

News on Nyumbani



The first facility for HIV positive orphans in Kenya.

www.nyumbani.org

Volume XI, Issue 3

Third Quarter 2009

Join Us in Celebration

Annual Nyumbani Benefit and Auction Friday, September 25

Festivities begin at 6 p.m.;
Dinner is at 7 p.m.;
Program from 8 to 9:30 p.m.
Willard InterContinental
1401 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C.

“U.S. and Kenya, United in Purpose and Hope” is the theme of the 2009 fundraiser and auction, benefiting the Nyumbani programs and celebrating the bond between the U.S. and Kenya.

This marks the 16th year the Children of God Relief Fund (COGRF) has hosted the benefit, and the fourth year to hold an auction to raise money for those living with HIV/AIDS in Kenya. Whether you are a first-time contributor, sponsor or already part of the Nyumbani family, please join us for a lovely evening at the Willard.

Details on the event are on page 2, and a full list of auction offerings, including donors, photos and descriptive information, can be found on the Nyumbani website (www.nyumbani.org). We have previewed a few items in this issue to whet your appetite.

Dear Friends of Nyumbani:

Greetings from a very cold Nyumbani in Nairobi and a parched Nyumbani Village. Climate change is certainly with us here in Africa. There is a severe water shortage in Nairobi city because of deforestation and drought where water sources are located, and there is famine in the area surrounding Nyumbani Village. We feature the Village with all its challenges and the miracles that are happening in much of this newsletter. Recently, when our Nyumbani Village Social Services team was visiting groups of children with potential for admission to the Village, they came across a family of four children living alone who were surviving on wild berries—a shattering experience for our team. The children are now settled in the Village. I rejoice that a beneficial side effect of our present extensive Nyumbani Village building program is that we are giving employment to over 300 members of the local community.

The hardest hit by the water shortage in Nairobi are our families in our community-based program, Lea Toto. A familiar sight now are the long lines of people with jerry-cans, queuing for 20 liters of water (about five gallons). Boreholes ensure that the Nyumbani Home and Village have sufficient water. But the drought has hiked the price of foodstuffs once again. Through the generosity of you, our American friends and donors, we continue to provide for the children and grandparents in our two residential programs and to provide nutritional support to 2,000 destitute Lea Toto families.

Summer in the western part of the world brings us many U.S. visitors (too numerous

to mention individually), as well as service groups. Once again Lloydie Zaiser organized two Kenya Educational Service Trips (KEST) groups and one service group (see pages 4 and 5). Not only has our network of USA friends of Nyumbani grown considerably through Lloydie’s KEST, but also the number of friends who sponsor the education of our children. The service group deserves special mention: Five young women spent three weeks in Nyumbani Village running a Young Ambassadors Club and an Environmental Awareness Club for 52 Upper Primary students. Because of their enthusiasm, applications are now pouring in for next summer!

Returning volunteer/visitors to our area of Kenya included ambassadors from the Global Environmental Management team from the University of Wisconsin, headed by John Sheffy; Georgetown University; Loyola Academy, Chicago; and Tomi Browne with her audiology team. Special visitors to the Nyumbani Home were U.S. Senators Johnny Isakson and Bob Corker accompanied by Warren Buckingham, head of the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, Kenya; and U.S. Agency for International Development staff. The senators showed great interest in all three of our programs, and I look forward to meeting them when I visit the U.S. in the fall. Another special visitor from the U.S. was Jorie Kent, Abercrombie and Kent, who spent a delightful morning with the children and presented a donation.

(Continued on back page)



Join us for the 2009 Benefit and Auction

On September 25, 2009, at the historic Willard InterContinental Hotel in Washington, D.C., the supporters of Nyumbani will come together for the 16th annual benefit and auction to celebrate the accomplishments of the prior 12 months, to recognize those who give their time to the Nyumbani children and programs, to remember our founder, Father Angelo D'Agostino, and to catch up with colleagues and friends.

Sister Mary Owens, IBVM, Nyumbani Executive Director, will be featured as keynote speaker. COGRF also welcomes to the event Professor Dominic Makawiti, Chair of the Board of Directors of the Children of God Relief Institute (Nyumbani), Kenya. Kathleen Matthews will serve as Mistress of Ceremonies, and John Murray will serve as the auctioneer for the evening.

