

THE RWANDA SCHOOL PROJECT

Learn. Empower. Lead.

The Rwamagana Lutheran School Newsletter

Vol. V No. 2 • Sep 2015

Dream Big

At our August 1, 2015 board meeting, we approved proceeding with the construction of a 100 bed boys' dormitory. For those of you who have been following our progress, you may remember that this January, 2015 we dedicated Kitao Hall (cafeteria), Sorensen Hall (girls' dorm) and Tally Labs (science building). For the past several years, the boys have lived in a classroom and/or in rented rooms a bit more than a kilometer away from our campus. It is time for us to move the boys' living space home to our campus!

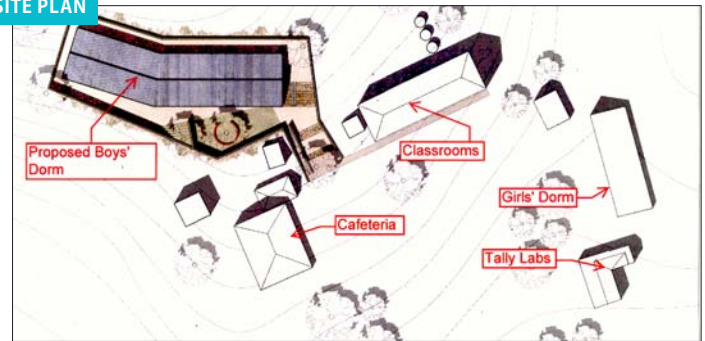
This dormitory will house 100 boys and a dorm supervisor. There will also be toilet and shower space, as well as common areas for study and relaxation.

To the right is a detail of the building:

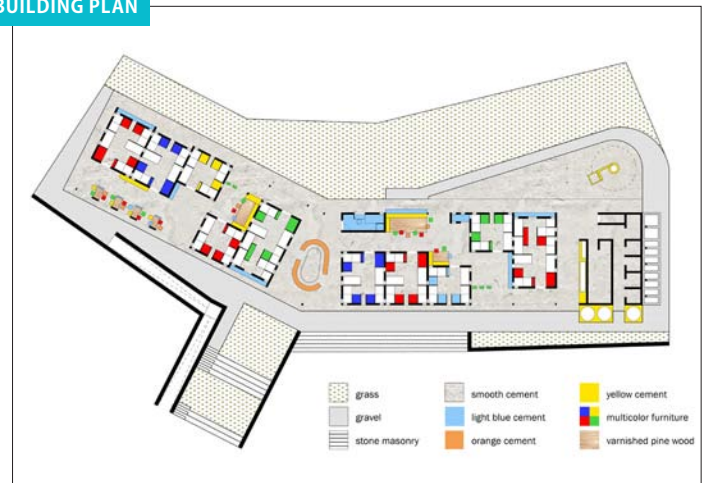
Although it is difficult to see in a small plan how we can provide living space for 100 boys, the proposed plan provides a system of built-in furniture designed to provide storage for clothes, shoes, and books to ensure some privacy. Each student will have a bed, a shelf, and an opening to the outside. Each dormitory room, even if modular in size, will be unique in its arrangement of beds and storage. This will create a sense of identity and belonging that will improve and strengthen his well-being.

We are projecting a cost of \$220,000 for this building, and thanks to a generous donor, we have over \$100,000 which has allowed us to start construction. We expect the building to be completed for the start of school in January 2016. It is our dream to complete the building without incurring debt, and that is where we need your help. We are asking for individuals to contribute to our building fund. Contributions of \$1,000 or more may be spread out over the next three years. Would you help us make our dream of providing on campus housing for our boys possible? If you can help us at any of these levels of giving, please contact Karl Smith, President, 707 829-0606.

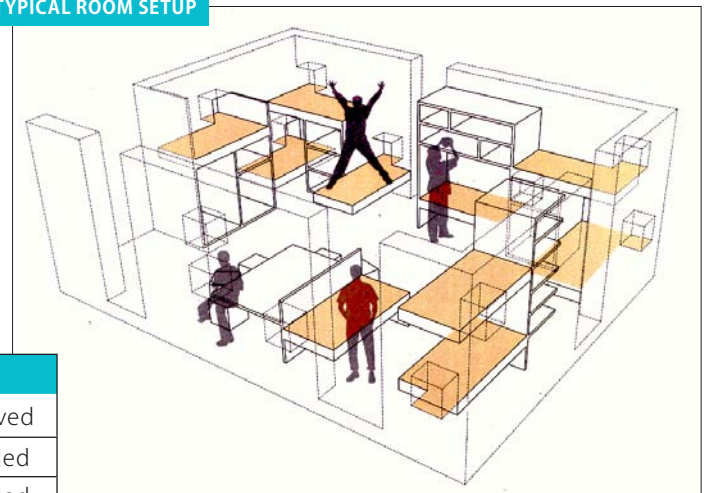
SITE PLAN



BUILDING PLAN



TYPICAL ROOM SETUP



LEVEL	NUMBER	AMOUNT	STATUS
Sustaining Contribution	1	\$100,000	funds received
Pillar Contribution	10	\$10,000	funds needed
Bedrock Contribution	20	\$1,000	funds needed



