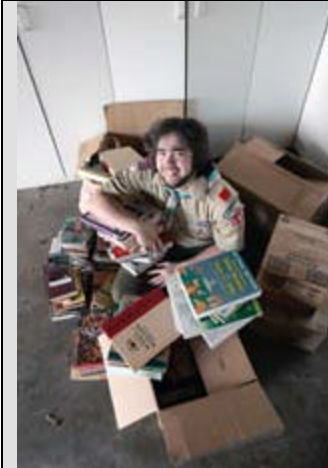


## Cover Story



Photograph by George Sakkestad  
Boy Scout Justin Reeves is collecting books to support Lesley Copeland's effort to fill a library in the small Western African village of Mandinaba. The two are both from Saratoga, but have never met.



Photograph by George Sakkestad  
Saratoga's Justin Reeves boxes up books he will send to Lesley Copeland in the small Western African village of Mandinaba. Copeland, also from Saratoga, is attempting to build a library in Mandinaba.

## **Book Collector**

### **Saratoga's Justin Reeves helps fill Mandinaba library with books**

By Shannon Burkey

Justin Reeves and Lesley Copeland have never met. Though the two both grew up in Saratoga and both attended Saratoga High School, their paths had never crossed.

But when Justin heard of Copeland's attempt to build a library in the small Western African village of Mandinaba, he chose to support his fellow Saratogan. He decided that holding a book drive in Saratoga to help Copeland fill the library would be a worthy way to contribute.

As a Boy Scout, Justin was looking to fulfill his final merit badge to become an Eagle Scout, Scouting's most prestigious rank. In order to do that, he had to manage and lead a volunteer project.

"Eagle is the highest ranking and it's a widely accepted honor, but in order to get it you have to help out your community," said the senior at Saratoga High. "As far as Eagle projects go, people usually do something like building a bench in the community. I wanted to do something different."

Copeland, a 1999 Saratoga High graduate who has been a Peace Corp volunteer in Mandinaba since January 2006, has been working to bring a functioning library to the village, where books have always been a rarity. The village had a space to house the library, but finding books to fill it was Copeland's challenge.

Her search for books eventually led her to Wings of the Dawn International Institute for Children, a nonprofit organization out of Fort Worth, Texas. Wings of the Dawn works to help improve the education systems throughout Africa by bringing books and school supplies to African schools and through adopt-a-school programs and exchange student programs.

"Education is a tool that we would rather people have than deprive them of," said Ade Otenaike, executive director of Wings of the Dawn. "Bringing a library to these people will help build a stronger community and a better society. We want to help children have access to the information they have been deprived of."

Through Wings of the Dawn, the library received its first shipment of books in mid-December, to the excitement of the villagers. More books, however, were still needed.

"I set a goal of collecting 400 pounds of books because that seemed doable," Justin said.

With that goal in mind, he enlisted his fellow Scouts and together they distributed fliers throughout Saratoga asking residents for any books they might want to donate. The Scouts then went back to the homes at the end of the week to collect the books.

Many of Saratoga's residents came through to help the tiny village halfway around the world, and to Justin's surprise he collected 507 pounds of books that were all sent to Fort Worth to await the next shipment Wings of the Dawn will be sending to Mandinaba.

"I feel great that we got as many as we did. I was a little nervous that we weren't going to make it, but we did," Justin said.

Holly Copeland, Lesley's mother, said she was impressed with the young man's work to help the project. Since Copeland began working on finding books, Holly Copeland has been an integral part of the project, working with Wings of the Dawn and raising funds at home to ship the books to Africa.

When Justin first approached Holly Copeland about helping, she admits she was somewhat concerned because she was unsure of the types of books they would get and the condition they would be in. Her concern soon diminished, though, when she saw his enthusiasm.

"He was so organized and into the project. He did everything on his own," Holly Copeland said. "We were surprised at how good the books were and by the diversity of them. Ade is able to get educational books and textbooks, but Justin was able to provide variety and make it more like a library. They will definitely be used because there is such a thirst for knowledge there."

From her home in Africa, Copeland and the villagers are touched by the response of people they have never met trying to help them fill their library.

"She is overwhelmed and somewhat surprised that people have taken an interest in what she is doing over there. She is amazed by it all," Holly Copeland said of her daughter. "She really wants the project to succeed, not only for the people in the village, but for the people here who have helped."

*To find out more on the project, visit [www.familycopeland.com](http://www.familycopeland.com).*