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Reliable Source

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Bob Johnson launches new charity project: Ties for Malaria No More

By *The Reliable Source*

Bob Johnson could have easily written a big check to fight malaria in Africa—but where's the challenge in that?

Instead, the multimillionaire co-founder of Black Entertainment Television came up with an elaborate plan to raise money for Malaria No More using his corporate and personal contacts.

“When you’ve got the entrepreneurial gene, you think ‘How can I make it work?’ ” he told us. “You think of it like a business.” He showed up on CNBC’s “Squawk Box” early Thursday morning wearing his latest pet project: A tie specifically created for the charity with the African continent woven into a tone-on-tone design.



Johnson wearing his "Malaria No More" tie on CNBC's "Squawk Box" Thursday morning. (Bob Johnson/CNBC)

Johnson was building a hotel in Liberia when he first got interested in preventing the disease. A friend at PVH, the menswear-manufacturing giant, mentioned the company was looking for a good cause to support. And Johnson happened to know three African-American designers who had impressed him with an **Obama**-themed tie. So the RLJ by Ella Rose Africa Tie Collection was born.

“Humanitarian causes can sometimes trigger relationships you didn’t know you had,” he said. “I’m playing the yenta here. I’m not looking to launch my own tie line.”

His ideas don’t always work: An online charity auction business set up to hawk celebrity donations failed, Johnson told us, because he found he could only get big names to give once or twice, not on a regular basis. “It was hard to get to the celebrities. The sustainability just wasn’t there.”



The "Malaria No More" collection on display at Macy's in Baltimore's White Marsh Mall. (The RLJ Company)

He's more optimistic about the ties, but there are still a few knots to work out. They retail for a pricey \$55, though proceeds go to the non-profit. Macy's execs have agreed to carry the neckwear, but only in five cities around the country (including Baltimore) so far. Johnson is lobbying to add Washington and New York.