

News on Nyumbani



The first facility for HIV positive orphans in Kenya.

www.nyumbani.org

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Father D'Ag's 80th Birthday



UK Board Member Jann Eastwood presents Father D'Ag with a painting.



The children sang and danced in celebration of Father D'Ag's special day.



Joe D'Ag presented his brother a check representing gifts from more than 200 relatives and friends in the USA, UK, Italy and Kenya. More than \$16,000 was raised for Father D'Ag's causes.

Dear Friends of Nyumbani:

Thanks to modern medicine, the ever present Providence of God and ancestors with sturdy genes, I reached four score years last month (January 26). The children put on an all-day festival, which they enjoyed almost as much as I did. A multitude of friends from near and far surprised me with a dazzling evening coordinated by my brother Joe D'Agostino, who came from the USA and whose creativity helped to make it a memorable event. The many kind remarks of my friends were enjoined by words from Rolf Schmidt, proprietor of the Nairobi venue, The Bedouin Lounge. Even the staff and workers at the Village joined in by putting on a local talent show and offering three chickens, a goat and a sheep. Finally, the intrepid Erin Melendy put her outstanding mark on the event with a Memory Book to which so many old friends and relatives contributed. It is a treasure beyond value.

Also, Erin's and Joe's efforts to put together a monetary donation gift celebrating my 80th were more than successful and the generous amount of money gathered will fulfill a unique need destined to benefit the poor and needy people of Kenya. To so many who so generously contributed to this part of my 80th celebration, a sincere thanks.

The month of January also saw the historical meeting of the leaders and some members of the four Nyumbani Boards: Kenya, USA, UK and Italy. Two days of well-planned agendas and hearty fellowship were facilitated by the talented Stuart Eastwood from the UK accompanied by his wife and fellow Board Member, Jann Eastwood. Ben Palumbo, Dino De Concini and Joe

D'Agostino from the USA visited the Village. Admiral Marcello and Rosalba DeDonno from Italy enjoyed the wonderful hospitality of the Severini family, who live near Nyumbani. They were joined by the indefatigable Adriana DePero on a second trip to the Village. Our Kenyan colleagues—Dr. Dominic Makawiti, Ambassador Denis Afande and Paula Lanco—were also with us at the meeting. Thanks to everyone, our goals were accomplished (see Ben Palumbo's remarks, page 2), but just as importantly, names that were only email addresses are now good friends and members of the Nyumbani family.

With regard to the Village, another milestone was reached January 27 when our water system was activated. Right in the face of a disastrous drought, we saw life-giving fluid flowing from a 2-inch pipe. This miracle was helped along by volunteer Aldo Magazzeni, who dropped by one day to say hello. He has been a God-send and appreciated by all.

In conclusion, 2006 has begun most auspiciously on so many counts. As I thank God for His many blessings personally and for taking care of the children in need, I again want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the multitude of people who made the "80s" fund a reality, and who contributed in so many ways to the birthday. I also want to thank those who made the "summit" meeting a great success. May God bless you abundantly for your kindness and make this a banner year for each and every one of you.

Fr. Angelo D'Agostino, SJ,
MD





Men and women are learning skills side by side in their effort to build the Village at Kitui.

Dear Nyumbani,

My wife, Ambassador Luba Acevska, and I visited Father D'Ag and Nyumbani over the Christmas Holidays. We have long been supporters, but there is nothing like being there. We were struck by the skill, compassion and dedication of the staff, and the extraordinary joy and trust of the children as they welcomed us as strangers and left us as friends.

We also visited the Village, which is rising from the earth of Kitui, a three-hour, hard drive from Nairobi. When we learned that the famous Norfolk Hotel in Nairobi will soon be renovated and remodeled by its new owners, we got in touch with the General Manager and are working to have furnishings that may be discarded sent instead to the orphanage and the Village.

We urge all Nyumbani supporters to really get acquainted with the Village concept as we believe it represents the second phase of Father D'Ag's important work and should receive our support and generosity.

