

## Little packets that save lives

A Langley business-woman ventures into international aid.

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Maria Martini wants to feed hungry children, no matter where they live.

When most people want to reach out and help, they donate to established charities or causes. This Langley businesswoman wasn't content to simply give money. Instead, she set about becoming something of a nutrition expert, starting last spring.

Now the result, Cibo, will be unveiled today at World Food Day on the Trinity Western University campus.

Cibo, taken from Martini's Italian heritage and meaning food, is a peanut butter-based food product with oil, sugar, and 22 vitamins and minerals added.

Cibo, with the consistency of thick pudding, will be packaged in sealed pouches for delivery to starving children.

"Our desire is to put it in the hands of anybody in need," she said.

It's similar to a product called Plumpynut but that is made by a for-profit company and sold to charities. Demand also exceeds supply.

Martini, part of the Martini family-owned Starline Windows operation, saw a media report about Doctors Without Borders using the therapeutic food to save children's lives and decided to figure out a product that could be made here and shipped abroad.

From the outset, Martini wanted this project to be different.

"We wanted it to be a Langley initiative and a true non-profit," she explained.

The product will be gifted to aid organizations which will then transport it to the area of need. Cibo and Food for Famine are working with Langley-



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Maria Martini and Ernie Charlton are eagerly anticipating the launch of the therapeutic food product Cibo this Friday.

based Global Aid Network which plans to include the pouches in a shipment soon going to North Korea.

Starline is covering the costs of start-up but Food for Famine is looking for supporters willing to help with the nominal costs of production.

"We hope to get that down to 35 cents," explained Ernie Charlton, a Starline staffer and part of Food for Famine.

The aim is to produce 150,000 pouches per month or enough to fill one shipping container.

Food for Famine, in its research, spoke to experts who said peanuts were a good base for the product and that few people in impoverished countries have food allergies. Created for children five and under, Cibo has a two-year shelf life and needs no refrigeration. The pouches will be packed in resealable plastic buckets which can then be reused by the families.

Charlton added that 100 per cent of donations will be used to produce Cibo and none will go to overhead or administration.

Three of the 100 gram packages per day can provide enough calories and nutrients for a child to grow which in turn helps alleviate that burden from the parents. Charlton said that could change everything for the family since the parents are then able to focus on work or other key issues and can work at building a sustainable future.

Food for Famine partnered with Global Aid Network because it has a focus on helping people build sustainable communities, he commented. Their mandate is to stabilize a community and help the people become self-sufficient within 12-18 months.

Martini said working on this project has shown her how much need is out there and she's learned about many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are working abroad to make a difference. She and Charlton know they can't feed every hungry child but they also know that these pouches can make a difference in the life of each child who receives them.

"The only difference between those children and the ones here is where they were born," Charlton noted. "They are children in need."

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