The COGRF Board of Directors is excited to showcase its latest video geared toward raising awareness of the Kenyan people's fight for the lives of its children. It is titled "Nyumbani: Kenya's Hope for HIV+ Orphans" and depicts the story of the Nyumbani programs and our beloved founder Father D'Ag.

What Treasures and Deals Await You...

As a melting pot of neighboring cultures, Kenya has a rich history of trade, artistry and craftsmanship that continues today. This year's auction has many unique items and antiquities from Africa rarely found in the U.S. The auction committee sought items and artisans that our Nyumbani supporters would find interesting and desirable.



An egret wall hanging from Weaverbird

The result of everyone's efforts is a diverse collection, including designs that are both old and new and include some pieces from up and coming as well as acclaimed designers. For example, artist Zahava uses nature's most beautiful semi-precious stones to create unique jewelry with trademark wrought iron silver clasps, rare stones, or special cuts

and pairings.

We also have pieces from Adele Dejak, designer for Magik Grace jewelry and accessories, who infuses geometric shapes with natural cow horn and bone beads often complimented with burnished wood, agate or trade beads. From Jewelry Designer Vicky Chignall of Maro Trader, there are unique fashion jewelry pieces and accessories created by Masaai tribesmen and women. Textile Designer Jacqui Resley of Kenya Weaverbird has created a hand loomed wool wall hanging with a graceful egret in flight. We also have tribal masks; kuba clothes (a long Congo cloth made of woven raffia); and African head rests from Turkana and other regions. Beautiful handicrafts have been meticulously made by women in Nairobi's slums including Noah's Ark and a whimsical lion backpack. One commonality among all the items is that bringing them here to sell benefits Kenya's people through fair wages and

trade.

In addition to African items, a number of companies and individuals have donated local entertainment and attraction packages for the auction. For example, there is a private tour for 12 of the Smithsonian American History Museum; a two-night stay at the newly renovated W Hotel in Washington, D.C.; Sunday brunch for four at the Cosmos Club followed by a walking tour of Embassy Row; a one-night stay at the Willard Intercontinental in Washington D.C.; a fall weekend for six in a beautiful log cabin overlooking the Shenandoah River; one week Jamaican vacation packages; full tuition for one week at Georgetown Preparatory School Summer 2010 Sports Camps; and much more.



The auction is a great place to pick up holiday gifts.

Honorees to Be Recognized at Benefit

The COGRF Board of Directors proudly announces that several honorees will be recognized at this year's benefit dinner and auction. These crusaders have had a tremendous impact in the battle against HIV/AIDS.

As Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at the National Institutes of Health, **Anthony Fauci, MD**, plays a major role in the planning and implementation of much of the AIDS research performed in the United States. These efforts include pathogenesis or mechanisms of disease, prevention, therapy and vaccine development. Widely recognized for his research and tireless efforts, he is the recipient of numerous prizes and awards, including the Albany Prize for Medical Research, The Lasker Award for Public Service, The National Medal of Science and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Fauci is also a member of the National Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Medicine and is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Following a 2002 trip to several countries in southern Africa, Fauci took his battle against HIV/AIDS to the White House. In early 2003, Congress approved the President's \$15 billion Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Father D'Ag also was a personal friend, officiating at the wedding between Dr. Fauci and his wife Christine.

Professor Dominic W. Makawiti, PhD is currently Chair of the Board of Directors of the Children of God Relief Institute (Nyumbani), Kenya and a powerful asset to the Nyumbani family. He is Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Academic Affairs at Maseno University and Professor of Biochemistry at the University of Nairobi. Professor Makawiti, whose PhD is in Reproductive Biochemistry from the University of London, has focused his research in biochemical endocrinology. He has published more than 40 peer-reviewed articles, is a Chartered Biologist and a member of the Kenya National Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Biology. Dr. Makawiti was decorated with the Head of State Commendation (HSC) by His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Kenya.

Nyumbani also will recognize the pharmaceutical companies that have contributed to the PEPFAR program. Companies like GlaxoSmithKline have allowed the Nyumbani programs, among many others in Africa, to continue to thrive.



