

VENDOR

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countries. It can be \$80 to buy kitchen supplies for a Cambodian orphanage, or \$2,500 to buy food for a children's center in a Brazilian shantytown. Carter has done both, and more.

Also known as travel philanthropy, his is a simple, personal approach to foreign aid. Donors give Carter and his kindred spirits small donations.

He hands them to a grassroots group or individual he has identified through his 12 years of extensive travel.

Often, he gives his own beer-selling money.

"I could participate in programs that would touch more people," Carter said while strapping on his vendor's gear at a bar a block from Wrigley Field. "I would rather have a more hands-on approach. I would rather have a more direct link to the people I'm helping."

Born in Hinsdale, Carter lived in Wheaton until he was a toddler. After his parents divorced, he lived with his mother in Lincoln Park.

Carter says he was fascinated with National Geographic magazine, an inter-

est both parents encouraged. They also fostered ideals of tolerance and helping others less fortunate. His mother was a hospital volunteer.

His father has cooked meals for the homeless for years and, as a younger man, marched in civil rights demonstrations.

About the time he started working at Wrigley Field, Carter chose to study cultural anthropology at University of Michigan.

"This was a window into the rest of the world," he said.

During college, he studied in Italy, traveled in Europe and took an excursion to Mo-

rocco, where he was struck by its exotic culture and its heartbreaking poverty.

"That experience definitely was an eye-opener," he said. "After that, I was like, 'I want to go to Asia. I want to go to Africa. I want to go to South America.'"

As graduation approached, Carter and a childhood friend weren't ready to "lock it in" on a career track, he said. Instead, they embarked on a journey through Asia and the Middle East.

Over the next three years, he spent his springs and summers moving up the vendor chain in Chicago and used

those earnings to travel in Africa, India, Mexico and Central America the rest of the year.

Fascinated by these regions' cultural richness but troubled by the poverty, he enrolled in George Washington University's international development program. As a Fulbright Scholar in 2001-02, he studied the effects of Moroccan immigration in Spain.

About that time, he heard of Backpack Nation, the dream of San Francisco cabdriver and writer Brad Newsham, himself a seasoned traveler.

Saddened and disillusioned by the terrorist at-

tacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Newsham wanted "to overwrite that chapter with a better one," he said. His idea was to transform the estimated 2.5 million Western backpackers "into an army of roving ambassadors, emissaries of peace," providing each of them with money to deliver to an individual, family, organization or village.

Newsham launched Backpack Nation in 2002, and the media fanfare helped generate \$20,000 in donations.

Carter applied for and received \$2,000, which he gave to a children's center that he'd visited in a shanty town on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro.

The director "started crying and he called me an angel," Carter said. "You talk about an epiphany."

With organizational help from Newsham, Carter continued his philanthropy, as did an acquaintance, Marc Gold, a community college teacher from San Francisco. Gold had started doing microphilanthropy on his own in 1989 and received \$2,000 from Backpack Nation.

At one point, Newsham's effort included about 15 ambassadors who distributed small-scale aid to nearly 20 countries, from Russia to Brazil, but, exhausted by the effort, he discontinued Backpack Nation in 2005.

Gold had already formed a philanthropy travel organization called 100 Friends (www.100friends.com), for which he raised more than \$250,000 from 2002 until last year.

Operating at first under the auspices of another group, it became an independent charity in January; Carter is associate director.

Travel philanthropy's impact is debatable. Practitioners concede it is tiny compared with the efforts of large aid organizations. And charity watchdog groups caution that they know next to nothing about the concept.

"It's nice, but what they can do is limited," said Daniel Borrochoff, president of the American Institute of Philanthropy in Chicago. "They can point to individual stories, but if you can do it on a bigger scale, you can substantially impact the well-being of a community. I'm not against the idea. I just don't consider it the most effective way of helping."

Gold and Carter contend that larger organizations often are slowed by bureaucracy or err in huge ways—like sending dozens of beds to an orphanage when the cultural norm is for the children to sleep together on the floor.

Small, strategic aid—as when Gold spent \$1 for medicine to clear up a severe ear infection for a Tibetan woman and \$30 on a hearing aid—can yield a powerful, personal connection, the two men said. It also dramatically changes others' perception of Americans as selfish, they added.

Gold provides a list on the 100 Friends Web site of 166 projects funded with donations, and he has posted several slide shows and video presentations about his work. Carter, who said he has given away about \$20,000—mostly in Brazil—since 2005, said he has never received a complaint from a donor.

Both men take a decidedly low-key approach to fundraising, typically making presentations in people's homes, but only when asked, and accepting any donation.

They pay their own travel and living expenses, so the donations go the people they're helping.

"It's more than faith," Gold said of donors' trust in him. "It's a highly educated guess."

This fall, Carter plans to leave the apartment he shares with his mother, again, perhaps for Africa or Brazil. But it could get complicated if the Cubs and/or White Sox make it to the playoffs.

For all the ribbing he takes from his fellow vendors, some of them say he has been an inspiration.

Doug North, 29, a history teacher at Clemente High School, visited Carter in remote Brazil in 2005. He is so impressed with Carter's work that "that's probably the next encounter I'll have with him—to meet up with him somewhere and help out."

And maybe to thank him, but not for the obvious reasons. At the end of his visit with Carter, North met a Brazilian woman whom he married last year.

"He's really challenged me to have an open mind," North said. "I'm really glad I met him, in more ways than one."

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