



## Rebuilding a Nation with Education

*KELLY ADAMS, Columbian staff writer*  
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**Mohammad Khan Kharoti's** life is in the United States, but part of his heart remains in Afghanistan.

His work building schools in his home village of Lashkar Gah, about 150 miles southwest of Kabul, frequently draws him back to the war-ravaged nation. His most recent journey was in August. He was a doctor in Afghanistan and is now a technician in the nuclear medicine departments of Vancouver's Southwest Washington Medical Center and Kaiser Permanente in Portland. He founded Green Village Schools three years ago. Despite oppression under the Taliban, he was able to quietly admit both male and female students.

Kharoti, 60, returned last summer with his son, Yama, and daughter, Sultana. They worked on an addition to the existing school, building several rooms. The attendance has also grown. There were six girls enrolled at the school in 2001; now there are 200. The number of boys has swelled from 10 to 400.

The number of female students is not growing as fast, Kharoti explained, because families still live in fear of the Taliban more than two years after the fundamentalist Islamic rulers were ousted. From 1996 until January 2002, they imposed strict restrictions on females, and educating girls and women was forbidden.

As a child, going to school opened up a world of opportunity for Kharoti. Two humanitarian organizations and an American doctor sponsored his education in the United States.

He now has four children who are attending college. In the United States, young people can take education for granted, he said.

"For American kids, it is their right. For us, it is something unimaginable," Kharoti said.

Working to improve conditions in Afghanistan rather than in the United States is a matter of going where his talents are most needed, he said.

"You go where you are more effective in a positive way," he said. "I understand their culture very well."

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His six weeks in Afghanistan were rewarding, except for the lack of resources, he said. Families eager to send their children to school were frustrated by the lack of transportation, and some construction had to be delayed because of money shortages.

"This was very disappointing to me," Kharoti said.

Back in America, he is now working with the Green Village Schools' board to raise money. His goal is to expand and improve the schools. He would eventually like to see an exchange program established that would bring students from Afghanistan to the United States and send American students to his home country.

Education is the key to rebuilding a country weakened by war, Kharoti said.

"We hope to change the culture of guns, of war," he said. "Education brings equality and understanding."

And well-informed citizens are necessary for his native country's recovery, Kharoti said.

"Without education, you can't rebuild a nation."

#### HOW YOU CAN HELP...

Green Village Schools is accepting contributions to support educational programs in Afghanistan.

\* To donate, visit [www. greenvillage schools.org](http://www.greenvillage schools.org).

\* Or write to: Green Village Schools, Box 80061, Portland, OR 97280.

**Cutline:** Courtesy **MOHAMMAD KHAN KHAROTI** \* **Mohammad Khan Kharoti**'s daughter, Sultana, shows students photos from the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks during a Green Village Schools class in Lashkar Gah, southwest of Kabul. TROY WAYRYNEN/The Columbian \* **Mohammad Khan Kharoti** works as a nuclear medicine technician, both at Vancouver's Southwest Washington Medical Center and Portland's Kaiser Permanente. He is also the founder of Green Village Schools, an organization that is building schools in his native Afghanistan. Courtesy **MOHAMMAD KHAN KHAROTI** \* **Mohammad Khan Kharoti** works on the school being built in Afghanistan by his organization, Green Village Schools, last August.

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