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PROGRAM-ASPEN

Sustainable Health Enterprises Wins Prestigious Curry Stone Design Prize

SHE addresses the lack of access by girls and women in underdeveloped countries to hygienic and affordable menstrual pads.

By Ernest Beck

Sustainable Health Enterprises (SHE), a nonprofit founded by Elizabeth Scharpf that addresses the lack of access by girls and women in underdeveloped countries to hygienic and affordable menstrual pads, has won the prestigious Curry Stone Design Prize which honors an individual or group for developing and implementing a visionary design innovation. Scharpf, who took part in last year's Aspen Design Summit (UNICEF Menstruation Challenge Project), will receive the no-strings-attached \$100,000 grant to continue work on launching a sustainable, locally-based micro-capital industry in Rwanda to combat this issue through community-based education, business skills training and product design. Scharpf's goal is to design, produce and market an effective, absorbent, low-cost and low priced product - made out of banana fibers - as well as to create jobs and prompt a discussion around this taboo topic. Production testing is now in a pilot phase in Rwanda, and Scharpf says the grant money will go toward the cost of launching the first manufacturing facility, planned for early 2011, at a cost of around \$1 million. The Curry Stone Prize money puts the fund raising at just over half of that amount, she says. This plant, Scharpf adds, will be the first of four in Rwanda and serve as a blueprint for other countries. The prize is important because it recognizes the critical role of design in social change and innovation, Scharpf says, adding "We are proud to be recognized by the design community."