

# Creating education on top of the world

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News staff

Troy Harris wants to change the world, one school at a time.

The former Belmont secondary school teacher is heading back to Nepal at the end of the month to begin work on building a school in the Okhaldungha region, east of Katmandu and south of Mount Everest.

It's been quite a mountain to climb for Harris, who devoted the last eight months of his life to founding the Canadian World Education Society, or CanWes.

He spent most of that time in Toronto, because getting away from the West Shore allowed him to accomplish more with the time he had.

"I'm close to a year ahead of where I would have been if I stayed here," he said, pointing out that the demands of teaching social studies, physical education and coaching at Belmont made for many 14-hour days.

What began as a notion to build one school has morphed into something on a much larger scale that's been challenging and rewarding at the same time, Harris noted.

He's quick to admit as a teacher, he's not well-versed in the demands of running a business or an organization.

Harris enlisted the help of Craig Stenberg to serve as CanWes board's president and Jacqui ten Hove, Kevin Harrington and David Hough as board members.

Four of the five are Belmont grads, with Harrington currently teaching at that school and ten Hove at Edward Milne in Sooke.

The original idea to build a single school arose out of a chance encounter about two years ago while Harris was travelling with a mountain guide in Nepal.

Harris found out that his guide, Mahindra Dahal, was a teacher forced to eke out a living as a mountain guide because of the corruption that permeates the education system in that mountainous country squeezed between China and India.

Although Harris originally planned to do something along the lines of sending a few thousand dollars a year to help out, the more he thought about it, the stronger he felt about getting a school up and running.

Harris has since committed to building schools in countries in Africa, South and

Central America in areas where accessible, affordable education is at a premium.

"I originally promised myself when I went around the world two years ago that I was going to give something back," he said. "It's made me look at the bigger picture, doing something that could make a difference worldwide."

Harris estimates the school in Nepal will cost about \$40,000 to build and staff for a year.

Although he's raised \$15,000 so far, he admits there's still a long way to go.

He was recently buoyed by a \$2,000 boost from a Nov. 10 fundraiser organized by Belmont student Meagan Blaquiere.

"We had a great turnout of about 130 mostly students who easily could have been doing lots of other things on a Saturday night," said Harris, adding he would have been happy if the event had raised \$500. "I was totally amazed by the support and efforts of Meagan and the students in her leadership class in putting together a really neat night. I told the kids we're making a commitment to change lives on the other side of the world."

Harris hopes another fundraiser planned for Nov. 23 will get him considerably closer to his goal. The event is a dance featuring rhythm and blues band Backstage Betty,

"They're a very good band who are donating their time to help out," Harris noted appreciatively.

Regardless of how much he raises, Harris is heading back to Nepal Nov. 29.

"I have enough to get started, and hope the school can open by the end of April," said Harris, who told the *News Gazette* recently that he'll max out his credit cards if he has to to keep things going while CanWes fundraises in Canada. "I've done a little renovating, and I'm looking forward to being involved hands on."

Harris's next fundraiser is Friday, Nov. 23, at the Greek Community Hall, 4648 Elk Lake Dr., 8 p.m. to 1 a.m. Tickets are for those 19-and-up and cost \$10. They can be purchased at the door, or in advance by calling 661-3226 or e-mailing troydavinharris@hotmail.com.

Donate to the project directly at [www.givemeaning.com](http://www.givemeaning.com), or call Harris at 661-3226.

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