

News on Nyumbani



The first facility for HIV positive orphans in Kenya.

www.nyumbani.org

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Save the Date



September 29

What: *The 2007 Nyumbani Annual Benefit Dinner*

Two special changes have been made this year:

- ❖ The Benefit will be held on a Saturday evening.
- ❖ The Benefit will move to Georgetown Prep's new center on the Bethesda, MD Campus

Sister Mary Owens, IBVM will travel from Nairobi to report on exciting new developments in Kenya.

Look for details in the next issue of *News on Nyumbani* or visit www.nyumbani.org.

Dear Friends of Nyumbani:

As I write this, it is May 1st, our public holiday of Labour Day, and I am enjoying a rare moment of quiet and reflection. The month of May heralds summer there in the States while here we are beginning to take out our warmer clothing to prepare for the cold season. Some of you will celebrate May Day, while here we hold the Candle Memorial for friends who have succumbed to HIV. This year, we will be remembering a special little angel from Lea Toto.

You see, yesterday we were keeping watch and praying as 10 year-old Margaret spent the last hours of her life on earth. We had admitted her to Nyumbani a few days ago for palliative care. Her situation was especially tragic because she couldn't be put on the life-saving anti-retroviral therapy (ART) because of unstable caregiver/family circumstances.

Meanwhile, outside the care facility's windows was the playground and the laughter of our blessed Nyumbani children, who were beginning Nyumbani Olympic week. The two contrasts show what we as caregivers face: at times, we must integrate life and death. Some children will enjoy life to the fullest while others face the great mystery of passing on to a new life just as Father D'Ag faced when his time came.

Our Olympic event is part of the school vacation time. Sister Julie and her team of volunteers planned an exciting and educational program for the children during vacation. The

first three weeks combined learning exercises with club activities. But there was also fun, such as the Olympics. This year, the most exciting race was one in which our two 2-year olds competed against each other and both won!

On another note, Nyumbani adolescents recently had the opportunity of participating in a program designed by Susan Gold (Wis-



The new future for youth at Kitui: a school house.

consin) as part of her Fulbright scholarship. Her program will teach youngsters about sexuality. Susan is the very first nurse to receive this award, and we feel privileged she chose Nyumbani for her Fulbright year. Susan will run a similar program for Lea Toto children. Another USA volunteer with us is Dr. Tomi Browne, who has come to monitor Mungai's successful cochlear implant (see the story on page 3).

Meanwhile, we are happy to report successes with our Nyumbani Village, which has grown considerably: The Village is now truly a growing community. Our goal here is to encourage the families to be as self-reliant as

(Continued on back page)



Faith prepares to embark on a "bobsled" race at this year's Nyumbani Olympic event.



Remembering in His Own Way

Editor's Note: We have all mourned Father D'Agostino in our own ways – ways that are influenced by how his life touched ours. Some memorials have been large and grand. Others have been small, but just as moving. What better way for Augustine Enabulele, who helped the children of Nyumbani start a stamp club, than to create a memorial stamp. Augustine started the club as a healthy, fun way for the children to develop a hobby. The initial stamps came from his own collection, but he got family and friends involved, then supporters from the U.S. and U.K. started sending stamps. Augustine also began a club at a local school and soon the children were trading stamps and making new friends. They also received attention from several major media outlets. Here Augustine tells how he met Father D'Ag and how he chose to commemorate the passing of Nyumbani's founder.

I lived with Father D'Ag in Loyola Jesuit Community in 2003 and volunteered at Nyumbani from 2002 to 2004, running a stamp club and teaching both at Nyumbani and at Hekima primary school. Father D'Ag and I sat together most times during dinner — he would brief me about his day, aspirations, joys, fears and frustrations. In turn I would share with him how the Nyumbani stamp club was going and how the children were doing at school and in the orphanage. These sharing sessions became part of a routine that extended into the community, including his favorite restaurant in Nairobi. Sometimes, we would talk over Scrabble games, which he usually won. I would tell him I could not talk and play Scrabble simultaneously, and he would say I always made excuses when I lost.



