# Cans send kids in Congo to school

By William T. Clew

Lynn Brouillette of Brimfield delivers mail for the United States Postal Service.
And she collects cans and bottles to send youngsters to school in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (D.R.C.) in central Africa.

The only thing that one has to do with the other is that some of the people on her mail route in Sturbridge, Brimfield, Holland and Wales save their bottles and cans for her. She does not pick them up while she's delivering mail, but does so afterwards, or has helpers pick them up, she said.

She picks them up every couple of weeks, she said. She cashes them in, gets a check and sends it to Father Ephrem Kapitula, an Assumptionist stationed in Butanbo, D.R.C.
Father Kapitula uses the money to pay the cost of schooling for youngsters picked by the local parish, Ms. Brouillette said.

People who know about her project have been helping her. In addition to the contributions from people on her mail route, a couple of businesses in Brimfield - Yahoo's and B.T. Smokehouse - also save cans and bottles for her.

The confirmation class at St. Anne and St. Patrick Parish in Sturbridge responded by raising $149.65 last January. She made a presentation to pupils at Wells Middle School in Southbridge and they plan a can drive in school May 13-15 and have scheduled a can collection from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. May 16 at Yankee Spirits in Sturbridge.

Velvet Green Garden Center on Route 20 near the Sturbridge-Brimfield town line has agreed

to be a drop-off center for cans, Ms. Brouillette said.

Joseph Pagano of Pagano Media in Worcester met Ms. Brouillette at a meeting of a group of friends of the Augustinians of the Assumption who often discuss ways in which lay people can aid the work of the religious order. When he heard about Cans for Kids in the Congo he said he would sponsor its Web site. People will be able to call up the Web site, www.kidsinthecongo.com, beginning May 20, she said.

Those wishing more information before that date may call Ms. Brouillette at 413-209-6526 or e-mail dukefan1@cox.net. or Father Musande at smusande@assumption.edu.

Why would Ms. Broullette, a single mother of two teenagers, a Springfield College graduate who spent nearly 12 years in the U.S. Army, wind up collecting cans to send Congolese children to school?

Well, there's a bit of a story there. She is a member of St. Anne and St. Patrick Parish in the Fiskdale section of Sturbridge. The Assumptionists serve that parish.

When two children, Brittany, 17, and Bobby, 14, finish school in a few years, Ms. Brouillette said she wants to retire. She said she wanted to do some kind of missionary work with the Assumptionists in Australia.

There was one little problem. There are no Assumptionists in Australia. There are Assumptionists in Africa. So, she said, "goodbye Australia, hello Africa."

When she told a friend, Cathy Banks of St. Anthony de Padua Parish in Dudley, of her retirement plans, Ms. Banks told her she should meet Father Salvatore Musande, an Assumptionist from the D.R.C., who has been at Assumption College in Worcester for more than two years. A short time later she met him when he spoke at a novena at her parish.

She said she was impressed with Father Musande's command of English and with his patience answering her questions about the D.R.C. Somewhere in the course of the conversation, she said, she asked him to teach her Swahili. Swahili, or Kiswahili as it sometimes is called, is the language of the Waswahili people who live along the Indian Ocean in southern Somalia and northern Mozambique. It also is the language of economics for many East Africans. It is also a national or official language of four nations.

It allows people who have their own separate first-language communicate with one another for business, diplomacy and other reasons.

She also asked Father Musande how someone in the United States could help a Congolese family. He said, "educate a child." She said she asked how much it would take to educate a child, thinking it would be $500 or $1,000. He said $50.

"I said $50 a month? He said $50 a year," she said. "If I gave you a check right now, when could these kids start school?" she asked. Right away, he told her.

"I wrote him a check for $100. The intent at that time was for me to give him $50 a month. I figured that was the least I could do for free Swahili lessons," she said.

She pledged to help 15 youngsters get educations. But the price of gasoline went up and money was tight. She already was collecting bottles and cans on her mail route for an older couple living on Social Security, she said. Neighbors also were helping them.

So she decided to expand collections, told neighbors and friends what she wanted to do and, she said, Cans for Kids in the Congo was born. Started in October last year, it soon was paying for three youngsters to go to school. It has continued to grow, she said. Last month Cans for Kids paid for the education of 15 youngsters and next year she is aiming for 60, she said.

She said she has spoken to people at the Brimfield Flea Market which is held three times a year, with 20 fields and 5,000 dealers and which draws more than a half million people. The people she has talked to have committed to giving Cans for Kids all their bottles and cans, she

said. Organizations also have been asking her to speak about the Cans for Kids project

The D.R.C. has been devastated by war for the last 12 years, Father Musande wrote in support of Ms. Brouillette's campaign. The country's social sector has collapsed and the people are impoverished. Few families can send their children even to elementary school. School enrollment and education levels have dropped dramatically.

He wrote that sponsoring the education of a child not only will redeem that child from ignorance but "put into place the building blocks of a new Congo. In fact, who will rebuild the Congo if not the Congolese themselves? Sponsoring a child in the Congo is all about benefitting the whole country as well as helping individual children; raising awareness to wider problems in the country as well as contributing to finding solutions."

He praised Ms. Brouillette for realizing that redeeming 1,000 soda cans in the United States for $50 can pay the cost of sending a Congolese child to school.