

A Global Mission

PERMA-DRY president partners with International Needs to give back to the developing world



Even as a busy entrepreneur, author and grandmother of 10, PERMA-DRY President and CEO Colleen Cole still finds time to give back on a global scale. For the past 18 years, she has worked tirelessly to support International Needs, a missions and development agency that supports non-profit organizations in developing countries.

Cole and her late husband Bill were introduced to International Needs through their church's pastor. At the time, the Coles had recently begun franchising their PERMA-DRY waterproofing and crack injection business and pledged to donate a portion of the franchise fee from every new franchise license they granted to International Needs. In addition, the Coles participated in a number of missions, travelling to over 34 countries.

The Coles' long term plan was to retire in the Dominican Republic, where they would raise money to build a church, a clinic, several homes and an orphanage. Then Bill was diagnosed with ALS, a progressive neuromuscular disease which he succumbed to in 2009. "When he died, I thought my involvement in missions died too," Cole recalls.

But Cole's passion ultimately led her back to her development work and in 2012 she joined a team of business professionals on a trip to Africa to audit International Needs sites across the continent, including a school for deaf children and a medical centre for women in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

What she witnessed in Africa – from the subhuman living conditions in Kibera, Africa's largest slum, and staggering number of orphans to the high incidence of violence against women – impacted her deeply. "Coming home to live in a country like Canada, I have difficulty enjoying material things when I know how other people are living," says Cole, who has long been dragged down by feelings of guilt, not just over her own privilege but over the demands of being a mother and an entrepreneur, a topic she explores in her upcoming book *GUILT: The Secret War of Successful Women*.

The book, written to help businesswomen in the West, is also meant to inspire them to help less privileged women. "I no longer want to be motivated by guilt," says Cole. "We should bring change simply because it's the right thing to do." Proceeds from the sale of the book will be donated to fund development projects.

Cole hopes that by sharing her story she can inspire other Canadians to take action. She is currently working on a program through which Canadian children will raise money to fund child vaccinations in developing countries. "I've seen the destruction that happens when children are not vaccinated," she says. "We went to a school in the Democratic Republic of Congo that has 350 children and they all became deaf through illness. It made me very angry."

One group Cole has inspired with her missionary work is PERMA-DRY's franchisees. "I always talk to them about my trips and development projects," Cole says. "Most will ask how they can get involved."

In response, Cole and her son Danny, PERMA-DRY's COO, are formalizing a corporate social responsibility program. "Everyone already gives back in their local communities but this is the first time we've enlisted them to do something on an international level and as a whole group," says Cole.

"We're initiating our first trip for a cause for all of our franchisees and they'll do fundraising for International Needs projects."

Cole is also planning to take a group of women to Africa, as she is especially passionate about improving conditions for women there. "Women take a big risk just leaving their homes. They need a place to go where they can be cared for, educated and empowered."

Cole might be back in Canada but her thoughts often return to her missionary work. In particular, she is always trying to think of ways she can connect people in the developing world to the resources they need. For example, at a clinic in Uganda

she met a lab technician who was working in a tiny laboratory using a meat grinder he'd retrofitted into a centrifuge to mix blood samples. Cole remembered hearing about a Ugandan doctor, now living in her native Nova Scotia, who had developed a portable "lab in a box" and is now raising funds to acquire the equipment for the Ugandan lab technician.

For Cole, the desire to give back stems from an appreciation of the opportunities she has been afforded as a businesswoman in Canada. "I was always very blessed in my life with entrepreneurship and opportunities and I believe that to those who much is given, much is expected." For that reason, Cole believes strongly in corporate responsibility and is excited to bring the PERMA-DRY network on board to support International Needs. 🌸

