



# The Ronnie Fund

*Working for Quality Village Life  
in Kenya*

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## Mghongo Leadership Centre Move Forward, Step Back

Last year we launched our most ambitious project, the creation of the Mghongo Leadership Centre, Eco Lodge and Demonstration Farm. We have purchased village property (now almost 8 acres on a hilltop overlooking Tsavo National Park). The road is in and a storage building with accompanying farm hand accommodation has been built. During my village stay this June I watched as a big organic greenhouse was built on the site thanks in part to Ashley L. of Canlove International and Nancy T. along with numerous other Muskoka donors. This was the most remote location Hortipro had installed this size of greenhouse. It was a great learning experience for village youth we hired to do the installation under the supervision of Hortipro staff. The land has been properly leveled, manure and soil added and we expect our first harvest in April. Already students

from Wongonyi Primary and Allan Mjomba Secondary School have visited to learn about greenhouse growing. Our farm hand Kole also set up the shade nursery for our tree seedlings so we could begin to grow seedlings needed for village reforestation projects. We were feeling very positive about our achievements, then Thanksgiving Weekend dealt us a bad blow. A lowland farmer chased monkeys from his land using illegal fire which got out of control and raced up the hillside burning 3/4 of our property. Luckily the youth put out the fire just 10 metres from the greenhouse and storage building but our shade nursery was lost as were all our demonstration plots and historic trees on the site including the special tree Ronnie's grandmother had planted just this year. Ronnie has initiated legal



proceedings against the farmer and already the youth have rallied by creating contours, making cut off drains and planting 75 tree seedlings on the property as it's the rainy season (we don't want to lose soil to erosion). Ronnie just met with the Chief who will mobilize the community to plant more tree seedlings for us. Kinandi, a widowed farmer will begin training others at the farm. The fire is a setback but one we can recover from, like a phoenix we will rise from the ashes. Ronnie will not be deterred from achieving his dream of providing quality education for all in Wongonyi Village.

## Western Carolina University - A Great Partnership

In June I was fortunate to finally meet Professors Nyaga Mwaniki and Anthony Hickey from Western Carolina University and this year's Anthropology/Sociology students. On their last day in Kenya we toured projects in Kibera Slums that Ronnie

consults for. Later Nyaga and his wife Prof. Lois Petrovich-Mwaniki (International Tour Co-ordinator) and I toured public schools—Wongonyi Primary, Mrangi, Makalari and Mole along with the District Hospital for next year's student placements. In 2013

WCU is sending Anthropology students along with student nurses and teachers to experience life in Wongonyi Village and provide teaching and nursing resources to the community. Thanks Prof Mwaniki for great collaboration.

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Kathy meets with Beatrice (Health Care Worker) and members of Kaza Moya Mwabira Support Group, a mixed gender and age group of HIV positive people seeking income generation ideas to support their families.



Beatrice, Wongonyi's Health Care Worker tries out her new Blood Pressure Monitor on Ronnie. Beatrice tells me this new tool is helping to save lives in Wongonyi and surrounding villages.

## *Beatrice—Wongonyi's Health Care Worker A Woman with a Mission*

In Wongonyi there is an amazing woman named Beatrice who realized many people lacked knowledge about basic health/ nutrition and many elderly & disabled who can't get to hospital when ill due to the hilly terrain. With few resources Beatrice has made it her mission to provide health care visits in homes to people of villages surrounding Wongonyi. She educates people on health issues and when care is needed has been known to carry some-

one too ill to walk on her back or pushed in a wheelbarrow in the middle of the night one hour to hospital.

Amazingly Beatrice does this all without being paid - she believes someone needs to address the issue. In June I took over a digital blood pressure monitor. You should have seen her face light up. She was so excited to be able to take people's blood pressure. Beatrice asked for a few more tools to help her. A stethoscope was one item. Nurse Way

Lem came to our aid. Beatrice now can hear people's heartbeats. She provides hospice care in her home, when HIV patients are at end of life having been rejected by their families and serves as midwife for four villages. Beatrice has a dream—to build a health care clinic in Wongonyi and to improve proper hospice facilities to provide dignity in death. We applaud Beatrice & support her dream of a clinic and accessible health care for all.



## **John the Leatherman—A Rags to Riches Story**

*What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us; what we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal."*

Albert Pike  
Freemason & American Civil War Confederate Officer

In 2008 John was one of our first recipients of a microfinance loan and how he has prospered from it! John, virtually self taught in leather craft works with the Vidasi Womens Basket Group adding leather handles, straps and zippers to their bags. He says it is unusual for a younger man to be working with a ladies

group like this and that he does not charge them for leather work before hand but instead waits until they sell the bags. With some new stamping tools provided by The Ronnie Fund he has been able to add elegance to his leatherwork. John showed me how he processes his leather by hand using organic meth-

ods. With increased business John has been able to buy a motorbike and now also provides transport service. John and his family have also taken in his sister's son's (who was not accepted by his new stepfather) paying for his school fees. John is a true rags to riches story and someone we are proud to support.



Members of Sere Girls Club collect garbage along the roadsides in Wongonyi Village

## **Sere Girls Club Cleans Up Wongonyi**

During my visit in June Ronnie and I met with the members of Sere Girls Club. We talked with them about the issues and challenges they face on a daily basis with school and family life.

Since many of the girls are being sponsored for their education, Ronnie asked

them what they could do to give back to the community. As Matthew, the Peace Corps worker had been talking to them about the environment, Kamburi, the chief's daughter said the girls would hold a community clean-up. This fall the girls mobilized and collected trash around the village and also painted oil drums

to be used as garbage cans. In October, Marcelina gathered the girls to plant trees in honour of Martha's 20th birthday in an effort to help restore the indigenous forests that have been degraded due to deforestation. We applaud the girls on their efforts to give back to the community and take care of the planet.