A student performs at a dress rehearsal for Performance Day.

Sweet Melodies

Yvonne Koncur of Community Lutheran Church in Sterling, VA was inspired by Robin's stories of the hope and resilience of the people of Rwanda and went into action to raise funds in support of the developing music program at the Rwamagana Lutheran School. Yvonne teaches at the Catoctin School of Music and her efforts made May a month all about the Rwanda School Project!

She explains that "the core effort was a studio-wide Practice-a-Thon, much like a walk-a-thon, but focusing on hours practiced instead! Interested students took home pledge sheets to find donors who would sponsor them for every hour they practiced their instrument during the month of May. At recitals and during lessons, we also shared videos and photos from Robin's Facebook page, stories passed down secondhand, and facts about the country at large. Some of the students volunteered to perform at local farmers' market and collect tips for our fundrais-

er." This effort involved over 40 students and spread the word about the RSP.

The fundraiser collected over \$4800 for the purchase of musical instruments, and this year the school hired Danny Ruzaza to be the music teacher and boys' dorm parent because he got music training in Uganda with the help of Pastor Lucy Kolin and Resurrection Lutheran Church in Oakland, CA. A guitar was taken over to Rwanda by a group from Community Lutheran Church in June, and thanks to Catoctin School of Music, Rwamagana Lutheran School will now be able to purchase more guitars and a keyboard. Danny will have his work cut out for him!

The teachers at the Catoctin School of Music are already brainstorming ideas for making further connections with the students in Rwanda and have added information about RSP to their webpage, and RLS is really excited to add more music activities to the school year.

▼ ROBIN'S LETTER

Astonishing! Here we are with November of 2015 barreling down on us like a locomotive, and yet there were truly times I thought we'd never arrive at our first graduation day. What kind of ceremony will we have? Will students wear caps and gowns? Who will speak? But the biggest question is, What will they do after high school? Truthfully, the answer has us all sitting on the edge of our seats. What will they do?

Our students will have to struggle to make sense of the world in which they are becoming adults. Rwanda -- a land with strikingly few natural resources -- is betting on its people. We really mean it

when we say "Learn. Empower. Lead!" We hope that the kind of education we have been preparing them with will allow them to be good leaders, not just because of their academic credentials, but because of the character they have developed as well.



Seniors at Kinigi, near the Volcanoes National Park

In our school, most students will have to rely on competitive scholarship opportunities that are extremely demanding, or prepare to work and go to school slowly, over nights and weekends for several years. But what I see is that this class

has high aspirations. They want to reach up. The future looks a lot more promising to this generation of Rwandans than it did to their parents who inherited a war-

Pamela

Talent Show guests this year noticed the young female MC: "She's so poised." "Her English and Kinyarwanda seem so effortless," they said. Meet Senior 6 student Pamela, who came to RLS in 2012. Described as shy when she first came, "now I can make presentations and speak eloquently in English," she says.

Her mother is the school's bookkeeper, and our good exam results in 2012 convinced Pamela to change schools. She enjoys singing traditional music and design, and career-wise, many things



interest her: "I wish to become a woman speaker in Parliament, a journalist or a statistician." Pamela appreciates Expeditionary Learning because students discover things for themselves

"through doing research and study tours." Finally, she has loved "the cooperation among students and staff; here anyone in the school can provide you advice whenever you have a problem."

Look for Pamela to be out and about in her community in the future. No longer shy, you may hear her voice on air or in Parliament!

Derrick M

One of the first things you notice about graduating Senior Derrick M. is his friendliness...and that he is tall! He often has a big smile and is friends with all different kinds of people.

