

Ex-Seahawks promote Africa refugee effort

By Les Blumenthal

WASHINGTON — It was like a Seahawks reunion, with former Seattle coach Mike Holmgren and former Seattle quarterback now Washington Redskins coach Jim Zorn together at a reception in the owner's suite at FedEx Field.

But the talk wasn't of West Coast offenses, nickel defenses or anything else football. Instead, it was about the tens of thousands of refugees from the Congo who have fled to neighboring Uganda as part of the chaos still festering as a result of the genocide in Rwanda more than a decade ago.

On Saturday, Holmgren's wife, a nurse, and his daughter, a doctor, will head to an area along the Congo-Uganda border for three weeks to treat patients for malnutrition, dehydration, dysentery, malaria, HIV/AIDS and other diseases at a clinic operated by Medical Teams International.

Even as Holmgren and Zorn, longtime supporters of Medical Teams International, held the reception Thursday night to introduce the group to the nation's capital, another non-governmental organization, or NGO, from Washington state was wrapping up a conference in a downtown Washington, D.C., hotel on eradicating extreme global poverty.

For a day, Northwest NGOs took center stage as they sought to focus attention and secure support

and help for their efforts to aid the world's most desperate.

"In humankind, billions of citizens of this world live in extreme desperation," former Secretary of State Colin Powell said in opening the Initiative for Global Development conference. "We have a solemn obligation to reach out to the rest of the world. Government cannot do it alone."

Founded five years ago by a group of Puget Sound-area business and community leaders, the Initiative for Global Development has grown into a group with 350 members, including the chief executives or top officials of Wal-Mart, Coca-Cola, REI, GE, McGraw-Hill and other major companies. Powell and former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright co-chaired the conference. National Security Adviser James Jones was one of the featured speakers.

Their goal is unchanged — tapping the private sector to help reduce extreme global poverty through improved trade, economic and aid policies. Powell and others said it's not just a matter of moral necessity, but also to enhance U.S. security by aiding areas that have become breeding grounds for terrorists.

An estimated 2.8 billion people live on less than \$2 a day. An estimated 850 million go to bed hungry every night. The World Bank has estimated an additional 53 million people will become impoverished or slip deeper into poverty if the global recession continues.

Eventually, the group will submit its action agenda to the White House.

"The time is right with a new administration," said Jennifer Potter, the group's president.

Ex-Seahawks promote Africa refugee effort *continued*

While the Initiative for Global Development has broader goals, Medical Teams International is an on-the-ground organization that has deployed 600 volunteer teams to troubled areas in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It also has shipped \$1 billion worth of antibiotics, surgical kits and other medical supplies to care for 35 million people in 100 countries.

“Some people say the problems are so large you can’t do anything about it,” said Calla Holmgren, the coach’s 35-year-old daughter, who’s a single mom and an OBGYN who teaches at the University of Utah medical school and has a private practice in Salt Lake City. “But you need to chip away. Who knows, the next great leader of the Congo could be one of these refugee camps.”

Calla Holmgren and her mother, Kathy, were in the Congo and Rwanda when the Seahawks played in the Super Bowl two seasons ago.

Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., knows firsthand what the Holmgrens face. He recently returned from a trip to Africa, where he visited six countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo.

“This is a region the United States cannot afford to neglect, both for national security and humanitarian reasons,” Smith said.

Mike Holmgren said he eventually wants to go, but “my medical expertise isn’t what it should be.”

As a Christian, Holmgren said, it’s his responsibility to help the less fortunate. He says his family tries to do it in a quiet way, but when his fame can aid a group like Medical Teams International, he’s prepared to offer it.

At Holmgren’s final game as Seahawks coach, fans donated \$60,000 to the organization, an amount that helped leverage a \$500,000 grant from the State Department.

“We have some things we are passionate about,” Holmgren said. “We have been fortunate and feel we should give back as much as we can.”

Zorn feels much the same. As a “strapping young” quarterback in 1979, Zorn said, he cut a public service announcement for what was then called Northwest Medical Teams. He didn’t give the organization much more thought until he returned to the Seahawks as a quarterbacks coach and was reintroduced to it by the Holmgrens.

“Mike made it voluntary mandatory,” Zorn said with a smile. “This is an organization that thrives from the heart. It is so important.”

Though Holmgren and Zorn have moved on, other Seahawks have become involved. Quarterback Matt Hasselbeck and his wife, Sarah Egnaczyk, are organizing a major fundraiser for the group this year.