

Something To Drink About

Most of us can't imagine a life without water. It gushes out clean and drinkable from faucets. We buy countless bottles of it and take it with us wherever we go.

Here's something to think (and drink) on: more than 4,500 people die from waterborne diseases every day and 90 percent of them are under the age of five. Twenty percent of the world's population doesn't have regular access to clean water.

than a traditional charity," says Church. "We're bringing a for-profit discipline to a nonprofit. We're a socially conscious brand in the industry."

Nika's tagline: Helping the world never tasted so good. It sure feels good, anyway. Bottled water has gotten a negative rap lately for its heavy carbon footprint. And, particularly in states where plastic bottles don't have a cash redemption value, most of that recyclable trash ends up in landfills.

Nika is the first CarbonFree certified water on the market, meaning the company is carbon neutral. Nika offsets emissions with a reforestation project in Nicaragua. And, in states that don't have a bottle bill, Nika is working with schools, buying back bottles in recycling drives.

It looks good, too. Each bottle features artwork by New York-based painter Stephen Bennett, whose work Church first sighted at a gallery near Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa. Bennett had spent a good deal of time with the very people Nika aims to assist. "It's amazing the amount of poverty there is," says the artist. "It's crushing." Yet in his portraits of children from remote corners of the world, which he donated for Nika's use, his subjects still radiate spirit.

Inspired by the youth-helping-youth nonprofit Free the Children, Nika gets kids involved at a direct level. Nika's volunteer "agents of change" receive a kit containing three bottles of water, a T-shirt, and an informational brochure listing their agent number. A case of 24 bottles costs \$19.99 — slightly more than store-brand water, but less than the fancy stuff like Fiji and Evian — and local shipping is free with five cases.

For every sale, kids earn service credits, which they can apply toward service-based rewards, like a visit to the developing world where they'll see firsthand how they're making a difference. Kids add energy to the project, Church says, and being involved helps them develop entrepreneurial skills.

One of Church's four children, ten-year-old Jacob, recently made his first sale. He, like the other founders' families, is excited to be involved. After all, it's a very simple way to do a lot of good. (800/545-5841, www.nikawater.org) ANNAMARIA STEPHENS



Reggie Norris, Jeff Church, and Jordan Mellul

Jeff Church shakes his head as he ticks off unsettling statistics. "It's all very solvable," he says.

Eight months ago, along with David Perez and Mike Stone, Church, a Rancho Santa Fe resident, founded the nonprofit Nika, a bottled water brand that donates all profits from sales to sanitary water projects in Latin America, Africa, and India. If Nika captures just a tiny percent of the rapidly growing, \$12 billion-per-year bottled water industry in the U.S., the organization will be able to make a huge difference. "This is different