



Portland Engineer Reaches Pinnacle of Career



BY DJ JOHNSON ON AUGUST 10, 2015

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It all started with a simple thought in February 2015. Engineer turned business owner, Keith Stone, was in the middle of his off-season as proprietor of Pinnacle Landscape & Design and was inspired to use his knowledge and skills to help others. A week later he was sitting in a meeting room with the Portland Chapter of Engineers Without Borders (EWB), a nonprofit organization dedicated to building a better world through engineering projects. Just a few weeks later, he was on a plane to Ethiopia.

Keith's trip was made possible by what some would call fate, an unexpected spot opening up shortly before the departure date, and the partnership of two organizations looking to make a change, [Engineers Without Borders](#) and [The Community Project](#). That desire landed Keith and a team of others in Debre Birhan, Ethiopia in March 2015.



Ethiopia is the second-poorest of 103 countries in the world. 76% of Debre Birhan population are living on just \$2 a day.

It all started from the vision of The Community Project's two founders, Colleen Kaleda and Angelique Smith, who sought out to build a school, a community center, and community garden in Ethiopia. As is the case in many developing countries, Ethiopia is in dire need of structures and spaces that can help its communities grow. In few places is that more apparent than in Debre Birhan. The city's low education rate is largely due to a lack of school buildings within a feasible walking distance. Its people also suffer from a high rate of malnutrition and child mortality.

Building and managing structures alongside the people of Debre Birhan has proved to be a step in the right direction. The mission has never been to build for the city of over 100,000 people, but rather build with them. It's not only about constructing the buildings, but constructing buildings that fit culturally and aesthetically. All parties involved want to go about the project so Ethiopians feel a sense of ownership when it's complete. This is being accomplished by forming strong relationships with the Mayor of Debre Birhan, community leaders and all the people working on site.

"We worked directly with the people and government of Debre Birhan to assure we are building a school, soccer field and so on that they would actually use," said Keith in a phone conversation. "Meanwhile, all of this is being done with donated materials."



"Pinnacle survey equipment being used in Ethiopia! I left our laser there so they could continue using it for the project," writes Keith on [Pinnacle's Facebook page](#).

Contributions from organizations like [Kids Around The World](#), who recycle playgrounds, are helping to provide sustainable, low-cost solutions. As for Keith, he went beyond donating his time. Impressed by the general knowledge and interest of the native Ethiopians, he left behind his laser leveling equipment for them to keep using. The equipment is vital in determining the grade of land and establishing a foundation for development. Keith's engineering background and [impressive portfolio of work at Pinnacle](#) make him an expert in his particular line of work, but he left Ethiopia impressed with how quickly his temporary coworkers picked up on his trade.

"I found that many Ethiopians have the skills to do many of the things I did in my time there, despite learning with a language barrier, but they don't have the education or opportunity to put them to use," said Keith from his permanent home in Cumberland.

That realization is seemingly the reason the project started in the first place. It's the reason the Engineers Without Borders Portland, Maine Chapter has weekly telephone conferences with the Chapter in Portland, Oregon, who is also working directly on the project. It's the reason Keith plans on going back to Debre Birhan to help further development.



Keith's efforts are a microcosm of the outreach taking place around the world to improve the lives of those in need. People with everyday jobs and families seeking to provide the opportunities they had as students and in their careers. The work in Ethiopia is far from complete, but it's people like Keith that will continue to push it forward.

Pinnacle Landscape & Design provides professional quality landscaping services for southern and coastal Maine. The company is owned and operated by Keith Stone, a Maine Registered Civil Engineer. Pinnacle provides a creative vision and high quality work.