

Rafiki Update February 2018

I just returned from my annual trip to Rafiki and am delighted to report that all is well at the Children's Center. The weekend was a great celebration of multiple accomplishments of our founder, the Rev. Dr. John Nganga. On Saturday, February 17 we celebrated the **20th anniversary** of the founding of Rafiki, the **30th anniversary** of John's ordination and John's actual **birthday!** And what a celebration it was, as we were honored that the Upendo Choir from Tanzania travelled to Kenya to join in the celebration and provide their own brand of spectacular music.



Cakes for the occasions



Upendo Choir from Tanzania joins in celebration

I spent Friday at the Rafiki Campus and had an opportunity to visit all aspects of the many departments that make up the Children's Center. At the core of it all is the orphanage itself – the First Community Church Boys' Dormitory and The St. Benedicts Girls' Dormitory as well as the kitchen and dining hall. Generous donations from the Downtown Rotary Club of Columbus and First Community Church funded significant upgrades to the dormitories. Both were completely repainted and provided with new mattresses, sheets and blankets. Importantly, an ongoing problem with the First Community Church Boys' Dormitory was mitigated. The dormitory sits at the base of a hill, and during the rainy season water drained down from the hill and seeped into the back wall of the dorm causing chronic moisture problems and, ultimately, mold formation. A new stone trough now collects and disperses the water, the mold has been removed, and the dorm now stays nice and dry regardless of how much rain falls.



Fresh paint floor to ceiling in both dormitories



Protective trough at base of Boys' Dormitory



New mattresses and bedding for the kids



Quilts to new arrivals at Rafiki

Continuing an annual ritual that began in 2005, individual quilts lovingly created by the Prayers and Squares Quilting Ministry at First Community Church were given to new arrivals at Rafiki. These quilts have been treasured over the years by the children and are greatly appreciated.

The Academy continues its remarkable story of success. At the top of the list of accomplishments is academic performance. In Kenya, the mark of success at the end of middle school (eighth grade) is how many of the students perform well enough in the national exams to get the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education, or “KCP”. The KCP is the ticket to admission to high school – without it, one cannot proceed forward educationally. All 11 of the eighth grade Rafiki orphans took the exam, and ALL got the KCP and are on their way to good high schools. This is a remarkable achievement and is making the school so sought after that we are now taking in some boarders who are electing to move onto the campus from the community.



Main Academy building – now one of three



Active engagement in classrooms is the norm

An important aspect to overall achievement is good nutrition. Our farm continues to supply an excellent source of milk, vegetables and meat to provide all students, including our orphans, a good balanced diet. The rate limiting step for further student body growth remains the single bus that we have. We are working on a Global grant with the Kikuyu Rotary club to purchase, among other things, a second bus. I met with the officers of the club for breakfast on Saturday morning and they remain totally committed to the project.



One of the kids' favorite activities – lunch



Our bus is great, but we need another



Rtn. Amos and officers of the Kikuyu Rotary Club



One of five new staff lockers

Other activity at the Academy included a significant upgrade of the staff room by a grant from District 6690 to provide lockers for the faculty where they can store their belongings in the break room. This is something they have wanted for a while and is a nice improvement for them. The final, and significant good news from the Academy came from our auditors who confirmed that **this year we have gone from losing money to breaking even – a major milestone in the history of the school.** Hopefully, with more boarders and local support we can even get to the point that a positive margin can be used to support other departments in the organization.

The School of Music continues to be quite active. Although we all miss the late Kirk Horn, the seeds he planted at the School of Music continue to grow. A generous personal donation from Arnett Howard who visited Rafiki last year has provided much needed electronic sound equipment for the school. While the equipment has multiple purposes, right now it is being used to provide background instrumental music for the choir as they prepare, once again, to participate in national competition where they did so well last year. We are delighted that our full time teacher, Edward, has returned to the Academy and is really inspiring these kids. He is also working to activate some lessons for interested students on the keyboard which was donated to the school a few years ago by First Community Church.

Finally, the School of Art continues to function well, providing art classes at all grade levels on a daily basis. This term focused on beadwork in the Masaai tradition: bracelets, necklaces and sandals. This beadwork has gone to the states and will be sold to support the Art School.



Rafiki Choir performs on Saturday



Kirk Horn's picture in the School of Music



Teacher Edward with Arnett Howard's Equipment



Beadwork from the School of Art

The farm continues to be very productive providing food for both the orphanage and the Academy and having some left over to sell to local buyers. Newly irrigated fields are planted with broccoli and the greenhouses are just beginning to sprout the next harvest of cucumbers. The unirrigated fields of maize got good rains this year and are producing nicely. Our cows produce plenty of milk, and are also producing other cows in the process. And **the farm is now operating in the black.**



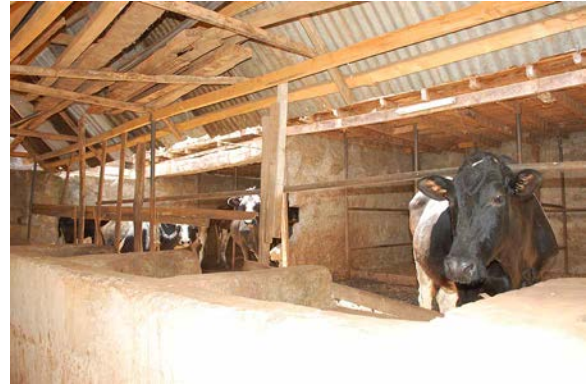
Irrigated field planted with broccoli



Greenhouse planted with cucumbers



Lush patch of carrots



Cows in the barn

Other departments are also doing well. The bakery is producing excellent bread. Like the farm, it is also providing entirely for the orphanage, the Academy, and has product left over to sell to the public. Likewise the tailoring department is busy making school uniforms for the academy students which include all of our orphans plus twice that many from the town.



Bread and scones for sale to the public



Tailors busy at work in the tailor shop

And finally in the clinic this year two pediatric residents from Nationwide Children's Hospital did a one month rotation: Stephanie Napolitano and Taylor Ballenger. This was a great experience for them to learn how medicine works in other countries, and it was great for us to benefit from their knowledge and experience in pediatrics.



Stephanie and Taylor in the clinic



Plenty of kids to see and help

In summary I was very pleased with what I found. The state of Rafiki is sound. There is, and always will be, more to do, and some challenges remain. But at the age of 20, the Rafiki Children’s Center is healthy and continues to do its main job – providing a safe, nurturing environment where orphaned children can grow and develop to their full potential – armed with a great education, a sense of belonging to a family, and an authentic feeling of self-worth.

It is, in the end, all about the kids: kids like Faith Wanjiku Waithira, who joined Rafiki at the age of three. She did well, attended Bishop Kamau Girls High School, and did a nurse assistant course at Avenue Homecare, Ltd. She worked at our clinic, and is now looking forward to a Dental Assistant Course. “I thank God for the well-wishers and sponsors who support Rafiki Children’s Center. May God bless them, and bless Rafiki” Faith says.



Faith Wanjiku Waithira



Rafiki kids changing class – preparing for the future

Terry Davis February 2018