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April 10, 1990

84-YEAR-OLD UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON ALUMNUS LIVES EARTH DAY EVERY DAY

April 22 may mark the official celebration of Earth Day, but for Brother George Dury, S.M., every day is Earth Day when environmental awareness is more than a concern--it's a matter of survival.

The 84-year-old Dury, a 1930 graduate of the University of Dayton, has been preaching environmental responsibility to the residents of Karonga in the central African nation of Malawi since 1983 when he developed a tree-planting project called the Chaminade Forest and Wildlife Preserve.

Launched by the Marianist-run Chaminade Secondary School, the project is aimed at replenishing forests that have been depleted by poverty-stricken residents in need of firewood. Dury, a 5-foot-1-inch bundle of energy who returned to Dayton in March after 28 years in Africa, points to a hodgepodge of construction paper, African maps and photos of dry, barren land plastered across the wall of his Alumni Hall room on the UD campus to illustrate his point.

"Do they want this?" Dury asks as he gazes at a photo of a young man surveying the arid land. "If they continue to chop down all the trees, this is all they're going to have left."

Dury and his fellow Marianist educators, concerned about the school's 86 acres of rapidly dwindling wood supply, launched the two-pronged program in 1983 to assure the school's teachers and students an autonomous supply of firewood, while educating the local residents of the importance of replanting what they deplete.

The results? Since 1983, more than 100,000 trees have been planted in Karonga and on the Chaminade grounds--an area approximately the size of the University of Dayton campus.

Convincing neighbors that tree planting is vital to their own survival has been a tough job, though. A subtle bribe by Dury--supplying residents with energy-efficient, wood-burning stoves--has helped.

"People tell me that (the depletion of forests) is a problem every place," Dury said. "Who cares about every place? We're just trying to do something in one little place. You've got to start somewhere."

For media interviews with Brother George Dury, contact Kate Cassidy at (513) 229-3241.

The University of Dayton
For further information or assistance in scheduling interviews, contact Office of Public Relations, (513) 229-3241.