

Relief workers meet challenge of Sudan

By JACKIE SCOTT

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GRESHAM — For Gordon Molitor and his wife, Suellen Rinker, life in the African desert city of Khartoum teems with contrasts.

On the one hand, they enjoy the luxury of fulltime domestic servants. On the other hand, they have to deal with floods, locusts, civil war, refugees and coup d'états.

Molitor, 39, directed the Washington County Community Action Organization from 1977 to 1984, when he resigned to work for CARE, an international relief and development agency. He is now assistant director for CARE's office in Sudan.

He said his work in Africa has called for the same type of skills he developed working for community action in Washington County.

"I'm doing the same thing but on a larger scale and in a different culture — and with a tremendous handicap," he said. "Our phone hasn't worked for over a year, and our Telex has to go through the Hilton Hotel. If we want to talk to our headquarters, it's usually a four-day turnaround. When you're dealing with funding from four to six countries, that can be a real problem."

Ironically, he said he has enjoyed a sense of personal safety in Khartoum because of the low crime rate among Muslims.

"I like the Sudanese," he said. "They're very polite and friendly and have a great deal of personal

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integrity. You don't worry about petty thievery or being assaulted on the streets."

His 2-year-old daughter, Rachael, has adjusted to Africa in her own way. She counts among her pets a 40-year-old African land tortoise named "Tutu," who eats mostly watermelon.

"'Tutu' is short for turtle with no r's," Molitor said.

The family is home on leave in Gresham, where Suellen Rinker was raised. Her parents are Frank and Helen Rinker, who live in the historic Dowsett house, home of Gresham's first mayor.

"The Sudan has been overwhelmed by crises," Molitor said. "It's in the limelight of the international press always. We need to react quickly to crises."

During Molitor's first year in Khartoum, drought, floods, an invasion by locusts, and civil war all combined to place Sudan high on list of countries needing relief, he said.

He said last year people in the south of Sudan, which has been ravaged by civil war, were starving



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Gordon Molitor and his wife, Suellen Rinker, relax with their 2-year-old daughter, Rachael, at Rinker's parents' home in Gresham.

because relief shipments of grain couldn't reach them during the rainy season. This year, he said people in the south wouldn't starve because CARE made sure grain shipments were in place before the start of the rainy season, he said.

Rinker, who married Molitor in 1985, is deputy director of a refugee resettlement program operated by the International Rescue Committee in Khartoum. Using translators, she interviews Ethiopians who have fled their own country because of war or repression.

Rinker screens the Ethiopian refugees to see which ones have family ties in the United States. A family connection often will enable them to emigrate, she said. Of the 3,000 Africans allowed to emigrate

to the United States last year, 2,000 were Ethiopians who had been recommended to the U.S. Immigration Service by her agency, she said.

Rinker, 40, said a Western woman faces many challenges in adjusting to Africa. She lived in Sierra Leone in West Africa for four years before moving to Sudan last year.

One of the biggest shocks for Rinker was adjusting to poor water sources, poor electricity and limited foodstuffs.

"We certainly don't have Safeways," she said. "There aren't any little cheeses or fresh milk or fast foods. It took me two months to find flour or sugar, and that's in a capital city of 3 million."

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