

SERVING COFFEE AND THE WORLD AT SKYSONG

A grant given to three Arizona State University students has led to the creation of the Sky Cafe, which opened Thursday at Scottsdale's SkySong high-tech incubator.

Proceeds from the cafe, on the second floor of one of SkySong's two current office buildings, will allow residents in communities as close as Guadalupe and as far away as Tanzania to give back to their communities.

According to its Web site at www.drinkthesky.com, the cafe provides organic and eco-friendly cafe and catering options to SkySong and ASU with a social focus: 25 percent of the profits from every sale helps bring health care to families in Arizona and East Africa who can't afford it.

Mohamed Abdalla, a junior studying molecular biology at ASU, is one of three students who competed in an entrepreneurial competition at the university in November for a grant that would decide what to do with the center space on the second floor of one of the SkySong buildings at the southwest corner of Scottsdale and McDowell roads.

Winning the competition allowed Abdalla, who worked alongside Damien Salamone and Ryan Brotman, two ASU graduate students, to create the Sky Cafe, a hub for the SkySong community to socialize and share ideas over food.

The students then used the Sky Cafe as an opportunity to create a nonprofit organization to benefit orphans in Africa.

Abdalla said he and the other students wanted to create an opportunity for the residents of desolate African communities to better their own situation instead of simply giving handouts about awareness. The organization, H.E.A.L. International, provides African orphans who have lost their parents to HIV/AIDS or those children who have become infected the chance to see a doctor once a month.

"The idea is to get community leaders to initiate the change," said Abdalla, who created a program called Business for Doctors.

"We go to businesses in the town and ask them what they need for their businesses to flourish," he said. "Then we make an agreement with the business owners that we will help them build their company if they agree to give a portion of their profits to a specific orphanage. So far, we have had great success."

Abdalla, who is originally from East Africa, said he hopes to eventually expand the project, which is currently serving orphanages in Arusha, Tanzania, and the surrounding area.

Abdalla chose African orphanages after he and Salamone visited Africa last summer. “We went there with the knowledge of what we could and were going to do,” Abdalla said.

“We were inspired by the community leaders we met – those who have dedicated their whole lives to tasks like building schools. The grant served as a great platform to go expand on the capacity of how to help kids.”

Currently, the students, along with eight other volunteers, are also reaching out to lower income families on a local level. Programs supporting health care and development are also in place in Guadalupe, Abdalla said.

“We want the citizens to know they can make a difference,” Abdalla said. “It is an initiative that we hope will