The Willard InterContinental has set aside a discounted block of rooms for benefit guests. The hotel was chosen for its historical significance as well as its beauty. Call (202) 628-9100

The Nyumbani Village: Friend to Mother Nature

By 14-year-old Tom D'Agostino, visitor with his family

Our trip to Kenya would not have been complete if we had not made the journey to Nyumbani Village to see the vision my great uncle Father D'Ag and others had for building a self-sustaining community. All the wonders of the Village could fill an entire newsletter, but here are a few highlights that struck me.

The area around Nyumbani Village experiences extreme drought, and much of the economy is based on subsistence farming. The Village itself, which is about 1,000 acres in size, grows organic goods, and conservation of water and other natural resources is essential (a sign at the entrance indicates that non-biodegradable items are not welcome).

The buildings on the property are constructed of rammed-earth blocks and powered by solar panels. Local people were employed to make the blocks and construct the homes. When I was there, nearly 40 homes had been built of these interlocking blocks as well as barns, storage areas, a community center, a school and other structures.

Each family home has a parcel of land behind the home to grow food for the family's own use. The Village also has planted fast-growing hardwood trees that should be ready to

harvest in seven years. Human waste is collected in the Village and is used as fertilizer for these hardwood trees. In addition to the trees, the amazing *Jatropha* plants are growing there. These plants are resistant to disease and pests, and the seeds are about 30% oil, which makes them a great source of biodiesel.

With water being scarce, Village designers and planners incorporated sand dams and a storage tank system that feeds a drip line irrigation. When the rains come, the water floods into the sediment created by the dams, and slowly and gradually travels through the area. This allows solar pumps to pull the water and send it to a storage tank system for later use.

Logs hang from trees throughout the Village. These carved out logs create a habitat for bees, which are essential in a vast agricultural area such as this. The Villagers also harvest the organic honey and use it or sell it in the local area.

In my community here in the U.S., people are focused on finding ways to conserve energy and resources—knowing it's the right thing to do to protect Mother Earth. My experiences in the Village, however, taught me not only is it the right thing, but a key to survival. It can serve as a model for other areas of the world that are in need of finding ways to help their people survive and thrive.

The Wonder of a Village that Arose from the Dust

By Michael von Fricken, Nyumbani Volunteer to the Village

When I found out I would be volunteering west of Kitui, a little known Kenyan city in Ukambani, I thought it best to investigate the lay of the land. A Google search gave me my first real doubts about having volunteered: the results gave a daunting message of: "area unknown." A truer statement I'd never heard: Nyumbani Village is 82 miles east of Nairobi, but it takes three hours of dirt roads and potholes to get there.

In my travels throughout East Africa, I had many opportunities to communicate with a diverse cross section of people. When the location of where I worked arose, a grimace would appear, followed by the phrase "happana Mvoova," Swahili for "no rain." With regard to most of Ukambani, this statement is on target. But within an arid wasteland that hasn't had a successful wet season in two years, I found a 1,000-acre oasis.

The tenacity of the staff that works there, the day workers and volunteers, can be seen in the physical, economic, and spiritual growth that has occurred over the past four years. The "pay" is almost as bad as the heat, but the best part of that pay is that every morning those workers greet visitors, volunteers and others with genuine happiness. They know they could be living in areas with access to electricity, plumbing, transportation and more. But most continue to keep faith with the dream that is Nyumbani. It's easy to stay hopeful when you're constantly surrounded by children whose lives are drastically different because of Nyumbani.

One of the important realizations I came to as a worker and volunteer is that the goal for a village that encompasses all aspects of life and can keep its own momentum going is attainable. I have no doubt the Village can accomplish this and begin to turn profit in the next 5 to 10 years. And while the word "profit"

usually conjures the idea of return on investment, the return we'll see from this particular venture is unlike any other. It's an investment in human spirit, dignity, and life. Not only does this program give a sense of belonging and home to orphaned children and the elderly, it generates income for the surrounding community by creating jobs in a typically low-income area.

It brings education and the opportunity to attend secondary schools, and for some, a university. It trains students in skilled labor such as carpentry, tailoring, and masonry at the polytechnic. Most importantly, all the children, who likely will go out into the world with their new-found skills and education, always have a home to which they can return.