## A Celebration of New Life for Widows

The dedication of widow Emma's new home was to begin at noon but for Ronnie and I the event started 2 1/2 hours earlier when we began the long trek to Emma's in the hillside overlooking the village of Mole. We arrived to a beehive of activity. Three ladies were in the living room rolling out chapati, another four were in an empty bedroom cooking the chapati over small jiko cookers. Outside in the kitchen goat stew was bubbling away and over another fire outside the kitchen

sukimawiki was cooking, later to be replaced with a huge pot of milk chai (tea). On the hillside, Peace Corp volunteer Matthew was giving a group of men lessons on limbering up before working on their shambas. Everywhere children were laughing and playing. When the meal was ready we all sat in and around the house enjoying the good food. After lunch Pastor Andrew made a speech of welcome as did I and then everyone crowded into the home for prayers of dedication. It was a beautiful day. Another



widow Kinandi in Wongonyi has also benefitted from a new home with iron sheets provided by BUC. Kinandi was so happy she cried for joy when the roof sheets were delivered. This is a new beginning for these women who have been struggling to survive. Thank you for giving these women hope, dignity and respect.

Widow Emma and her two daughters receive a gift of clothes from Matthew, the Peace Corps volunteer during the dedication of her new home. A Special Gift from Bracebridge United Church (BUC) paid for the doors and windows.

## Dreams Can Come True

In our last newsletter we told you about Constance, one of Educational Scholarship recipients who recently graduated from secondary school. Constance has a dream to go to university and study to become a Nurse or Doctor of Women's Reproductive Health. With the help of Ronnie and her sponsor group the Original Nine

Book Club Constance was able to attend a couple of workshops on Reproductive Health as she awaits acceptance to university. Constance told me she feels this is a great need in the community and she wants to return to Wongonyi once she is educated to help girls and women with their health needs. She feels very blessed that people

from so far away believe in her and are sending her encouragement to follow her dreams. Ronnie has found someone in the reproductive health care field to mentor her. In return Constance will continue to mentor and inspire members of our Sere Girls Club. Constance knows if you believe, dreams can come true!

*"Making plans for one year, we plant rice. Making plans for ten years, we plant trees. Making plans for one hundred years, we prepare people."*

Old Chinese saying

## Welcome Ronnie Junior—A New Family Addition

During my trip to Kenya in June I had hoped to be present at a baby's birth but it was not to be. Serah's C section was moved a week later when I would be home to see Jeremy graduate. But on June 27th we are happy to report that little Ronnie Junior (RJ) or Junior as he is being called or as Martha

and Jeremy have affectionately named him French Vanilla) made a safe arrival into the world. I was able to participate in a baby shower prior to my return with all of Serah's family and some of Ronnie's family and it was great to meet everyone and be considered Serah's other mother and Junior's

new grandmother. Big brothers Julius and William Peter are quite taken with their new brother. Junior was even taken to Julius's school for show and tell. Ronnie and Serah are taking the family to the village for December so that the boys can connect with their extended family for Christmas.



Mocha (William Peter) and new baby brother French Vanilla (Ronnie Junior) in July 2012



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**Donations can be made by cheque to  
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Connecting Canadians Working in Kenya

## Ronnie's Family Life

We wanted to take time to update you on Ronnie and his family. Ronnie and his wife Serah are now the proud parents of three boys, Julius (age 9), William Peter (age 2) and baby Ronnie Junior. Ronnie divides his time between his home in Nairobi and the village. Ronnie and Serah operate a homestay in Nairobi choosing to live in the city so the children can access a higher quality of education than in the village. Ronnie knows the value of good education. He and Serah also fund the education of Elizabeth, their house help. Elizabeth told

me how much she values going to school and how the many visitors to Ronnie's home help her with her studies.

But Ronnie's heart is in the village. Growing up there he understands how important empowerment can be in lifting people out of poverty. He spends about 2 weeks of every month in Wongonyi overseeing projects, educating people, providing program leadership. He educates villagers on effects of deforestation, climate change, new farming methods and business skills. He has been collaborating

## OUR MISSION STATEMENT

We are a humanitarian organization dedicated to improving the quality of life of Kenyan people. Our mission is to assist our Kenyan friend (and son) Ronnie Mdawida achieve his dream of empowering the people of his village of Wongonyi and the country of Kenya to a better quality of life than the disadvantaged life they are now part of.

## OUR MANDATE

Our mandate is to alleviate poverty, improve the standard of living and strengthen the social fabric by empowering Kenyans through:

- Helping women and people decrease hunger and eliminate global poverty
- Empowering citizens through education and economic opportunity
- Combating the spread of HIV/Aids and other preventable diseases like TB, malaria through proper water and sanitation techniques
- Cultivating compassion and intelligence
- Encouraging confidence and skilful means

with Matthew Alch, Peace Corp Worker on a variety of initiatives including health & nutrition, water & sanitation, new business opportunities and much more. In Nairobi Serah runs the homestay which provides a starting/ ending point for many volunteers coming to work in our village or on other Kenyan projects Ronnie consults for. Serah works on Eco-tourism ideas to implement when the Eco Lodge is operational.

Ronnie and Serah are the face of a new Kenya, young people who know the value of helping themselves and others. We thank Serah and the boys for allowing Ronnie to spend so much time in the village overseeing our many projects—we know it is not easy on them



At the youth barazza, Ronnie tells the youth how he grew up disadvantaged like them and that they have the power to help themselves through education.

but they too can see the difference it is making.

*As we enter the holiday season our family wishes you and yours a very Merry Christmas!*