

News on Nyumbani



The first facility for HIV positive orphans in Kenya.

www.nyumbani.org

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Third Quarter 2008

A Night to Remember

**Nyumbani 15th Annual
USA Benefit Dinner
Friday, September 26
The Embassy of Italy
Washington, D.C.**

Most people who have been involved with Nyumbani for any length of time recognize two names that appear frequently in regard to the Annual Fundraiser: Kathleen Matthews and Mark Russell. Both will be there this year, and both have been a part of the event many times with Kathleen serving as Mistress of Ceremonies and Mark entertaining the crowd.



Mark Russell at the 2005 Benefit

Kathleen was a news anchorwoman for many years in Washington, D.C. and is now an executive with Marriott Corporation. Mark is a political satirist and comedian whose enthusiastic witticisms are presented partly in song and piano. Two

Dear Friends of Nyumbani:

Blessings of peace to each one. It is summer in the USA, and many American friends have chosen to visit us. This is both affirming for us and also for our country Kenya in the aftermath of the post-election crisis.

For example, the past months brought the Global Environmental Management (GEM) team from Wisconsin University, the first two Kenya Educational Service Trips (K-E-S-T) groups, visitors from World Teach, Harvard University, (three of those visitors will teach in the Village for a year) and many others. Saturday, June 28 brought a surprise visit from actress Teri Hatcher and her family. Not only our Nyumbani Home children but also other children visiting that day recognized

other names, however, may be familiar from reading this newsletter. Protus Lumiti, General Manager of Nyumbani Children's Home and Dennis Buluma, the first young man to complete his stay with Nyumbani, who is now living independently, will be special guests at the event. A new entertainer this year will be singer/songwriter L'illon, who founded a genre of contemporary pop music. Also at the event will be both a silent and a live auction (see story, page 2), as well as items on display for sale that were handmade by women in the Lea Toto community outreach program (www.hopecraft.org) and jewelry made by Tomi Browne and friends (www.heartofthevillage.org).

Join us **September 26** for a pleasurable evening sharing our love and support of Nyumbani. For benefit details, visit www.nyumbani.org or call 202-342-8488.

Teri, to her great delight, and our dance group performed one of the "High School Musical" numbers for her. We really value our USA connections.

The Fr. Angelo D'Agostino Multi-Purpose Hall is now complete. On June 1, we had the blessing of the hall and the first Eucharist. Awe filled the air that Sunday as children and staff explored and rejoiced in its beauty and facilities. The hall now daily resounds with a variety of activities from indoor sports, art, music and dancing to liturgical celebrations, meetings and seminars. Currently, we are in the process of procuring equipment and setting up the Fr. Angelo D'Agostino memorial room. Our sincere gratitude to our donors, the majority of whom are from the USA.

The other big news from Nyumbani Home is that Donna Denelli-Hess, after a two-year struggle, has successfully concluded the adoption of Bernard Komu, who is 9 years old. Bernard and his adoptive mother leave for the USA in August. Words are inadequate to express our appreciation of Donna's extraordinary commitment to Bernard despite setback after setback. We are deeply grateful to her for pioneering the adoption of our first HIV+ child. The door is now open, and we look forward to others following suit to give parenting to orphaned HIV+ children, who are doubly challenged in life.

Over the past six months, we have noticed that the number of active Lea Toto children has only increased by 89, even though the monthly enrollment continues to average 100. Early analysis indicates that we are beginning to experience the effectiveness of the Prevention of Transmission from Mother to Child

(Continued on back)



Nyumbani through a Student's Eyes

By Nyumbani Volunteer Annie M. Bertholf



Annie and friends at Nyumbani

I began this summer with the trip of a lifetime on the maiden voyage of Lloydie Zaiser's K-E-S-T (Kenya Educational Service Trips – see Nyumbani's spring newsletter). Our primary focus was visiting the Nyumbani programs. I heard of Nyumbani through the Holton-Arms School in Bethesda, Maryland, where I am entering my senior year. Lloydie is the former director of community service programs and first introduced us to Nyumbani through a visit from Father D'Agostino.

Personally, I have found high school to be a minute-to-minute experience where I feel inconsequential much of the time. My experiences in Kenya profoundly changed that outlook. I can now say that I have a clearer dream of what I want to do with my life.

With the recent unrest in Kenya, my family initially discouraged my travels. Despite some uneasiness, however, I followed my heart. Some say it is best to "play it safe" but I believe there is always something to be gained from reaching beyond one's comfort zone, and that is exactly what I did. In Kenya, I found more welcome faces and open hands than anywhere I had ever been. I was humbled by the gentle nature and generosity of spirit in every person I met, from the driver at the airport to the staff at

Spurwing Travel & Tours and everyone at the Nyumbani Home. I was totally astounded with their joyfulness and eagerness to give their hearts and hugs to a complete stranger. We can learn much from the Kenyan people.

K-E-S-T exposed our group to three different lifestyle situations: the Nyumbani Orphanage, the Lea Toto program, and the Kitui Village. Each offered a glimpse into a unique way of coping with levels of impoverishment imposed by the AIDS crisis. Yet, despite the disease, one thing they all seemed to share is gratitude for what they do have, such as family, counseling and medical care.