No one would head to Kitui to go on safari unless they were interested in goats and chickens. But if a large enough impact is made on the surrounding environment, the micro climate will change. As more crops and trees are planted, more oxygen is released, which in turn can lead to cooler temperatures, more rains, and a general growth of the entire area. By planting hundreds of acres of trees and crops, as well as using bore holes, solar pumps and sand dams for irrigation, the Nyumbani Village will bring more favorable weather for the surrounding area.

I hesitated when asked to write about my experiences. How can one transcribe the feeling of exuberance of having shared in third world Africa and seeing the good? To truly understand, one must stand under the Kenyan sun, walk the Village, and most importantly communicate with the people that make the Nyumbani organization so wonderful.

I am only 23 years old, and still don't know exactly what I want from life, but I can say with certainty that the experiences I received working for Nyumbani have made me stronger. I will always be grateful for the opportunity to get out of my comfort zone and do something that benefits others. The rewards far exceeded the challenges.



Women of the Village working on their crafts and sharing companionship.

Beautiful Kenya's Summer Visitors

By Lloydie Zaiser, founder and coordinator of the KEST program

As the founder of Kenya Educational Service Trips (KEST), I have the good fortune of traveling to Kenya and the Nyumbani programs several times a year. This summer, KEST sent three travel groups to Kenya over the course of nine weeks. Each group had a different purpose for their visit and achieved different goals. They also brought with them donations they collected of items each of the Nyumbani program directors identified as needs.

The first group, which arrived in Kenya in May, was five seniors from the Holton-Arms School in Bethesda, Maryland, who chose a KEST adventure as their culminating senior year project. This group had two weeks to pursue a passion. Two of the five students had experienced a KEST journey last summer that served as inspiration for the project. The purpose of the visit was two-fold: to explore the different cultural settings of the various Nyumbani programs and to understand each program's specific needs, then help in some small way by leaving a "gift" behind in the form of service or donations.

At the Children's Home, this group provided activities for the St. Paul Miki Pre-School children and craft projects for children of all ages. They participated in activities such as hosting a movie night and helping with homework. They also donated scooters and school supplies, which Protus, the manager of the Nyumbani Children's Home, had identified as a need. In Nyumbani Kitui Village, each traveler completed a field placement either in Sustainability, Home Care or Polytechnic. There, they brought donations of soccer balls and school supplies. The Lea Toto sites visited were: Kawangware, with a focus on community mobilization and home visits; and Dandora, where we met with the Vision Self Help Group founded by Sister Little. Vision is a collection of single mommas trying to earn money to provide life's basic necessities for their children. They meet at least once a week to encourage and support each other while making crafts to sell. We learned how such enterprises, which are called micro-credits, were helping the economy in the area, and we even had the opportunity to support the women through shopping, an enjoyable experience.

The second group went to Kenya in June to serve the various communities and offer after-school programs at the Village.

These five hearty souls served at Nyumbani Kitui Village for three weeks and the Children's Home for 10 days. In this issue of *News on Nyumbani*, Sarah Baranes and Jennifer Geiling tell the story of the two after-school programs the group brought to the Village—the Environmental Awareness Club and the Young Ambassadors Program. Each was a huge success and the young women who made it happen deserve praise for their efforts.

July brought nine more KEST travelers to Kenya. Two sisters arrived four days ahead of the group, just to get acclimated and grab a few extra morsels of Kenyan life, such as a cooking class featuring Kenyan delicacies. This group's itinerary was much like the May group—visits to the various Nyumbani programs. Two major differences were a special trip to a tea farm, which illustrated to the visitors life from Kenya's colonial past; and a magnificent Farewell Presentation by the entire Children's Home. This end-of-summer presentation will never be

forgotten by those that experienced it, and it brought simultaneous laughter and tears for those in attendance,



Lloydie Zaiser (third from left) and some of the women in Vision Self Help.

including me. Sixteen more scooters were left behind for the children, in addition to our hearts. Lea Toto also received many donations of toys, school supplies, and staff gifts.

The 2010 KEST travel schedule is in the works and will be posted in September at www.k-e-s-t.com. If you would like to join in on a KEST adventure to Nyumbani, please contact me at lloydie@k-e-s-t.com.

