...

Shoes for Arctic Schools

Lois Ballard-Stephenson – All Saints Lutheran Church/Arlington, TX

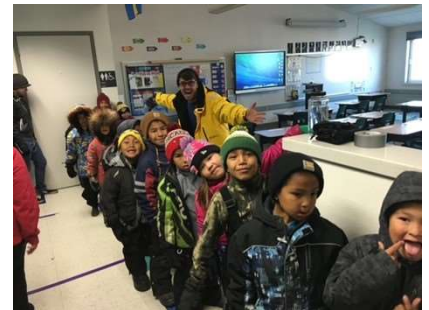
A land of ice and snow, ocean and darkness. This is the land of the native Alaskans known as the Inupiaq. The traditional territory of the Inupiaq roughly spans the Arctic from the Norton Sound on the Bering Sea northeastward to the northernmost part of the Canada-U.S. border. The Inupiat Iitqusiat, a list of values that define Inupiaq people, includes respect for elders, hard work, hunter’s success, family roles, humor, respect for nature, knowledge of family tree, respect for others, sharing, love for children, cooperation, avoiding conflict, responsibility to tribe, humility, and spirituality. These values serve as guidelines for Inupiaq life. They inform and can be derived from Inupiaq subsistence practices. Honoring their heritage, however, comes at a cost.



As a former teacher and principal in the Northwest Arctic Borough (NWAB) School District, Lois Ballard-Stephenson knows first-hand the struggles of the Inupiaq. The Borough covers 40,749 square miles, 5,176 square miles of which is land (making it slightly larger than Maine). Average temperatures range from 10-50°F throughout the year; the annual average precipitation is 12” of rain and 64” of snow. Over 88% of the population is Inupiaq, with over 41% under the age of 18. Most of the 1,850 students in the NWAB School District – 90% of whom are Inupiaq – live far below the poverty line. Families in the Borough struggle to meet their basic needs due to the area’s remoteness, expense of supplies, and desire to live a sustainable lifestyle adhering to their cultural heritage.

Ballard-Stephenson was raised on Wrangell Island, Alaska. A heavily forested island originally inhabited by the Tlingit people, it is in the southeast of the State and in the heart of the Tongass National Rain Forest. Her mother, a nurse, moved from New York City to Wrangell in the 1950s after responding to an advertisement in a nursing magazine. The local Chamber of Commerce asked her father, originally from South Dakota, to move to Wrangell to open a movie theater. Ballard-Stephenson was born in Sitka – because there was no doctor in Wrangell – and left home to attend college in Washington State.

In 2011, Ballard-Stephenson returned to her native Alaska for the opportunity to teach in rural communities. For eight years she served the families and children of the eleven villages in the NWAB. She noticed that the children arrived at school wearing soaking wet shoes and wore them throughout the day because they owned only one pair of shoes. This lit the spark that became her *Shoes for Arctic Schools* program.



Despite relocating to Texas in 2021, Ballard-Stephenson’s heart remains with the children of the NWAB. When she joined All Saints and their Mission Team in 2022 she found the outlet for the program that had burned in her heart for 10 years. They seek to raise enough funds through donations and corporate sponsorship to provide all NWABSD

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students from ages 4 through 18 with a pair of shoes they would use within the school building. She says that basketball is key for kids in Alaska, just like football is king in Texas, and want to provide basketball shoes so the children will be able to participate in indoor sports.

Shoes for Arctic Schools is partnering with Buchner Shoes and is seeking corporate partnerships to accelerate the project. They have raised sufficient funds to provide shoes to one village; then, they will

move on to the next village. However, freight costs are significant. They would also like to provide socks to go with the shoes.

You can join in by visiting All Saints Lutheran Church's Outreach & Missions web page (<https://allsaintsarlington.com/community-outreach/>). They have a very nice video about the project. You can donate online at the link provided. All monetary contributions are tax-deductible.

DISASTER RESPONSE

On June 18th Michael Dittrich, Coordinator for the NALC Disaster Response Warehouse in Rosenberg wrote:

The Rosenberg Disaster Response Warehouse recently hosted youth from Welcome Lutheran Church/Brenham and a Methodist church from Industry.



The projects the group worked on:

- Moved, washed & restacked 175 buckets & lids (The buckets were donated but needed to be cleaned. By cleaning them, the group saved the warehouse \$1200! With the money saved we will be able to purchase supplies for at least 60 buckets!)
- Organized & inventoried health kit supplies
- Reorganized the warehouse
- Signed donated bibles

They also brought cards with words of encouragement to insert in bibles. The night before, the group made baby blankets to add to the warehouse supplies.

This group of Christian, hard-working youth were a joy to work with!

If there are any other church groups that would like to work at the warehouse or have us visit to speak or help with a disaster response project, please contact me.

God Bless You!

Michael Dittrich (cell 281-381-5588)

From the Editor:

The Missions Team of the NALC's Texas-Oklahoma Mission Region publishes this newsletter to spread the word about the mission and ministries of our Region.

What's your "spark"?

How has your "spark" grown into mission?

We want to hear about it and *pass it on!* Maybe your "spark" can help light some other "fires" around the Region. Please contact newsletter editor Rev. Becky Thane (Email BeckyThane@aol.com or cell (201) 572-8073). She'll be happy to interview you about your mission work and help write your story.

We'll help get the word out

We send this bi-monthly newsletter as a way of partnering in Christ's kingdom work.

Please feel free to submit an article about your congregation's mission work.

Stories along with photos can be submitted to Rev. Becky Thane via e-mail (BeckyThane@aol.com).

The deadline for publication in the October newsletter is September 20th.