At the Nyumbani Orphanage, the children impressed us with their big hearts and bright personalities, eagerness to help out, and their outstanding talents at singing, dancing and free-hand drawing, to name a few. At Lea Toto, the situation was more dire, but those we met through Lea Toto in Kangemi and Kibera exhibited bravery in the face of adversity unlike any I had ever seen. For instance, members of our group visited a woman in Kibera and went to her tiny shop where we purchased some of the jewelry she had made, prompting her to comment, "Today I can eat." In contrast to the situation in the slums, Kitui Village struck a chord in me for a different rea-

son. There, the children darted to school every morning to get the maximum amount of daylight for studying. Comparing this image to my own feelings toward school and homework was a major wake-up call for me.

As a finale to the Kenyan experience, we traveled to the Masai Mara where we were eye-to-eye with magnificent animals and were invited to participate in the Masai culture. The hospitality of the tribesmen made it surprisingly easy to be comfortable surrounded by a circle of villagers, haggling with the chief's son for a pair of salad spoons. I even made a point to get up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom, just to experience being escorted by a Masai warrior. To complete our safari, we spent the night at a fenceless lodge in the heart of Lake Nakuru. Our final night was then spent back among the children of Nyumbani, where we said our sad goodbyes.

I would like to thank the people of Kenya and, most particularly, the children of Nyumbani for what they instilled in my heart, a piece of which I left with them. Because of my experiences, I look forward to returning one day. I also want to thank Mrs. Zaiser for being a wonderful friend and the mentor who brought Nyumbani into my life.

Benefit Dinner Offers Auction Options

By Gail Dalferes Condrey, Auction Chairperson

The COGRF Annual Benefit Auction Committee has been hard at work to bring new and exciting options to the annual event. The challenges of the economy affect our organization by reducing the impact of each dollar. We need to raise more money to sustain existing programs but also to provide services to meet the children's changing situations. To answer those needs, we have challenged ourselves to enhance your ability to join us in the fundraising aspect of this year's dinner by offering a broad selection of silent auction deals along with a live auction during the event on September 26.

This year's Silent Auction includes a wide range of items including weekend getaways

to a cabin in the Shenandoah, the St. Regis hotel in The District of Columbia or a bed and breakfast in Lincoln MA; various drawings by local African artists and longtime Nyumbani supporters; special group events like a 'design & dine' party with Tomi Browne or a dinner hosted by USA Board President Marilyn Jerome; and many more items that will allow people to shop for family, friends or themselves while supporting Nyumbani.

We will also have a live auction during the program following dinner. Lucky winners will go home with a getaway to a vacation home in the Dominican Republic; an all inclusive week at one of two luxury homes in Jamaica; fine jewelry including strings of pearls or a diamond cross; a shopping party for 20 at Hu's Shoes in fashionable Georgetown; even a baby grand piano. The full list of all auction items is available at www.nyumbani.org under USA Annual Event.

We know you have many charitable organizations to choose from and appreciate more than ever the donations you direct to Nyumbani. I leave you with the thought that the holidays are just around the corner—so plan on shopping with us this year! We look forward to seeing you in September.



Shoppers at the 2007 Silent Auction

Toiling Alongside Villagers Shows Different Kind of "Rich"

By Nyumbani Village Volunteer Jim Hunt

Editor's Note: Hands Around the World (HATW) is a United Kingdom-registered charitable trust devoted to sending short-term volunteers to help in developing countries. The organization has sent over 300 volunteers around the world since it was started in 1994. For information on the organization, go to www.hatw.org.uk

My wife Jean and I had already completed three months in 2007 as volunteers for HATW at Nyumbani Village when I was asked to lead a team of seven HATW volunteers. The new team was to spend a month at Nyumbani Village in 2008 to help build two more family houses.

Our team was an interesting combination of six women, one man—ages 23 to 63, with various occupational backgrounds including engineering, teaching, nursing, administration and public transport.

Three members of the team had been on previous HATW projects in Africa, and the other four members had heard about such projects through friends who experienced other HATW ventures. What we had in common is that all of us were leaving behind family, friends and jobs for one of the most memorable months of our lives. None of us had any particular expertise in building, but we all had enthusiasm and a willingness to offer any practical help we could to this remarkable project. After six months of fundraising activities and meetings to prepare us for our trip, we finally arrived in Nyumbani Village in June 2008.

The local builders we were to work alongside for the next month looked quite bemused when we arrived on site on day one—I don't think we were quite what they were expecting! However, as we labored alongside them each day, what we lacked in skill, we made up for in effort and enthusiasm; and we were quickly accepted as useful members of their team.

Each morning we would arrive on site at 8 a.m. and spend the next eight hours carrying and laying the hydraform bricks [bricks that can be made using local soil and cement] and assisting the skilled local builders in whatever they directed us to do. I have never seen people work as hard or as cheerfully as those local people did. Morning break each day we shared cups of hot sweet tea and conversation around the fire with our new friends, which became a special time for us all and just one of the many precious memories we took away from our time there. Although we worked hard, to see two completed houses at the end of our month's work was such a satisfying feeling—well

worth every aching muscle and blister gathered along the way.

