



Giving Back

By Michelle Russell

Take Away

Suitcause

Rebecca Rothney has a packing tip for travelers visiting any of more than 35 countries around the globe: Leave a little extra room in your bags for some much-needed supplies.

The first time Rebecca Rothney and her husband, Scott, went to Africa, they packed lightly, following the safari company's instructions to limit their bags to 40 pounds each. When she realized that the airlines allowed international passengers 100 pounds of checked baggage plus a 40-pound carry-on, Rothney got to thinking. And the next time they went to Africa, in 2002, the former teacher and her husband loaded up their bags, bringing 140 pounds of supplies to a school near the lodge they were visiting in Botswana.

"We had [brought] about 50 Smokey the Bear rulers with us," Rothney said. "And it was a love-

they had chairs, they had a building that would keep them warm and dry and stuff, but not a ruler. People who never travel have no idea what it means to have nothing."

Seeking to make it just as easy for other travelers to take school supplies — as well as medical items for clinics — to destinations that they visit, Rothney and her husband founded the nonprofit Pack for a Purpose in 2009. The organization encourages travelers to pack five pounds' worth of items — equal to 400 pencils, or a stethoscope, blood-pressure cuff, and 500 Band-Aids — and connects them with lodging venues in 32 countries that will get those supplies to where they are needed locally.

"When you get to your destination, if you are staying at the place [listed] on [Pack for a Purpose's] website, when you unpack your baggage, you just take it to the front desk, and that is all you have to do," Rothney said. "You can know that those items will go directly to the project that that particular lodging is working with."

Since 2010, Pack for a Purpose travelers have brought more than 5,000 pounds of supplies to places such as South Africa, Fiji, Kenya, Indonesia, Mexico, and Ecuador. Next, Rothney has her sights set on international conferences, whose attendees have the potential to multiply donations in host destinations.

"It is so simple and makes you feel so good," she said. "You would never go to someone's house for dinner without taking flowers or candy; ... it is just the gracious thing to do. Pack for a Purpose is the extension of that. We want to thank the community that is hosting us." ■



BAGGAGE CLAIM: Thanks to Pack for a Purpose, one party of eight brought six duffel bags full of clothing and school supplies to Johannesburg last year.

ly school; I mean, it was a nice building. Botswana is a fairly well-off country compared to most countries in Africa, but really, the principal got tears in her eyes [when she saw the rulers]. There was not a ruler in the school. You know, they had desks,

'Small Space. Little Effort. Big Impact.'

Pack for a Purpose's tagline is Rebecca Rothney's mantra. Five pounds of goods tucked into a suitcase may seem like a drop in the bucket when you consider the overwhelming need for basic supplies in much of the world, "but people should not think that five pounds is not meaningful," Rothney said. "It is very meaningful — 400 pencils to a child in Africa becomes 800 pencils, because they will break them in half and share."

"And one stethoscope, which weighs a pound, [donated] to a clinic that does not have a single stethoscope — I mean, what a gargantuan gift. Would anyone ever believe they would go to a clinic in the United States and there would not be a stethoscope?"

► Michelle Russell is editor in chief of *Convene*.

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ON THE WEB: To find Pack for a Purpose lodgings around the world, click on "Select Your Destination" at www.packforapurpose.org. To learn more about MedWish, a recent Pack for a Purpose partner, which recycles gently used stethoscopes and other medical items, visit <http://medwish.org>