

## World Community Service

Rotarians build bridges  
in Ethiopia

**D**uring World War II, the 295-year-old Portuguese Bridge in Ethiopia – one of only four bridges spanning the Blue Nile – was badly damaged. For the next 65 years, attempts at permanent repairs failed. Meanwhile, residents who needed to travel between the provinces of Gojam and Gonder had to use a suspended rope to cross the gap in the bridge. This practice claimed at least five lives each year.

Inspired by a photograph of a man attempting the dangerous crossing, Ken Frantz, a former member of the Rotary Club of Gloucester Point, Va., USA, formed Bridges to Prosperity. Frantz, the owner of a construction company, knew he could use his expertise to help the 375,000 villagers who live on either side of the Portuguese Bridge.

With financial support from the Gloucester Point club and the Rotary clubs of Gloucester, Va., and Addis Ababa-West, Ethiopia, Frantz, along with seven other volunteers from

**Crossings were treacherous before Rotarians helped repair the Portuguese Bridge.**

the United States and Ethiopia, went to work. But it was far from easy. The bridge spans a 4,000-foot gorge, 26



miles from the nearest road or town. Some 25,000 pounds of steel, cement, and equipment necessary for the repair work had to be transported to the site on the backs of 350 donkeys.

Over two weeks in February 2002, the volunteers, assisted by more than 250 local residents, repaired the Portuguese Bridge. All of the work was done by hand, and a rock hammer was the largest tool used. When the bridge was completed, more than 1,000 residents and government officials attended a reopening celebration.

John Steele, president of the Gloucester club, commends Bridges to Prosperity for its efficiency. "I think it's great that someone down the street is doing something so international," Steele says. "Every dollar we give them goes into actual construction. There's no overhead."

Next up for Bridges to Prosperity is a permanent bridge-building program

slated to begin in August. **A safe steel bridge now spans the Blue Nile.** With help from District 7610 in Virginia and District 5030 in the Seattle area, the program aims to construct 50 pedestrian/donkey bridges across the Blue Nile per year. — ANTHONY G. CRAINE

## Community

## German Rotarians bail out local businesses

**W**hen heavy rains caused the Elbe and other rivers in Central Europe to burst their banks last summer, floods devastated parts of Germany, Austria, and the Czech Republic. Rotarians responded with a massive relief campaign, raising money and coordinating hands-on efforts to help the most severely affected regions in the German states of Bavaria, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and Thuringia.