For those of you who wonder what life in Nyumbani Village is like at present: it's basic in many ways—we had no electricity, water was collected each day from a standpipe, squat "eco-toilets" are in use on site, and a shower consists of cold water poured over

were pleased with what we had achieved, but by the time our project came to an end, we realized we had received far more than we had given. While it is extremely rewarding to see a building finished because of your efforts, the friendship you



The volunteers had little building experience but villagers welcomed their help.

your head. But the Village is rich in so many other ways—the overwhelming generosity of these people who have so little in terms of wealth, the lack of traffic noise or pollution, the amazing landscape and the huge sky—these people live a slow pace of life due to the sheer remoteness of the area. But their existence is far from "poor." It's amazing how quickly this simple way feels natural and in many ways preferable to our consumer-driven societies where everything is rush, rush, rush, and image and appearance seem to matter so much.

The families living in the Village welcomed us with open arms, and it was a great privilege for us to be accepted so readily into their community. Most of the villagers are of the Kamba tribe, and we were all soon given Kamba names. Living and working alongside these people each day, sharing in their celebrations, and on occasion their sadnesses, learning about their traditions and culture and sharing some of ours with them, have all been experiences none of our team would have missed for the world. Even when you don't speak the same language, it's amazing how much can be conveyed through a smile, a warm handshake or a hug.

Like all volunteers, we embarked on our project with the intention of giving of ourselves—of our time and of our abilities. We were conscious of the friends at home who had so generously supported us in our fundraising efforts, and we didn't want to let them down in any way. We worked hard and

share along the way and the insights you gain into another culture are priceless.

Nyumbani Village exists to offer a better future for the children and elderly. It is a village of hope and opportunity—Father D'Agostino left an amazing legacy. When we awoke each morning at 6:30 a.m., children were already eagerly running to school after having completed morning household chores. At the end of a day's work, we loved to walk the Village visiting the grandparents and seeing the children, who had been through so much—now safe and well cared for, laughing as they played together. When the day of departure arrived it was hard to leave our new "family" who had welcomed us so warmly into their community and their lives. As we said our goodbyes, the children sang us a song of blessing, wishing us a safe journey home. The whole experience was one we are so thankful to have had, and it is certainly one we will never forget. I hope one day we will be able to return to meet the families who will be living in the homes we built.

Sister Mary's Letter

(Continued from page 1)

program. A majority of our new enrollments are babies under six months who test positive at birth because of carrying the mother's antibodies. However, now that we have access to the Dried Blood Spot Test, the true status of these babies can be determined much earlier and those who are negative can be discharged. For example, we discharged 221 between January and June this year.

Nyumbani Village stands to increase considerably in number now that 22 family houses are complete. The last two were built by a unique team of seven volunteers from Hands around the World (HATW), Britain, in collaboration with our local contractors (See page 3). The team of six women and one man caused quite a stir as they proved able to match the building capacity of our mainly male local teams.

Hotcourses' children hit the headlines again when their choir came in first in the Zonal and District Music Festival competitions and fourth at the Provincial level. Eyes are now set on reaching the National Level in 2009. However, one girl in the Nyumbani Home has already made that target with her

school verse-speaking team, and we are all eagerly awaiting how they will perform when they face competition from all over Kenya.

The Village Sustainability Program is currently receiving a great boost with help from the GEM Team from Wisconsin University led by John Sheffy. Recycled-water drip irrigation in family home gardens is now installed; extra wood lots are planted; and the Forest Project announced by John Noel at the 2007 USA Benefit has gotten off the ground. After much research, the hardwood *Melia Volkensii* was finally identified as the most suitable for our Village climate. Fifty acres have now been cleared, a solar pump with irrigation system installed and seeds procured. We will plant when the rains come in October. Our deep gratitude to John and Patty Noel who are funding this project, which stands to generate considerable income after 10 years.

One of the GEM Team is an entomologist who specializes in tropical insects. She is helping us to deal with an invasive beetle attacking the leaves of the jatropha plants. Kenya is joining the rest of the world in the search for a substitute for fossil fuel. Jatropha is receiving great publicity, with Kitui identified as one of the areas most suited to the plant. We hope to be at the forefront of this development.

Like everywhere, the cost of fuel is skyrock-

eting here, with food costs equally rising. Currently we are experiencing 30 percent inflation, throwing our budgets into disarray. However, donors continue to support us, and every so often we also get the surprise large donation, all of which keep reminding us of Father D'Agostino's firm belief: God will provide. We also believe that God is looking after Sammy even though this defies human reasoning (See the Summer issue of *News on Nyumbani*). Please continue to keep him in your prayers.

May God continue to provide and care for each of you as God does for us in Nyumbani,

**Sister Mary
Owens**

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Photos of the Village at Kitui courtesy of Jim and Jean Hunt.

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