

Hundreds Go Barefoot to Raise Awareness of the Global Need for Shoes

✖ **April 16, 2009** – Hundreds of people are going barefoot today as part of a nationwide effort to raise awareness about the global need for shoes.

Organized by TOMS Shoes, a company founded by Christian businessman Blake Mycoskie, the One Day Without Shoes event has drawn participants from around the world. The Assemblies of God-affiliated Southeastern University in Lakeland, Fla., is serving as a pilot school for what they hope becomes a growing annual initiative.

“The idea for One Day Without Shoes was to kind of raise awareness of what life is like without shoes, to kind of think about the people in the world who are living without shoes and what they are susceptible to as a result of that,” said Allison Dominguez, a public relations representative for TOMS Shoes, which gives away a pair of shoes for every pair sold.

Reporting that 40 percent of people worldwide lack shoes, the Los Angeles-based company has donated 200,000 shoes to needy children worldwide since 2006. In rural areas where people walk through volcanic soil, such as in Ethiopia, going barefoot can lead to podoconiosis, a disfiguring illness that causes swelling and ulcers in the feet and lower legs.

“[One Day Without Shoes] really fits who we are,” said James L. Davis, vice president of development at Southeastern, which presented Mycoskie with its Servant Leader Award last month. “We believe servant leaders are world changers, so the whole premise of giving something away and serving the community and

serving the world really fit for us. It was perfect in every way."

Southeastern hoped to have 100 percent participation today, with students filing shoeless everywhere except to the school's dining facilities, where bare feet would violate health codes. The Southeastern students are also participating in a documentary that will be used to encourage other colleges to get involved in future One Day Without Shoes campaigns.

"They're doing exactly what we want to do-spreading the awareness and getting everyone involved in what we're trying to do," Dominguez said.

Mycoskie, who won third place in *The Amazing Race II* in 2002, said the idea for TOMS came after he befriended the children of an Argentine village and found that they lacked shoes. He thought his tech company would help pay for the shoe venture, but a newspaper article generated so much business he decided to sell the tech company and focus exclusively on TOMS, which refers to "creating a better tomorrow."

Nearly 200 One Day Without Shoes events are being held nationwide, with attorneys at an Ohio law firm putting aside their wingtips to go barefoot for the day. Five events are being held internationally.

In addition to going without shoes today, Southeastern students purchased TOMS' canvas slip-ons to sponsor shoes for needy children in the U.S. and abroad. Davis said a team of students also will accompany TOMS representatives on a "shoe drop" later this year.