Joseph R. Novello, MD

(The Novellos were visitors to Nyumbani in December).

A copy of the latest U.S. financial report and official registration filed by the Children of God Relief Fund, Inc. can be obtained by contacting COGRF, Inc. at 3050 K St. NW, Suite 400, Washington, D.C. 20007-5108, or by calling (202) 342-8488. Residents of the following states may also obtain this information by contacting: NEW YORK - New York State Attorney General's Charities Bureau, Attn: FOIL Officer, 120 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10271; VIRGINIA - Division of Consumer Affairs, P.O. Box 526, Richmond, Va. 22304. Registration with these governmental agencies does not imply endorsement, approval, or recommendation by the state.

President's Message

On January 20-21, 2006, a major event occurred — not a headline-grabbing, worldwide occurrence, but definitely an event of note in the progress of Nyumbani. For the first time ever, the presidents of the four national boards that support this estimable project—this dream that has become a reality; this model of the beatitudes in action—gathered to meet each other and to plan for Nyumbani's future. The meeting, which was held in Nairobi, brought together Dominic Makawiti of Kenya, Dean of the Nairobi Medical School; Stuart Eastwood of the UK, retired head of East African operations for Coca-Cola; Marcello DeDonno, retired Chief of Staff of the Italian Navy; and me in my capacity as president in the U.S. Other board members from the four countries, including Joseph D'Agostino and Dino DiConcini from the USA, also participated in this noteworthy event, as well as Father D'Ag and Sister Mary, of course.

The meeting was necessary because, like the parable of the mustard seed, Nyumbani is tiny no longer. For example, while the Nyumbani orphanage remains our crown jewel, its needs have grown with its size. Land has been acquired for an expansion of the physical facilities, more children will be cared for on site, and growing educational demands must be met.

Meanwhile, Lea Toto, the program that reaches out to those in the awful slums of Nairobi, will be serving over 2,500 children and their families by this June. With major assistance from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), this holistic approach to meeting the desperate needs of children and their families will continue to grow, but with no guarantee that the USAID funding will last after 2007. Yet by 2008, the target for children served will be 6,000.

Also, the Nyumbani diagnostic lab, which is critical both to our own efforts and to the community in general, is the most advanced in all of Kenya. To remain so will require constant attention to advances in precision equipment, and the wherewithal to purchase that equipment. As an example of how costly that can be, the last piece of equipment we bought cost \$35,000.

Finally, there is the Village at Kitui. It is impossible to describe what you feel when, after driving for hours over bumpy roads (the shock absorber business in Kenya must be hugely profitable), through arid conditions, parched vegetation and an absence of human shelter—suddenly, you come upon a large water storage tank, then a dam, and finally a cluster of brick homes surrounded by a beehive of activity. This Village has

been created by people trained to do things they didn't know how to do before Father D'Ag created this opportunity: to make bricks; excavate for foundations; manufacture windows; and erect structures. Both men and women have been taught skills that will last a lifetime; they are earning a living while honing those skills. Thirty-two homes have been completed and progress is nearly complete on school buildings, a clinic, a town hall, and a police facility; the foundations also have been laid for buildings where the villagers will turn harvests into marketable products so they can reach self-sustainability. Over a thousand souls will live there when the Village is complete. Yet financing has yet to be assembled.

It's remarkable that the Nyumbani effort



The Village at Kitui is taking shape as workers turn arid ground into a place of hope.

began with one HIV orphan found by Father D'Ag and has grown to help thousands of people, and it could not have happened without the support of thousands of contributors, friendly governments, and multiple hundreds of volunteers who have been drawn to this vision. However, reliable long-term support is clearly needed to assure this growth continues and answer the risks that the ebb and flow of giving and the always potential changes in government policy pose to stability. This first-ever meeting in Nairobi was planned to provide international coordination of efforts so that Nyumbani's future and the futures of those to whom it brings hope will be secure.

