

CHARITY



good
education

With a combination of glamorous fund-raisers and financial savvy, three young women take up the plight of Afghan schoolchildren.

It could be any kind of festive party, except for the ubiquitous presence of Kelly-green ribbons: threaded through a pair of Manolos, looped around the silver handle of a clutch bag, or tied elegantly around a wrist. Presiding over the crowd at Ferragamo's midtown flagship in a Marc Jacobs jacket and billowy vintage skirt is 32-year-old Elizabeth Hartnett, who explains that the ribbons are a show of support for her organization, the **Rebuilding Afghanistan Foundation**, and its first major success—the construction of a school in rural Wardak, Afghanistan. On hand for the virtual ribbon-cutting ceremony is A. G. Ravan Farhadi, the permanent representative of Afghanistan to the U.N., and his wife. “We have two kinds of educational needs,” he says. “One, we need actual school buildings. The second is the commitment of supplies, textbooks, teachers, and a successful way to teach English along with our native languages.”

R.A.F. hopes to provide both. “Very quickly after 9/11, the focus turned to Iraq,” says Hartnett, an articulate brunette who grew up in Pennsylvania, earned a law degree, and now works at Brown Brothers Harriman in New York. “Afghanistan just dropped off the public radar, and I wondered what Americans were doing to help.” No stranger to the benefit circuit, Hartnett approached two acquaintances, Alexandra Coolidge and Malalai Wassil, with the idea of creating a charitable

institution to help the next generation of Afghan citizens—the children and young adults who could become their country's lost generation—by furthering the development of educational facilities in Afghanistan.

The threesome, all of whom work full-time jobs, began devoting nights and weekends to their nonprofit, which took on a very special meaning for Wassil, an Afghan-American who came to the United States in 1985 at the age of eight. “My father never let us forget how blessed we were to be educated in this country,” she says. “It was our responsibility to give back to those who hadn't been as fortunate.” From a Soho House soiree to dinner and dancing at the Bryant Part Hotel, R.A.F.'s gatherings—and their cause—have developed a strong following. Previous events include a trunk show by Afghan label Tarsian & Blinkley, and a photo exhibit at the Maya Stendhal Gallery featuring Harriet Logan's “Unveiled: Voices of Women in Afghanistan.”

In a little over a year, the women have managed to raise more than \$35,000, attract more than 300 new, mostly young donors, and catch the attention of both CNN and the social pages. “The support continually amazes me,” Coolidge says. “Usually people just attend a benefit and go home. In this case, they call us the next day and ask, ‘How can I help?’” (For more information, contact www.rebuilding-afghanistan.org.)

—CAROLINE PALMER