Father D'Ag and Styne at a stamp exhibition.

As I look back, I believe two of the things that I saw that made him most happy were

how much fun the children had singing and dancing as well as collecting stamps. I remember how proud he was to see the children performing on national TV and showing off their stamp collections. That's why I decided to choose music and stamps as the ideal memorabilia from me. I created a self-made U.S. stamp bearing a picture of Father D'Ag and some of the children he gave his life to, and I compiled a CD of songs that have helped my grieving, as well as my celebration of his life. I've tried to share both with some

of the people of Nyumbani, including Sister Mary and Father's brother Joe.

Usually when I pray or meditate I pick a subject. When I pick Father D'Ag, I turn on this compilation of songs, and many things



The Nyumbani and Hekima school clubs exchanged friendship as well as stamps.

happen, starting with tears. I begin to think of things such as the fact that my wife did not get to meet him, but I take solace in the fact she talked with him on the phone. I think about the Village I am so glad materialized before his passing. I think about all the children at the Nyumbani Children's Home, and how much I'm sure they've grown since I left Kenya in 2004. I also think about his role and achievements in this world, and what mine might yet be. My memorabilia are small – some stamps and a compilation of music. But they commemorate a colossus of a man.

Augustine "Styne" Enabulele

U.S. Treasurer's Report

As COGRF's new Treasurer, I have been learning a lot about our finances in order to catch up with Joe D'Agostino, who served so long and so well in this position before becoming President. One of the most interesting and encouraging things I observed is our steady growth over the years. I will give you just the last 3 years so you can see this for yourself. Here are the figures:

	2004	2005	2006
Total contributors:	<1,000	1,276	1,728
Total contributions:	\$491,030	\$492,599	\$625,548
Annual dinner:	\$125,000	\$128,530	\$189,890
Combined Federal Campaign:			
	Unknown	\$17,888	\$15,786
Sent to Nyumbani:	\$216,604	\$282,956	\$349,058
Year end balance of Reserve Fund:			
	\$1,055,696	\$1,107,616	\$1,340,291

These numbers show what can be accomplished with a hard-working, committed Board of Directors and an expanding group of generous contributors. Let's keep this partnership going as Sister Mary, Protus and their dedicated staff and volunteers keep improving the facilities at Nyumbani, expanding the services of Lea Toto, and completing Nyumbani Village at Kitui.

Dino J. De Concini

Friends Tell Friends

Nyumbani recently received a check for over a thousand dollars from a co-housing group outside of Washington, D.C. that chooses a charity each year to benefit from a portion of Christmas Tree sales.

The Blueberry Hill Co-housing group works with Potomac Vegetable Farms, west of Tysons Corner, Virginia, on a program to sell Christmas Trees to the public. Each year, the group decides as a whole which cause will receive a portion of those sales.

Nyumbani's Village at Kitui was the lucky recipient this year – which is appropriate given that, like a co-housing group, the Village raises its own food and seeks to be self-sufficient.

How Nyumbani was chosen illustrates the importance of spreading the word. Anna Dausman, grand-niece of Joe and Father Angelo D'Agostino, was good friends with Alex Mandell, who is one of the co-housing community's residents. Because of Anna's association with Alex and because she had been to Kenya with her family last year, the community asked her to speak about Nyumbani.

"Happily, they [the group] reported that this was their largest sales year ever, and we were all very pleased that this donation will go directly to Nyumbani Village," reports Anna's mom Michele Dausman.

Women Helping Women: Erin Meets Oprah

In some ways, it's fitting that Erin Kennedy won the honor of a week at a health spa with Oprah Winfrey. After all, Winfrey's contest had to do with encouraging women to take care of themselves first and foremost so they could then take care of others.

As many donors know, Kennedy (formerly Erin Melendy) has served as Nyumbani's U.S. Board Administrator for 7 years. Recently, Kennedy gave up some accounting tasks partly to pursue a new Nyumbani-affiliated effort: Hopecraft. Hopecraft is a U.S. non-profit empowering Lea Toto, and eventually Nyumbani Village, women through micro-credit.

