

January 31, 2010

LEXINGTON COUPLE TAKING 5 MILLION STEPS FOR CLEAN WATER

In April 2010, Justin and Jessica Meeker of Lexington, KY will set out on a nearly 6 month, 2,178 mile journey along the Appalachian Trail. This roughly 5 million step journey has nothing to do with personal accomplishments or trophies, however. For Justin and Jessica, the trip will be used as a way to raise awareness and funding to provide safe, clean water sources for the nearly 1 billion people worldwide that are without.

Last year, Justin and Jessica discovered that nearly 1 billion people do not have access to safe, uncontaminated water which often results in disease and death. According to the World Health Organization, water-borne illnesses are responsible for over 3.5 million deaths each year which is more than any single act of violence, including war. Sadly, over 80% of those deaths are children under the age of 14.

Not having access to this natural resource also often has large social and economic impacts. According to Justin, communities without access to clean water also face a lack of education and employment due to the time that must be spent fetching water each day. The couple's campaign, entitled "WalkToWater" was inspired by the fact that an average person in a developing country must walk sometimes more than 5 hours a day to simply gather a few gallons of water.

"I remember watching a PSA by an organization called charity: water that depicts people in New York walking to Central Park with yellow jerry cans fetching water out of a pond for their families. One of the final scenes showed a mother pouring a glass of disgusting, dirty water for her child. That's when the severity of the situation really hit Justin and I. I hope the 5 million steps we take will be steps that some people will never have to take again to fetch water," said Jessica referring to the reason the couple decided to take on this task.

In the time leading up to their April departure, the couple will be selling their home in Lexington, Kentucky and many of their possessions in preparation for their journey. "It's not just all about the fund raising for us; we want to have a deeper understanding of what these people face as reality each day. We hope that spending 6 months without the luxury of using the 150 gallons of water that the average American uses each day will help us develop a more realistic view of what much of the world faces," said Justin.

The couple has set a fund raising goal of \$10,000 during their hike. All donations will go directly to water projects and will be handled by charity: water, an organization that helps provide clean, sustainable water sources to developing countries. According to charity: water's website at www.charitywater.org, \$10,000 would help provide clean

water for 100 families. The couple is encouraging everyone to consider making a donation of just \$20 which they say will help provide clean water for one individual for 20 years.

To read more about the couple's journey, or to make a one-time donation or pledge to this project, visit <http://WalkToWater.com>. You will also be able to follow their blog as they post updates leading up to and during their journey.

Photos of the couple can be found at <http://WalkToWater.com/media>. Additional photos related to water projects similar to those Justin and Jessica will be raising funds for can be found at charity: water's website at <http://charitywater.org/assets>

Additional questions or comments may be directed to media@walktewater.com or you may contact Justin and Jessica directly by phone at 859-963-5732