



Rick Philabaum/Staff
Dean Machinery CEO and Founder Walter Dean, far left, talks with Mali President Amadou Toumani Toure, who personally visited the company to inspect a plow to purchase for crops in that country.

Alpharetta business owner fights poverty, hunger in Africa

By Michael French
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Despite getting deathly ill while working in Kenya, Alpharetta business owner Walter Dean vowed to return to Africa and help the country that had helped him.

"They were good to me when I had malaria and typhoid," he said.

The CEO and founder of Dean Machinery, he is a native of North Carolina who attended Davidson College before teaching schoolchildren in Kenya in 1983 and 1984.

After returning to the United States to recuperate from his illnesses, Dean found work with a British machinery company in Norcross.

Before long, the owners were offering to sell Dean the company.

"I'm a liberal arts guy," he said. "I couldn't see myself running a business."

He accepted their offer and worked the business into a success, moving it to Alpharetta in 1998, where he now acts as the sole distributor of German machinery for embossing and laminating.

Dean said his heart is still with Africa.

"I lived with them, taught them, and watched them die. That's a life-changing experience," he said.

He added that he uses the company, now earning millions of dollars a year, to assist the impoverished nations of Africa.

"I have used this business as a vehicle for funding work in Kenya," he said.

Dean has traveled to Kenya annually to help construct a women's school, water wells and provide medical supplies with the help of the charity organization CARE.

His most recent effort involves a small plow that he said will make a "huge difference" in the lives of Africans.

After seeing deer hunters use a small special plow, named the Plotmaster, to lay bait, he had the manufacturer, Tecomate Wildlife, modify the plow so it could be pulled by a farm animal and be low cost.

He said he hopes the plow will be utilized by African farmers to make enough food to feed families and enough surpluses to sell in that continent's marketplaces for extra money and

pay for the plow.

"It's a tool, a micro-economic tool, for increasing food production," he said. "The greatest terrorist on the face of the Earth is poverty."

Last month Dean was visited personally by the President Amadou Toumani Toure of Mali, who wanted to see the plow.

"He loved it," Dean said. "It was a very touching personal visit. He said, 'This is exactly what my people need.'"

Dean said he is not interested in making large profits from the plow and will not be selling it domestically.

"A lot of people get rich when there's instability and poverty somewhere," he said. "I can't sit in Alpharetta and take a speedboat to Lake Lanier, knowing that people live that way."

The plow, priced at \$4,900 for African governments to purchase, is a tool Dean said he hopes will improve quality of life for Africans and reduce disease as it will provide husbands with a way to stay home and make money.

"I hope it catches on," Dean said.