Erin's Nyumbani and Hopecraft efforts, along with a well-worded nomination by her mom, were reasons she was selected to receive the Winfrey trip.

Meeting Oprah Winfrey

Erin ventured to Tucson, AZ in early March for a 5-day spa vacation with 59 other women also selected for their achievements.

If you know Erin, you know she's not the type to have entered herself in the contest – that task was accomplished by Jo Ann Kennedy, who entered her daughter not as a pat on the back, but because she felt Erin, a single mother of two, needed a break.

And for Erin, who's traveled to Kenya five times to meet the children and staff, and in more recent years, to set up Hopecraft, the trip was fun and relaxing ...but bittersweet.

"As I was being pampered, I couldn't help but think that many HIV-infected women and

children in Kenya can't even afford shoes, much less the medicine to keep them alive."

Still, what Oprah was saying through this event was not lost on Erin: "Oprah is a woman who spends a lot of time teaching others to step back and see what they need to do for themselves so they can accomplish what they want in life," Erin explains. "For many women, including her, that means finding the best ways to help other people," Erin adds. Oprah is known for her own efforts in Africa on behalf of children.

The educational sessions and the spa staff, "taught us to live every day like it was on purpose. To cut through the clutter in our minds so we can live meaningful lives," Erin says.

Erin and Hopecraft

Erin Kennedy, who recently moved to New England to be closer to family, met Father D'Ag in 1992 when she lived in Washington, D.C. She became a passionate volunteer and later, a U.S. staff member. After a visit to Nyumbani and Lea Toto, Erin, encouraged by Father D'Ag, bought some crafts and has been working with a board of directors on setting up a system that will allow Kenyan women to reach the U.S. consumer base.

Hopecraft now has a web site where the jewelry, leather goods, pocketbooks and other crafts are featured. (www.hopecraft.org). Through that site, which offers exposure, and through organized sales, people in the U.S. are giving women in Kenya a way to earn a living. Proceeds from the sales in the U.S. are reinvested into the micro-credit fund that is managed by Lea Toto staff in Kenya.

"Just like with Oprah and her efforts, we're trying to find a way for these women, who have enormous challenges in life, to help themselves. By making money through Hopecraft, they can support their families and hopefully pull themselves out of poverty," Erin concludes. If you can help the Hopecraft mission by hosting a sale in your home, church, school, etc., contact Erin at info@hopecraft.org or (603) 988-8740.

Magnificent Mungai's Visit

By Jeff Browne

We knew it would be a huge adjustment for an 11-year-old orphan from Nyumbani to fly to the United States to spend four months with an American family while getting surgery that would dramatically improve his ability to hear. What we didn't expect was that we would learn as much from



him as he learned from us.

Mungai has a long-standing reputation for impish behavior along with a winning personality. It's why I

named him "Mungai the Magnificent" during a visit to Nyumbani in 2005. By that time, his hearing had already deteriorated and eventually he was classified as "deaf." He excelled in schoolwork with other deaf children, but was limited in his ability to understand or be understood. The idea of bringing him to the U.S. for cochlear implant surgery was the brainchild of Nyumbani's Sister Julie, who with my wife Dr. Tomi Browne, an audiologist, teamed up to raise funds and bring Mungai to the U.S. His surgery took place at Children's Hospital in Philadelphia.

Mungai's first plane ride and arrival in the States coincided with Halloween. In short order, he experienced his first surplus of candy, first McDonald's, a big screen TV, the birth of puppies, his first snowfall, and a multitude of other delights. We were con-

cerned he might not want to go back, but throughout his stay he talked of missing the other children, particularly his friend Daniel.

Mungai is industrious and independent: we'd find him sweeping the floor or setting the table. At one point, he decided to plant a garden, and he declared his "shamba" would contain no flowers, only vegetables. Armed with fully cooked broccoli, he planted row upon row in frozen soil and was disappointed they didn't grow. To our collective consternation, Mungai would also make unauthorized visits to fellow COGRF Board member Marilyn Jerome's house a block away, but it was hard to fuss at him when we learned he was helping out there as well.