Father D'Ag, Sister Mary and their dedicated and capable staff are inspirations to us all. We know the volunteers do wonderful work. But realizing that so many children have been saved and there is so much more to do is what drove this meeting. I hope it will drive all of you as well, for you are most needed.

Father D'Ag summed up our feelings in remarks at the end of the two days. As he said, "You have been sent by God." I cannot speak for my colleagues, but those words startled and unsettled me. No one has ever said such a thing to me in such a personal way. This was not just another Sunday sermon; it was an undeniable clarification of my personal responsibility toward my fellow human beings. I am sure Father D'Ag meant those words for all of us who have helped him live the commands of the Gospels.

COGRF President Ben Palumbo

The Streets of Kibera

By Jeff Browne, who visited Nyumbani in December with his wife Tomi and their three sons, Christopher, Andrew and Stephen.

Kibera is Africa's largest slum—estimates range from 800,000 to over 1 million people or about half of Nairobi's residents (who live in just 5 percent of the land area). Yet Kibera doesn't exist on a map because it is an illegal encroachment on public land. Still, the vast majority of its residents pay \$5 to \$10 a month to true slum lords for one-room structures with dirt floors and mud walls. Understandably, untreated children have a high mortality rate...half die before the age of five from TB, AIDS or malaria.

Kibera is built on a steep slope—small businesses are centralized at the top along with nicer structures that house residents. The nicest structures might rise to the level of “lean-to” in the United States, but not much more. To see Kibera is to see long rows of corrugated metal roofs sitting atop mud walls with living spaces separated by bed sheets.

The deeper one goes into the valley on which Kibera is built, the more desperate the living conditions. The paths get narrower and wander arbitrarily as those who walk them literally sink deeper into the mud of the slum. The stench is overwhelming, and like in Dante's inferno, one descends into more terrible rings of hell as one travels until reaching the bottom of the valley where the streams of waste trickle down to form a small, completely polluted river. Yet children play happily there and pose for pictures with big smiles on their faces, oblivious to the human disaster around them.

It is only a question of time before the entire water table in Kibera is unfit for human consumption, even by marginal slum standards. Residents regularly use plastic shop-



A small Kibera resident navigates the narrow passageways.

ping bags as toilets and fling them into the narrow alleys—a practice called “flying toilets.” But in a place with no indoor plumbing and astronomical crime rates at night, throwing waste out the door becomes a reasonable practice. That it is a health hazard is meaningless when life is so fragile.

Crime is a serious issue in Kibera. The four of us were surrounded by aides from the clinic and a volunteer. We were told to wear no jewelry, carry no visible cameras, and bring no money. At one point, I wanted to take a picture along railroad tracks and was told not to do so because of “bad men” hovering in the direction I aimed the camera. Over half the girls here have been raped by age 14; and many of them end up pregnant with HIV. It was hard to imagine surviving even a night there, let alone a lifetime.

Yet with all this hardship, we were never asked for handouts by anyone.

While there, we visited several homes that have children in the Lea Toto outreach program. Tall people like me have to bend down to walk in the low and narrow passageways. An open drain runs down the middle of the dirt walkway, and I braced myself on mud walls on either side to avoid stepping in it.

The homes are tiny by any standard, minuscule for the five or more people living in each one. The “living room” where we were received was about the size of a small rug. Typically, we sat on a couch that must double as a bed and wondered what we were going to say. At one home, I asked about news articles attached to the walls only to learn they were part of the insulation. We found out how many children were living there and which were part of the Lea Toto program. Sometimes we asked what kind of work the adult living there did—all have jobs and are trying desperately to provide for their families. Yet they asked nothing of us, and everyone was pleasant.

At one home we met the widower of a woman who died two days before. He wepted inconsolably while we were there. We were not asked for money but learned he needed to ship his wife's body back to where she was born, a widespread tribal custom in Africa, but he had no idea where he would get the fabulous sum (for him—for us, a pittance) required. Tomi pressed some money into his hands as we left. Later we learned before his wife got sick, he used to get drunk and beat her — his nurturing skills kicked in when it was too late to help her.

