

# Back Mountain helps give an angel her wings

By HEATHER B. JONES  
Post Staff

**SHAVERTOWN** - A 13-year-old girl sits in a wheelchair half a world away. She has never played with a doll, never went to school and was unwanted by her biological father.

About five months ago, Mama Cula arrived at Our Lady of Fatima Rehabilitation Village of Monrovia, Liberia. There, a frail but spirited 76-year-old, legally blind Bernardine Franciscan nun with spinal arthritis took her in and gave her a new life.

These are just two of the people being helped by Sister Sponsa Beltran, the daughter of a coal miner, who was born and raised in Wilkes-Barre.

At 19 years old, she entered the Franciscans because she felt a bond with the poor coming from an extremely impoverished but very loving and religious home herself. In the 1960s she attended College Misericordia, Dallas, where she earned a bachelor's degree in nursing. But it wasn't until 1986 when Sister Sponsa found her true calling.

A 10-year-old girl named Eliza was brought to Sister Sponsa with extended legs, dropped feet, painful joints and a severe calcium deficiency. Sister Sponsa gave the child intensive daily therapy for nine months. Eliza began to be able to bend her knees and was enrolled in school. And then came the next handicapped child.

"From 1970 to 1986, I didn't even know there were handicapped in Liberia," said Sister Sponsa. She explains that in Liberia handicapped children are believed to be 'witched.' When someone has a child who cannot walk or hear, the people believe someone did not like them and put a curse on the family. So the children are abandoned and there is no government help. Sister Sponsa is the only hope the children have in Liberia.

She admits at first, she almost felt people might be right about these children. But she decided to give them something they

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Maureen Albrecht  
Dinner organizer

never had before - a chance. "I am trying to give people who are 'witched' a chance to prove themselves," she said.

"They are just like other children," said Sister Sponsa. They like to play soccer, they like to learn about the world and they have dreams for the future.

On 13.5 acres she and 100 children, 77 of whom are handicapped, have begun to construct themselves a city. They have built buildings, raised their own food and are learning about electronics. They have a piggery, make soap and tie-dye clothing. But most of all, the children learn and they pray.

"We have existed on prayer," said Sister Sponsa. "We are committed to prayer and God hears us."

She remembers when she first started, and the children were sleeping on the floor. "No one gave us money, we prayed," she said. Soon they received beds donated from an old age home and the children no longer slept on the floor.

Today, the children sleep at least two in each bed, but they do not complain. Sister Sponsa said they just do not have enough room for all the children who need help. She tells people they have to wait until there is more room, but when she looks into the eyes of a child she cannot turn them away.

"I tell the children to pray, even though there is no room at the inn. If we build, they will come." She is certain of that fact. Sister Sponsa has enlisted the support and help of her sister, Angie Cebulski, and fellow Misericordia graduate Eileen



Sister Sponsa Beltran is shown at the mission village in Liberia where she provides care for handicapped children and adults who would otherwise be abandoned by their families. Her work is supported by many people in northeastern Pennsylvania, including the parishioners of St. Therese's Church in Shavertown.



## Website gives view of Sr. Sponsa's work

To hear the angel voices of the children singing or to learn more about Sister Sponsa and her work visit [www.epix.net/~krock/olofrehab.htm](http://www.epix.net/~krock/olofrehab.htm).

Rockensies of Shavertown. These three women are on a mission to help the children. Angie and Eileen spend their time raising the funds for Sister Sponsa and the children.

The parishioners of St. Therese's Church, Shavertown, have embraced Sister Sponsa's children, Eileen said. For the past three years, the parishioners have held spaghetti dinners with all proceeds going to the children.

When Maureen Albrecht, organizer of the dinners, heard of Sister Sponsa and the children

in Liberia she said, "It touched me, and I wanted to help her." She said the church raises anywhere from \$1,500 to \$2,000 at each spaghetti dinner.

St. Therese's also contributes to St. Sponsa's work on a weekly basis. Each week a part of the collection is designated for Sister Sponsa's children.

"The fruits of our endeavor are so wonderful and it's all worthwhile," said Maureen. "The part we play in Sister Sponsa's work is so small, but Sister makes you feel like you have accomplished the world."

# Library Auction Corner

Volunteers are hard at work collecting items for the 55th annual The Back Mountain Memorial Library Auction.

The life of the library is a year-to-year proposition, and the auction is crucial to its operation. Twenty percent of the annual budget comes from the auction.

Any and all donations of cash or saleable items can help assure the continued fine service of the library to our communities. For more information, call the library at 675-1182.

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Donations are tax-deductible.

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## Donate good used items to the Auction

In addition to antique items and new goods, the Back Mountain Memorial Library Auction committee is always on the lookout for good used items that can be sold to support the library. If you have something you think may be of interest, call the library at 675-1182 and let someone know about it. Pickup is available for larger items, and you'll be given a receipt for your donation, if requested.

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