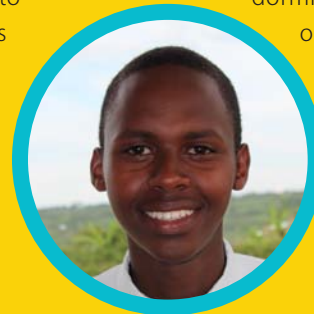
When Derrick's dad brought him to RLS four years ago, Derrick wondered if a school so small could be any good. However, the warm welcome he got at our traditional "Morning Circle" before classes made his doubts fade away

Although he'd never mention this himself, Derrick is an academic all-star, humbly making

straight A's. He hopes to pursue studies in Computer Science, and we think he has a good chance to compete for international scholarships.

Derrick's main hope for Rwamagana Lutheran School is the future boys' dormitory because our current rented dorm "is very far from the main campus which affects the prep time at night."

Like his father who served on our PTA, Derrick is civic-minded, and he hopes to return to his local community Kigali and "do community service," no doubt making friends with everyone and quietly doing his best.



torn disaster of a nation.

Finally, just a few quotes from our graduating Senior, Amani, who was writing about the Senior Class study tour to northwest Rwanda.

"We had gone under the earth in caves for day one; we then had to also go on the peak of the mountain. That was the most exciting thing that everyone was wondering about... for everyone, it



2nd Annual Homecoming Day for Senior 6 students and Alumni

was the first time to hike."

The hike was tough, but they were excited to reach the summit of Mount Mugo-go (about 7,000 feet) and they met with Langley DeWitt, leader of a team from MIT

that is partnering with the government of Rwanda to monitor climate change and global air quality. We thank the Petaluma Teachers and our recent visitors

from Virginia and Texas who contributed to make this memorable and fantastic trip possible -- it was so appreciated!

Again, from Amani: [On the way home], "everyone was not feeling that the trip was in its last minutes. Everyone was happy. I was thinking about all the good things that I had had during the trip. ...I like the way that my classmates give me advice. They have really become my new family. This year has been so good that none of us that will ever forget this time....God bless everyone that raised a hand to help us."

Amen to that!

Welcoming a new board member

Shortly after her husband, Mark, was elected bishop of the Sierra Pacific Synod in 2008, Debbi Holmerud was introduced to Pastor John Rutsindintwarane. Pastor John spoke about his wife, Robin, and her efforts to start a new secondary school in Rwamagana. Debbi, who at the time was a public high school principal in Stockton, CA, was very intrigued and looked forward to meeting Robin.

In 2009, Debbi got to meet Robin, and a bond of friendship and collegiality was formed. It seemed impossible to Debbi that, as a principal, Robin would also be called upon to work with congregations, raise funds, purchase property, collaborate with architects and oversee the construction of dormitories and classrooms. But all of this, Robin was doing, and doing it well.

In January 2015, Debbi and Mark traveled to Rwanda and visited Rwamagana Lutheran School (RLS).



Debbi at RLS

It was exciting to see the campus, walk into classrooms, meet students and staff and share in the dedication celebration of the girls' dorm, science labs and cafeteria. Debbi came home with an even greater sense of awe for all that the school has become.

Since retiring last year, Debbi has spent much of her time traveling to visit her grandchildren. Supporting RLS is the kind of work to which Debbi aspired after 36 years in public education, so she considers it a privilege to serve as a board member of RLS.

U.S. Board of Directors

Robin Strickler, Program Director
Karl Smith, President, California
Melissa Becker, Vice President, California
Libby Bullock, Secretary, California
Joy Petty, Treasurer, California
Jeff Biber, Virginia
Sally Bullock, California
Greg Farrell, New York
Debbi Holmerud, California
Val Jennings, California
Elizabeth Petty, California
Melissa Roussin, Minnesota
Karen Saenger, British Columbia
Cathy Whitlow, Virginia

Rwanda Governing Board

Kazarwa Francois, President
Rutamu Augustine, Treasurer
Lengema Leonard
Muhire Eugene (teacher rep)
Ramurangwa Stephen
Rurangwa Meshack

Contact Information

Robin Strickler, Program Director
robinrutsi@gmail.com
P.O. Box 82
Rwamagana, Rwanda
Tel: +250 (0)78-856-9212

Karl Smith, President
karl@rwandaschoolproject.org
1300 St. Francis Road
Santa Rosa, CA 95409
(707) 829-0606

Help Us Go Green

Send Us Your E-Mail Address!

Please send us your current e-mail address to help us complete or update our records. We would love to reduce both our paper consumption and our printing and mailing costs by offering an electronic version of the newsletter. If you would like to continue receiving a paper version we are happy to continue to mail. However, if you would prefer to receive our quarterly newsletter by e-mail, indicate that preference. The full version of the newsletter will be sent as an e-mail attachment.

info@RwandaSchoolProject.org

