

# News on Nyumbani



The first facility for HIV positive orphans in Kenya.

[www.nyumbani.org](http://www.nyumbani.org)

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## New Roles for Father D'Ag & Sister Mary



Sister Mary Owens

Sister Mary Owens and Father D'Agostino recently took on new roles at Nyumbani. Father D'Ag took on the title of Founder & Medical Director Emeritus. He will spend less time on day-to-day operations and more time on funding efforts.

Sister Mary Owens, who has been with Nyumbani from its inception, has become the Executive Director.

*The Nyumbani family was greatly saddened recently by the death of George L.J. Dalferes, who served as Nyumbani's U.S. President from 1995 to 1998. Dalferes' leadership and generosity towards the Nyumbani effort contributed greatly to its current rate of growth and its success. Memorial services were held in November.*

## My Dear Friends in the U.S.,

As I write this, I am looking forward to Thanksgiving Day. By the time you read my words, however, we will all be looking forward to Christmas. Both are special times of the year during which we stop to reflect on how truly blessed we've been.

This year I give thanks for:

- ❖ The growth of the Nyumbani family from three little children to the hundred at the Children's Residence today, the thousands helped through several Lea Toto offices, and the hundreds that will benefit from the Nyumbani Village in Kitui.
- ❖ The wonderful assistance over these years from Sister Mary Owens, a dedicated and loyal champion of the children of Nyumbani. It is good to know that governance of these operations will be supervised by a woman who cares as deeply as I do and whose experience will guide us going forward as I step back from daily duties and spend time finding ways to accomplish the goals we have all set.
- ❖ All who have assisted us in the growth of the Village and especially for the recent grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development (see page 2).
- ❖ The imminent arrival of 40 persons who will be the first group of children and grandparents to move into and become the citizens of the Nyumbani Village.
- ❖ The generous people in many cities and nations who have walked beside us as we developed our plans.
- ❖ The largest USA Benefit ever, which brought so many friends together in September (see page 2). There are far too many to name, but I do want to thank President Ben Palumbo, who presided over his third Benefit and led us to new heights, as well as MaryLynn Qurnell, who is rapidly becoming the most successful party-thrower in Washington.
- ❖ LeMoyne College, Syracuse, whose administrators graciously invited me to their campus and awarded me an honorary degree. The president and faculty could not have been more cordial and generous to me and to the Nyumbani Village.
- ❖ Dr. Paul Perito, who invited me to Miami for a second fund-raising event he organized. The results were overwhelming and the children and the Village will be assisted greatly by the generosity.
- ❖ Mr. Anthony Schopp and Dr. Bob DiBenedetto, who invited me to Savannah to be the guest speaker at their Annual Columbus Day Italian Heritage Society Dinner, an unforgettable evening for me.

I also want to give thanks that the Lord has given me the opportunity to work with you and for the Nyumbani family. With your help, we will continue on for many years to come.

The message of Christmas for both children and adults is the universal longing for peace, brotherhood and joy in the world. We join with you in praying that the year 2007 will bring all of us those blessings in abundance.

God bless you and your families.

Fr. Angelo D'Agostino, SJ, MD



## USAID Helps with Village Funding

With great joy, Nyumbani received word recently that the U.S. Agency for International Development granted half a million dollars to help make the Nyumbani Village at Kitui a reality. The funds were granted after much effort by Jim Desmond, Larry Byrne and Mike Sherwin from the U.S. board in presenting a case for the sustainability of the village.

The money allowed the Village to move forward so that the first residents could move in and begin working toward bringing in more people at a rate of about 66 orphans and six caregivers per quarter.



## A Special Visit to the U.S.

One of Nyumbani's children made a trip to the U.S. in October for a very special reason: to get his hearing back.

Mungai, accompanied by Sister Julie, traveled to Philadelphia for an implant at Children's Hospital to restore hearing damage that occurred two years ago from an HIV-related infection. He will be in the U.S. several months recovering from surgery.

Mungai's trip will mean a drastically changed life for the young man. If you'd like to contribute to the fund set up to make the implant a reality, use the enclosed envelope and designate "funds for Mungai."

## 2006 Nyumbani Benefit & Silent Auction

A record 300 people attended the 13th annual benefit dinner for Nyumbani, which was Sept. 26 in Washington, D.C. A silent auction held during the event raised over \$14,000 for the cause, with the top prize of a week in a Jamaican Villa going to Gail Dalferes and Bailey Condrey.

The funds raised from the benefit dinner come in over an extended period, but at press time, it was close to \$175,000.

A special tribute was paid to Father D'Agostino this year to note his changing role in the organization (see page one).



Steve Ross entertained with his special caberet style.



Comedian Mark Russell, a long-time friend of Father D'Ag, was on-hand not to work, but to reiterate his support.



Twelve people were honored with Medallions of Hope. Among them were Stanley Waringo (left), George Shoup (right), Jack and Michele Dausman (bottom left) Aldo Magazzeni (bottom middle) and Susan Dillon Gold (bottom right).



Photography courtesy of Richard Latoff Photography, [www.latoff.com](http://www.latoff.com).