The cochlear implant surgery was a complete success. Mungai gradually regained his hearing and now has complete comprehension of Swahili. Tomi went to Kenya in April to work with Mungai and evaluate his progress. She reports that his English comprehension is excellent, and he will be mainstreamed into normal classes starting in the new semester in May.

What Tomi and I learned from Mungai is how broad the Kenyan heart is, and how a child could survive numerous potentially fatal diseases, yet be upbeat and positive about his future. We also learned what stubborn really means when Mungai didn't get his way. He firmly believed men were head of the household, and he frequently made "decisions" on my behalf without consulting me. The only way those "decisions" could be reversed was if I decreed otherwise. He made us laugh; he made us cry. But his visit was as unforgettable as Mungai himself is. Mungai's future is unlimited. My prediction is that he will either become a stand-up comedian or President of Kenya...or perhaps he'll be both.

Sister Mary's Letter

(Continued from page 1)

possible. Each family has been allocated a half acre of land and access to water. As Homecare Manager Albanus Mwololo puts it: "I tell each family on arrival that I will be giving them dry foods and vegetables for the first three months; after that, I will only be giving them dry foods, since they will have their own vegetables." This certainly shouldn't be a problem. Our grandparents early on came to Village Manager Nicholas Makau to tell him: "We are not used to sitting around all day doing nothing. Please give us some land to cultivate."

Our energies with the Village are now focused on preparing for the opening of the Primary School. The first three classes will have about 10 pupils each while the fourth grade has more than 20. I often wonder if Father D'Ag fully realized how far we could go in such a short time. Founding a Primary School allows us to go to the next challenge, opening the Polytechnic, which is the technical school where many of these people will learn the skills that give them independence. Four units of the school are already designed and the first two are built. The units will include: Dairy and Fruit, Honey, and Medicinal Processing; Woodworking; Macramé & Textiles, Carving and Leather Work; Metal Work and Auto Garage. We hope to open in

June as we now have several young people who missed out on formal education.

Lea Toto, sadly, continues to reach out to more and more HIV+ orphans, often coming to us in a compromised situation. However, with great joy, we can now report we have access to testing for babies 0-18 months that allows us, as early as the first weeks of life, to find out the true HIV status of a baby. We were also delighted when we got the first results: out of 185 tests done, only 33 were positive. Our joy is based on the belief that the Prevention of Transmission from Mother to Child Program is gradually having a positive effect. This brings us a step closer to our dream of a sub-Saharan Africa where the percentage of children born with HIV will be negligible, as is the situation in the developed world. In the meantime, however, we continue to reach out to the hundreds of thousands of HIV-positive children, and hopefully, place them on ART, so we can minimize the number of cases like Margaret.

Finally, as I reflect on all of this, my heart fills with gratitude for the people of the world who make this mission financially possible. Your donations bring to mind one of the first lessons Father D'Ag taught me: 'God will provide.' And so we proceed with serenity, trusting that God will continue to provide through the generosity of our friends of Nyumbani. May each of you and your families be blessed with that peace and joy that only God can give.

Sister Mary Owens

University Honors Father D'Ag

Father Angelo D'Agostino was honored post-humously by the University of Scranton. Father D'Ag received the Arrupe Award, named for the late Very Rev. Pedro Arrupe, S.J., Superior General of the Society of Jesus from 1965 to 1983. Rev. Arrupe, best known for his call to the Jesuits to become involved in worldwide issues to promote peace and justice, encouraged Father D'Ag to found foreign refugee services in Thailand and in Africa.

Rev. Timothy Brown, SJ, Provincial of the MD Province, accepted the award on behalf of Father D'Ag.

To donate to Nyumbani, use the enclosed envelope or visit www.nyumbani.org. If you would like to receive this newsletter electronically, please send an email to info@nyumbani.org or check the box on the donor envelope.



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Nyumbani's newest addition (above) as well as pictures from the Olympics (left, middle) and Cottage G (upper left).