

Minnesota nonprofit helps build women's hospital in Afghanistan



Megan and Dennis Doyle are co-founders of the nonprofit Matter, which they started 17 years ago.

Dennis Doyle, who started 40 years ago as a laborer, worked his way up to CEO of Twin Cities property developer-manager Welsh Cos.

Doyle, 65, sold Welsh this year to global real estate firm Colliers International of Toronto. He's not completely retired, continuing to develop and manage unrelated properties through Wildamere, the Doyle family investment office.

However, Doyle and his wife, Megan, are most keen to talk about their nonprofit Matter, which is collaborating on a \$5 million-plus women's hospital in Afghanistan.

The Bayat-Matter hospital, to be built in Kabul near two universities, boasts operating rooms and a maternity ward and provides needed medical services, particularly treatment for fistulas, a complication of childbirth that especially occurs in teen mothers.

The Bayat Foundation, started by wealthy Afghan-Americans, is partnering with the Doyles' nonprofit.

"It's a big deal," Doyle said of the hospital construction. "Bayat builds it, and we equip it."

Matter has worked since 2000 with dozens of individual and corporate donors of cash, medical, food and other supplies to equip medical centers and otherwise improve health and foster economic stability in Somalia and other troubled and emerging countries.

Dennis and Megan Doyle ran the nonprofit in its early years, when it was called Hope for the City.

They used their trucks and warehouse space to store and distribute food aid from partners to food charities. Now that Matter has grown and taken on an international scope, it employs 19, including a roving international executive who seeks out international charitable and development projects.

The Doyles said their motivation to share some of their wealth was informed by their faith, which tells them to walk with and love the poor and dispossessed. They gear their giving to projects that not only provide relief from famine or disease, but which enhance sustainable health care and small-farm development.

\$600 million global reach

All told, Matter said it has distributed nearly \$600 million in aid around the world. It works with 35 partner companies, individual financial donors and a few thousand volunteers.

In 2016, the nonprofit raised \$3.3 million in cash and distributed about \$15 million in goods and services, according to its annual report. Last year, it sent 53 shipping containers overseas loaded with supplies and equipment, from medical supplies to Cuba to medical and food aid, even soccer balls for youth groups in Africa.

The Doyles decline to discuss their personal giving other than that it has totaled millions to Matter and other causes.

“We were raised to give, like many Americans,” Dennis Doyle said.

The Kabul women’s hospital now under construction will make a big difference, even though it’s the size of a modest American health clinic. Matter consulted with Afghan and U.S. experts on the project.

The Kabul hospital was designed by Minneapolis-based DJR Architecture, which also has done work for Welsh and Wildamere. DJR CEO Dean Dovolis said he worked over the internet with Afghan builders and medical personnel.

The facility is being built by Afghan builders and workers and will be maintained and staffed by Afghanis as well.

“Not many design professionals get an opportunity to use their skills to give back to benefit lives of women in a way like this,” Dovolis said.

The Doyles said there is risk to building such a facility in what can be a harshly patriarchal society.

However, it arises in a neighborhood of education and emerging enlightenment, they said. Women are being educated and gaining more rights in moderating areas and amid Western influence in the country.