## The 2006 Nyumbani Award Honorees

Each year Nyumbani gives out its highest honor to people who have given outstanding service to Nyumbani and its programs. The Medallions of Hope are presented by Father D'Ag during the Annual Nyumbani Benefit and Silent Auction. The honorees' contributions are too broad to list in one article, and many have donated efforts over a number of years. However, the honorees and a sample of this years contributions include:

**Jeffrey Browne**, CEO, CapAd Communications, Inc.— spearheaded the Nyumbani computer center

**Tomi Browne**, Au.D., Founder, Heart of the Village, Doctoral Professor of Audiology, Pennsylvania College of Optometry and Audiology—created a fundraising bead project

**Jack Dausman**, Director, ICI System, Inc.— helped set up the Nyumbani computer center

**Michele Dausman**, OTR—spearheaded a family volunteer effort

**Donna Denilli-Hess**, MSPH, MA, Director of Health Education and Counselor, Williams College—taught and mentored children at the orphanage and worked in the daycare center

**Deborah Foss**, PhD, Professor of Psychology and Coordinator of Advising, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts—taught and mentored children at the orphanage and worked in the daycare center

**Susan Dillon Gold**, Pediatric Nurse Clinician, University of Wisconsin Children's Hospital, —volunteer nurse for Lea Toto, first RN to become a Fullbright Scholar

**Aldo Magazzeni**, Chief Executive Officer, Champion Fasteners—designed and installed the water delivery system for Kitui

**Rebecca Schmitt**, Social Insurance Specialist, Social Security Administration—heads the U.S. effort to screen volunteers

**George D. Shoup**, MD, Retired Physician—gave medical aid and personal support to Lea Toto families on three separate occasions.

**Paul Shoup**, Owner, Strategis, Inc.—built furniture and volunteered for Nyumbani Village

**Stanley Waringo**, Marketing Analyst, Advanced Micro Devices—biked 2,900 miles across the U.S. to raise money and awareness for Nyumbani

## The Baluch Family

# Two Girls from Nyumbani Now Live in US

Shelley Baluch believes it was God's providence both that she be given Vashti and Iman as daughters and that they would spend their lives as sisters.

Baluch and husband Issa adopted the two girls as babies from the Nyumbani orphanage in the early 1990s. The Baluchs, who were living in Dubai, UAE at the time, heard of Nyumbani because of an earlier attempt to adopt a little girl later found to be HIV+. Because of UAE's policies, they could not bring the girl into that country and, desperate to find her a home, they turned to Nyumbani for help. Some months later, they learned about Iman at the orphanage, who was 7 months old and ready for adoption. When Baluch came to Kenya to look into adopting Iman, she discovered a second little girl at the orphanage – 14-month-old Vashti, “and I knew my life would not be complete without her,” Shelley says.

When Shelley looked into the girls' backgrounds, she discovered a miracle.

“I found out that Iman and Vashti had both come from young, unmarried girls who left their babies at the same nursing hospital in hopes they would have a better life. The two babies laid side by side on the same bed for a month before each of them was brought to Nyumbani,” Shelley explains.

What's more, Iman lay gravely ill, born prematurely with all sorts of health problems in a hospital with little hope of solving them.

“This wonderful intern name Carolyn Odula kept after the nurses not to let the baby die – feeding her (and Vashti) on cow's milk through a straw and keeping her warm with a hot water bottle.”

Iman now carries that intern's name – Iman Caroline Odula Baluch – and the last time the Baluchs were in touch, Odula was studying to be a doctor.

### Coming to the States

The girls grew up in Dubai where the Baluchs lived for 30 years, raising four children they had by birth before adopting the Nyumbani girls and later, two younger African girls.

About two years ago, the family decided to move to the United States and settled in Hendersonville, N.C. (Shelley is from South Carolina, while Issa was raised in East Africa). They moved here because the couple felt it was time the girls were exposed to a culture of opportunity, as well as a country “that makes it easy to adopt a child and has given the girls citizenship,” Shelley said.

The Baluchs are not the typical American family, however, as the girls have no portable game players or even cable television. Shelley, who had home schooled the adopted children when they lived in the UAE, enrolled the older

girls in public school with some trepidation, but she says “they've done extremely well mostly because we have a strong family with a schedule that allows little time to hang out at a mall,” Shelley says.

Instead, the girls are very involved in music and church. Both girls play the flute and piano and sing in a choir. In fact, the whole family is musical – everyone plays an instrument and sings. At family get-togethers, “we all put on a concert,” Shelley says.

This December, the girls will be returning to Nyumbani for a second visit (the first was when they were nine), then spending about

five months back in Dubai because “The girls really miss my birth children, as well as my grandbaby – they are family,” Shelley explains.

Shelley says her dream is that one day the girls will make a decision to return to Africa to serve in some capacity.

“I've encouraged our kids to practice ‘pure religion’ by taking care of people in need or pursuing medicine. If that's the route they choose, I certainly will endorse it,” Shelley says.

