



Baridi night helps buy supplies for refugees

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-Laura Petruzelli-
Pittsburgh Refugee Center

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Baridi Night rocked David Lawrence Hall from 7 p.m. until 2 a.m. Friday night with the beat of drums and the music from seven musical groups.

Flooding David Lawrence with information and packing it with people, Baridi Night was a nationwide event. Pitt's was designed by both Carnegie Mellon University and Pitt students working with Pittsburgh's hub of the group Facilitating Opportunities for Refugee Growth and Empowerment.

Baridi means cold in Swahili, and Friday's event was meant to both raise awareness and money to provide African refugees in camps with blankets and educational materials. About 200 people signed a pledge not to sleep with a blanket that night in solidarity with African refugees, and the event raised \$1,625 for blankets for refugees in Zambia.

Senior Molly Ferra, committee chair of events and entertainment for FORGE, said that certain members of FORGE traveled to Africa last year and took a survey of people in refugee camps asking them what they needed the most, and one answer was blankets.

"Some of the refugees had received blankets seven years ago when they first entered the refugee camps," Ferra said. "Obviously, that's not adequate.

"Based off of the surveys, FORGE came up with this idea for an event called Baridi Night," Ferra explained. "To save shipping costs, we're purchasing the blankets in Zambia. So not only are we helping refugees, but we're supporting Zambia."

Ferra said she was very excited by the amount of support FORGE received for their event and the number of people who showed up.

"It's hard, because you really want to help every cause," she said. "But when we told people about this event, everyone was so enthusiastic."

Other campus organizations like UCIS, Keep It Real and STAND, as well as the American Civil Liberties Union, hosted tables with information and free food.

There were also documentaries, like "Invisible Children," shown, and a silent art auction featuring artists from the university and local community with articles like paintings, a designed hubcap, a stained-glass lamp and a crocheted purse with a fringe of pop tabs.

CMU's branch of FORGE hosted an African coffee stand and a silk-screening T-shirt table.

Junior Craig Lehocky saw one of the T-shirts when he walked in and decided to head straight to that table.

"I came over then saw this design that says, 'Einstein was a refugee,'" Lehocky said as he pressed down a picture of Einstein's head onto a white T-shirt. "So I gave them my last \$12, and now I'm trying to make it artsy and combine two colors, but I'm not sure if it's working," he said with a laugh.

"I think the event is a pretty cool idea, so I thought it was worth it to come out tonight. I think it's a great idea to tie this global issue into a campus-wide event and make it accessible. We're directly helping people here."

Baridi Night also featured musical entertainment from start to finish. The colorful African Drum Ensemble kicked off the evening with a high-energy performance in the middle of David Lawrence that ended to loud applause as the dancers disappeared one-by-one into an open classroom.

Colorful Speech, Joy Ike, Sound Bytes, Newmen, Pete & Beau, The Meridians and Evan Murphy followed with concerts in the adjoining classrooms.

Across the hall, the event also consisted of three speakers.

Laura Petruzelli from the Pittsburgh Refugee Center showed a slideshow with pictures of how African refugees really live. She showed her audience the few plastic bags of food rations refugees get. These rations have to last them for two weeks.

"You can be in these camps for five years, you can be there for 20 years, it depends on the country you're placed in," she said. "The refugees are not allowed to work because the host country does not want them there. So the camp essentially becomes your home. And there's no end in sight," she stated.

Yinka Aganga-Williams, or "Mama Yinka," the executive director of Acculturation for Justice, Access, and Peace Outreach, preceded Petruzelli's talk and spoke of the problems facing refugees here in Pittsburgh today with adapting to the language and culture.

"When there is a cake to be shared, Africa is usually left out. But you have turned that around and put Africa at the forefront," she said, praising FORGE's event.

"We try to make people understand who is the refugee, what are their difficulties? We need to understand who they are so that we can walk hand-in-hand side-by-side together. Not to give them pity, but to understand what they face here."