The Inspiration the Children Provide

By KEST member Sarah Baranes, senior at Holton-Arms School, Bethesda, MD

This past June and July, I traveled to the Nyumbani Village with two of my peers through KEST. My peers and I share a passion for Environmental Studies, and one reason we went was to offer a little of what we have learned in our respective schools in America to the children of the Nyumbani Village. However, once there, we were inspired by the measures the Village has taken to conserve and utilize its minimal resources, and how selfless the children there already are. The people of the Village have a monumental challenge. The dryness of the Kitui region exacerbates environmental issues that people in most developed countries don't even face, since resources in those developed countries are readily available to support excessive lifestyles. However, in Kitui, one cannot ignore the scarcity of essential needs for everyday life such as food and water because lack of these essentials

constantly threatens to make the land they call home uninhabitable.

My peers and I thought we might be able to help the children by showing them ways they could protect the Village's fragile environment. We focused on issues particularly relevant to their region of Kenya, such as water scarcity and what deforestation has done to Kenya and other parts of the world, and then tied those topics to more global issues such as climate change. We wanted to show them how environmentally harmful activities in one part of the world, such as cutting down trees without replanting, can cause changes in seemingly isolated other parts of the world. We hoped to show them how they could help the environment by teaching about sustainability and making sure they understood why they should fix dripping faucets and help plant trees

(continued on page 5)

Kenyan Students Form Bond with U.S.

By KEST member Jennifer Geiling, M.P.A., Monterey Institute of International Studies

Though all the time I spent volunteering at the Nyumbani Village in Kitui was unforgettable, the most inspiring time I spent was in meetings with the children.

I came to Kenya for three weeks as part of a KEST service program. During the day I assisted in the Homecare Department and afternoons I spent with 30 brilliant students at the Village's primary school. To provide a more informal environment for growth and learning, a second volunteer, Megan Mullally, and I started a Young Ambassadors Program.

The Young Ambassadors Program was originally designed by the Children's Culture Connection and implemented in the Washington, D.C. area by the non-profit: For the Love of Children. Megan and I adjusted the lesson plans used in D.C. so the same program could be introduced into a Kenyan community to facilitate a cultural exchange between the two locations. Together, we defined "ambassadors"—how the students themselves could be representatives of Kenya and their local community.

As part of the lesson component, we covered the importance of community service and leadership. To back that up, we participated in a day of collecting trash as a service project to the Village. We also worked on cultural projects to illustrate the way of life in the Village and the views and goals of Kenyan schoolchildren to share with the American students. Each participant created his or her own "cultural binder" to share with counterparts in the states.

I traveled to Kenya this summer because I felt the need to contribute to the world: I thought my background in International Relations and my strong desire to see the world should benefit the communities I would visit. Through this KEST program, my colleagues and I were able to facilitate an environment in which these children could experience growth, learn more about the global community and see how they could contribute to that community. What I was unprepared for, however, was the impact these children would have on my life and my understanding of "global community."

For example, when asked how they would change the world or serve their community, one student replied, "I would plant a lot of food for the people to stop dying of hunger." Another student said, "I can serve the community by helping aged peoples – i.e. fetching water for them, collecting firewood, looking after cattle, and helping with home duties." This showed me these students not only care about the Nyumbani Village, they also dare to dream beyond their classroom and the Village. Our program's goal was

to educate and encourage the students to learn about their friends in America and provide a forum for them to share their lives. I had no idea an exchange at such a profound depth would happen...in other words: what both the students, and we as "teachers," would learn.

Inspiration (continued from page 4) around their homes. Ultimately, we hoped they could have an understanding of the repercussions of their actions that goes beyond what most American

development so they do not exhaust the resources outside the Village. As just one person in this very large world, I have often felt powerless against the huge need for global cooperation and large-scale changes that the colossal damage to the environment has created. Working within Nyumbani proved to me that as one person, I can make an incredible difference. This is because the leaders of Nyumbani — Sister Mary, Nicholas Syano, the late Father D'Agostino, and many others — have demonstrated incredible perseverance through seemingly hopeless times, only to come out having successfully changed many lives for the better. Working with the children of the Nyumbani Village gave me hope that other people will feel enough responsibility to take the initiative to improve the world. The children's selflessness is truly inspiring because, despite the adversity they faced, they showed an interest in helping others and working to improve their home. Their ability to devote themselves to their peers, their fervor for learning and their unwavering work ethic present invaluable lessons to teach all of us.