## A Mother-to-Be Explains Why She's Adopting

by Donna Denelli-Hess, MSPH, MA

At 57 years old, I never could have imagined my life taking this direction. After the unexpected death of my husband, I was left with an unimaginable emptiness in my life. I not only lost the man I loved for 25 years, I lost my best friend, my compass and my faith in God. An unexpected turn of events brought me to Kenya in 2004 and before my six-week trip was over I was one of those visitors to Nyumbani who came by for a “look-see” that led to two additional extended trips to volunteer.

In the process, I came to know and love Bernard Komu, a six-year-old boy living in Cottage E. In the span of two years, I have seen him blossom from a shy sickly boy who seemed to always be in the background of life at Nyumbani to a eight-year-old who is happy and healthy (his blood work is now comparable to a typical non-HIV+ eight-year-old in the U.S.). I think we have an unconditional agreement to be part of each other's futures.

I am now in the process of adopting Bernard, having completed my home study and submitted the necessary paperwork to Homeland Security. I return to Nyumbani in December to celebrate Christmas with the children and begin the Kenyan side of the process. Ababu Namwamba (an advocate/lawyer in Kenya who is also a member of the Kenyan Nyumbani Board of Directors) has agreed to represent me in my quest to bring Bernard to his new home in western Massachusetts. From the moment he arrives, Bernard will be embraced by my family and friends, who are eager to be a part of the next chapter of his childhood.

Although my immediate goal is to be successful in adopting Bernard, I believe that cases such as this could serve another purpose – to raise awareness that there are healthy HIV+ children at Nyumbani who can be adopted into loving homes. Sister Julie (Nyumbani's volunteer coordinator) has said that if Becki Schmitt (another volunteer seeking to adopt) and I are successful, she will personally write to every Catholic diocese in the US seeking families to give the gift of a future to Nyumbani's children. At the same time, this will open more spaces at Nyumbani for the more sickly children referred through the Lea Toto program.

So, with Nyumbani's blessings and God's providence, this 57-year-old is about to become a mother for the first time. What I have learned from Nyumbani over the past two years is love, purpose, kindness and a faith that goes beyond anything I ever thought possible. I only hope that I have shared these lessons with the children and staff I have come to know and respect. Because of Nyumbani, I know I can give of myself, rather than giving up.



# A Goodbye from Ben Palumbo

**A**t the end of 2006, I will have completed three years as President of the U.S. board for Nyumbani. It has been a great privilege.

A new president will be selected in December to carry on Nyumbani's life-saving work, helped along by all of you who read this newsletter, as well as the talented staff in Kenya, and the board here in the U.S. I am confident that together, all of us can continue to achieve great progress.

Our present board has been dedicated to Father D'Ag's vision; they have worked hard, and they have used their knowledge and enthusiasm to further that vision. I thank them for their efforts in helping the Nyumbani programs grow beyond the orphanage: the Lea Toto program now reaches into the horrible Nairobi slums helping thousands of children and their families; and, the Village has arisen in an arid section of Kenya to provide a new life for hundreds of grandchildren and grandparents, innocent victims of the HIV/AIDS plague.

These past three years have seen many spectacular changes for the good: 1) USAID is providing significant assistance; 2) the U.S., Kenya, U.K., and Italian boards have

worked together at their first-ever summit meeting to coordinate efforts; 3) Ireland formed its own board to join the Nyumbani family and demonstrated its commitment by funding construction of facilities for the teenagers on land purchased with the help of the U.S. and U.K. boards; 4) volunteers continue to arrive in Kenya in unsurpassed numbers to provide significant help while rejuvenating themselves spiritually; and, 5) we held the most successful fund-raising effort in our history this past September.

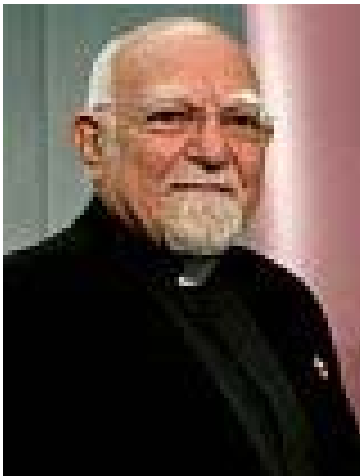
It is easy to look at all this news with the eyes of optimists. And from the perspective of the large number of additional people being served—and saved—see a miracle. But the other side of the coin is this: to save more of our fellow human beings requires more effort. This is our challenge. We cannot stand still, nor can we rest on our laurels. We must always seek ways to ensure that Father D'Ag's vision does not become static but grows like a living thing; like the mustard seed in Jesus' parable.

I leave office thankful for the opportunity to have served this great cause, and confident that all of us can rise to the ever-growing challenges of tomorrow.



*Ben Palumbo applauds Medallion of Hope honorees at the 2006 Annual Benefit Dinner.*

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.



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*Father Angelo D'Agostino, SJ, MD was laid to rest November 27 in Nairobi. Over 1,000 people attended the funeral and hundreds more attended two memorial services in the USA in December. The next issue of News on Nyumbani will contain a special memorial section devoted to Nyumbani's founder.*