We didn't see it while there, but others who visited wondered why so many Kibera children carry containers of glue. The quick answer is that glue is the poor man's highly



Tomi Browne holds a child in the Lea Toto program.

addictive drug and some children are using it, despite potential effects on brain development. The tougher answer is that glue also dampens the constant hunger pangs. What a terrible choice.

Part of the film “The Constant Gardener” is set in Kibera. Based on the book by John Le Carre, it is about an unscrupulous company that tests its new drugs on Kibera residents with disastrous results. We watched the movie on the flight home. The movie notes indicate that after visiting there, the cast set up a trust fund for Kibera residents...pretty amazing for a city that doesn't even exist on a map. And lest you think this story is depressing—think again. There was hope, pride, and respect among the people living in squalor. What's needed is to nurture those positive human impulses and give these people opportunity.



The children of Kibera don't know their lives aren't like other youth around the world.

Visiting Nyumbani and Kenya

By *Kathleen Matthews*

Kathleen Matthews is news anchor for Channel 7, ABC-TV. She has served as mistress of ceremonies at Nyumbani's fundraisers in the USA. She tells here what this year's visit between her family and the Nyumbani family was like.

The spirit and mission of Nyumbani grows in our hearts with every visit. We feel truly "at home" when we arrive at the front gate, proceed down the brick driveway, and see Protus' welcoming smile. This year, our daughter, 16-year-old Caroline, brought two big duffle bags of King Kong T-shirts for the children donated by Suzanne Wright, wife of NBC-Universal CEO Bob Wright. With the children on school break, the orphanage was alive and bustling with activity and visitors.

Father D'Agostino showed us plans for a new dormitory for the older children on the adjacent property where his office is now located. We were impressed with the growth and professionalism of the whole operation since our first visit in 1999. We were also impressed with plans and construction progress for the new Nyumbani Village, which we know will truly be a role model for intergenerational care for the survivors of the AIDS pandemic in Africa.

Caroline remained at the orphanage for a

week to work with the children. It was an experience that will shape her views about global health and about the U.S.' responsibility to those in the world who need our help. She told us how one of the orphans asked if she wanted to meet his friend. Holding her hand, he took her to the small cemetery at the back of the property to see his gravesite. It was a moment she'll never forget and confirmed her resolve to continue raising money for Nyumbani through her AIDS Awareness Club at Georgetown Visitation School. Later in our visit, our two boys were able to spend a night with Caroline at the orphanage, and they also came away with a broadened view.

For the first time during this visit, I had a chance to broaden my own view by visiting the Lea Toto Outreach program in the Kibera slums with Tomi Browne (see story, page 3) and one of the sisters who works with hundreds of children at the clinic there. It was an experience I'll never forget. "The Constant Gardener" was filmed here, and the scenes it depicts are true to life — not just Hollywood sets. Millions of people live with no running water, sewage system or electricity. The Mombasa train track splits the shanty town in half, and children scatter as the trains barrel through the sea of people. The typical home we visited was 6 feet by 6

feet with a corrugated tin roof, cardboard walls, dirt floor, single bed for as many as six people, wooden plank and tree stumps for dining, and a giant pot for a kitchen. When you pull away the sheet that serves as a front door of one of these structures, it's pitch black inside. Yet amidst this squalor, Nyumbani is offering medical care, counseling and now in some cases, the anti-retroviral drugs some children need to live. Most importantly, though, what Nyumbani offers is hope.

This was our family's third visit to Nyumbani, and we are so impressed with the spirit and energy of the children as well as how the antiretroviral drugs have brought them good health. The challenge is offering not only this hope but a plan for the future as these children mature into adults. Nyumbani is an organization that gives meaning to our family's life, and we are forever grateful to Father D'Agostino for bringing us into his "home."

Kathleen, Chris, Caroline, Michael and Thomas Matthews



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