

Thousands Go Barefoot to Address Global Need

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More than 250,000 people are going without shoes Thursday to raise awareness about the plight of children in developing nations who contract preventable diseases because they lack shoes.

The One Day Without Shoes event is organized by TOMS Shoes, a company founded by Christian businessman Blake Mycoskie that gives away a pair of shoes for every pair sold. More than 1,400 events are being held nationwide, with community groups, colleges and individuals spreading the word on Facebook and Twitter.

Celebrities such as the Jonas Brothers, singer Jordin Sparks, and actors Kristen Bell, Ed Begley Jr. and Heather Graham also planned to go without shoes Thursday and encouraged others to do the same.

"A shoe company asking people to go barefoot? I know it's odd, but we are so excited for people to once again join us in One Day Without Shoes," said Mycoskie, according to *Vogue* magazine. "We ask people to go the day, part of the day, or even just a few minutes, barefoot, to experience what millions of children endure every day. Awareness and empathy are the catalysts of change."

In rural areas where people walk through volcanic soil, such as in Ethiopia, going barefoot can lead to podoconiosis, a preventable but disfiguring illness that causes swelling and ulcers in the feet and lower legs.

TOMS Shoes hosted its second One Day Without Shoes last year, using the Assemblies of God-affiliated Southeastern University in Lakeland, Fla., as a pilot school for organizing campus-based support for the campaign.

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 newspaperarticle generated so much business he decided to sell the tech company and focus exclusively on TOMS, which refers to “creating a better tomorrow.”

Since it launched in 2006, the Los Angeles-based company has donated 400,000 shoes to needy children worldwide.