Environmental club leaders (from left) Sarah Baranes, Sarah Bourne and Hannah Baranes with new friends.

kids know, and then be called to educate their peers about how they could help to better the environment.

As my fearless group leader Lloydie Zaiser put it: "The Village lives the way the rest of the world should," using alternative energy sources such as solar power and working towards sustainable



Jennifer Geiling (left) and Megan Mullally (right) with a proud new ambassador.

The Young Ambassadors Program in Washington, D.C. and the newly formed program in Kenya have made a great start in bringing students across the world together. Several students in the Village inquired about next summer's program and how they can stay involved throughout the year. I look forward to sharing information with anyone who is interested in taking on this task, but first you'll have to beat me there! (*Jen plans to return to Nyumbani Village to continue the Young Ambassadors Club or to offer an additional after-school program. Contact Lloydie Zaiser if you would like to join a four-week KEST service trip to the village.*)

We respect your privacy. We do not sell, trade or share our donors' personal or contact information.

If you wish to be added to, or removed from our mailing list; or require a correction to your information, please let us know at (202) 422-5024 or info@nyumbani.org

Sister Mary's Letter

(Continued from page 1)

Late last year, we identified the great need for a respite care center in Nyumbani Home for children from Lea Toto and the Nyumbani Village. Before we had the necessary arrangements in place, we received an urgent request just before Christmas to take Canary into care. He was 5 years old, weighed 8 kgs (about 18 pounds!), was malnourished and had TB. Now, 6 months later, he weighs 16 kgs (35 pounds), is TB free and his general condition is satisfactory. Another Lea Toto rescue situation arose when we discovered two HIV+ siblings, Reagan and Priscilla, living on a garbage dump with their grandmother and cousins. The elder child, Reagan, was so compromised we feared we would not be able to save him. A few months in Nyumbani, and he made a remarkable recovery, only to give us a fright when his blood count plummeted because of a reaction to one of the antiretroviral drugs. Thanks be to God, a week in the hospital, and he emerged ready to go! His 5-year-old sister was indistinguishable from the other Nyumbani Home children from day one. Then there

was Mata from Nyumbani Village who had a defective aorta valve. Happily, we managed to get the services of Heart Run, a cardiac program for children, and he is now recovering in the Nyumbani Home.

Our Nyumbani Home children had a special treat when the Kijabe American International School put on the musical "Joseph and his Amazing Technicolor Coat" in our Fr. Angelo D'Agostino Hall. They brought their own props and, for the first time, we saw the potential of the hall's stage. A visit from Oscar, the dog traveling the world, made for a fun-filled afternoon as the children chased him around. Other local groups also came to perform, all providing great cultural opportunities. This cultural exchange also is never one-sided as our children are often invited to perform at various functions.

Nyumbani Village building continues with extension of the Primary school, the building of the Secondary school and a Polytechnic Mechanics Unit. A group from Britain, Hands Around the World, came in June to help build a classroom block they funded. At the beginning of August, we had a group of 25 from Playing for Life, Ireland, who will help build and fund another classroom block and two houses.

The global financial crisis is now really be-

ing felt in Kenya. Our own first graduate, Dennis, was laid off at the end of May, but happily has another job. Despite the economic downturn, we continue to receive support from our local and international donors for which we are extremely grateful. We trust 'God will provide' as Fr. D'Agostino showed the way.

Sister Mary
Owens

..... Giving Made Easier

We have recently added a feature that makes gift giving easier. Instead of sending a check, those who would like to contribute can initiate a direct withdrawal from a savings or checking account. This can be a one time donation, or set up to occur each month automatically. Please visit our website at www.nyumbani.org or email the office at info@nyumbani.org for more information.



A sand dam

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Log for bee hive



A happy resident



The entrance to the Nyumbani Village at Kitui



Villages entertain visitors.



Working for others