

"Your past does not define your future. There is no barrier too great that you cannot overcome. I never envisioned myself achieving what I have today, but RLS stood by me every step of the way. Seize [this opportunity] with both hands!"

THE RWANDA SCHOOL PROJECT

LEARN.EMPOWER.LEAD.



TUGENDE 2025: We are 20!

BY ROBIN STRICKLER

This year, our annual fundraiser during the week of September 20, "Tugende 2025" ("Let's go 2025"), will coincide with the 20th anniversary of The Rwanda School Project's incorporation 4 years before the school opened.

I was living in Dubuque, Iowa in 2005 and I was seeking a model for high-quality education for our future school in Rwanda. Someone referred me to the Expeditionary Learning field office in Dubuque. Deb Otto, then the Midwest Field Director, told me she was pressed for time, but then said, "Tell me all

Join us the week of September 20 for Tugende 2025!

about it!" She eventually came to visit Rwanda and helped train me and some of the first staff. It was encouraging and inspirational.

Now called EL Education, the model continues to inspire us as we work to marry the Rwandan government curriculum to some of

EL Education's excellent educational practices. Our Crew program, where all students are part of a small group, helps staff to know students well, helps students to have a voice, practice leadership skills, do service and learn good social skills. As we consider what it means to "be the best", this is just one structure that helps us be the "family" that many students mention as a positive aspect of RLS.

During the week of September 20, we invite you to join us in taking the next steps to sustain and improve RLS as we educate a new generation of leaders!

Karl Smith retires as Board President, Reflects on Past and Considers Future of RSP

Twenty years ago, a trip to Rwanda changed my life forever. Bishop Dave Mullen asked if I wanted to accompany him and a group of individuals traveling to Rwanda. I returned from there with a goal to raise funds to build a school. I joined hands with Robin and we formulated our mission: to change Rwanda, one student at a time. We started with nothing but a prayer, lofty goals, and trust in leadership from the Holy Spirit.

Now, as I retire as president, I reflect on our campus and our students. I remember many of our graduates who have done amazing things: Amani, Ornella, Shukulu, Pacifique, Joyeuse, Rita, and many, many others. But I also remember all the students who just love getting an education at RLS. I remember the students looking in the window seeking an education as Robin offered her first English class.

Here are some typical memorable comments from students:

"It doesn't feel like a school; it feels like family."

"I salute you and thank you for your support and for giving me my dream school."

"I want to express my gratitude towards my teachers, parents, classmates and all sponsors who have made my education experiences a hub for growth and evolution."

*Our students used to say,
"The sky is the limit." But I
would add, "We have no limits."*

Each year, I've had the opportunity to read the letters of hundreds of students. I've been inspired by the number of students who want to graduate and help their families and their community. It is only through God's help that our slogan actually anticipated what was to come. We ARE changing Rwanda, one student at a time. One of this year's S6 students captured this sentiment, saying, "It's a pleasure to keep helping fellow students to be successful in their study, which will help them to have a positive impact on the country's well-being."

A short time ago at a board retreat at my home, we looked back at our first 20 years and began a discussion about our next 20 years. We developed what we called a Big Vision Plan and it set two goals: 1. Become the Best and 2. Double in Size. At our last board meeting, Moses shared a report and a Power Point summary. According to that report, we now have 311 students, 41 staff, and offer seven A-Level combinations. We celebrate remarkable performance levels by our students and have taken initial steps to become the best. In addition, we hired an ASA Architect to draw up a plan to lead us for our next 20 years, and we have that plan in hand.



I've held The Rwanda School Project in my heart. Now, as I step down, the title of president will be removed from my name, but I know the The Rwanda School Project will remain in my heart. I plan on staying on the board for as long as I'm able. I love The Rwanda School Project and will for as long as I live.

In these last 20 years, it is remarkable to see what we've accomplished: our students, our alumni, our donor base, our campus, and our dedicated board. We are no longer a start-up.

Since that first visit to Rwanda 20 years ago, The Rwanda School Project has formed a nonprofit, purchased land, built classrooms, a cafeteria, labs, two dormitories, a library, and an administration building. We have practiced sustainability and have taught a generation of students to aspire to great things. Over 90% of our students go on to attend college, and many have received bachelor's and master's degrees, with one student starting work for a Ph.D. Our donor base includes almost 1,500 donors. This last year of 2024, I'm looking at an 11-page printout listing 7 grants, 54 sponsors, and 262 general contributions.

This year, our budget passed the half-million-dollar threshold. We can now look forward to serving our students for generations to come. Our students used to say, "The sky is the limit." But I would add, "We have no limits."

It is with gratitude and humility that I turn the leadership of The Rwanda School Project to Debbi Holmerud. I look forward to Debbi's leadership, as well as the great things that are yet to come. I encourage you all to continue supporting The Rwanda School Project and its mission: your continued support is vital. As Walt Disney said, "If you can dream it, you can do it."

ALUMNA JOYEUSE G AND NEW HORIZONS IN PENNSYLVANIA

RLS GRADUATE JOYEUSE G IS NOW NEARLY FINISHED with her freshman year of college at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, PA! She earned her 4-year full scholarship through stiff competition in the Bridge to Rwanda program (hundreds apply for about a dozen spots) and then spent a further year of study in English and cultural studies.

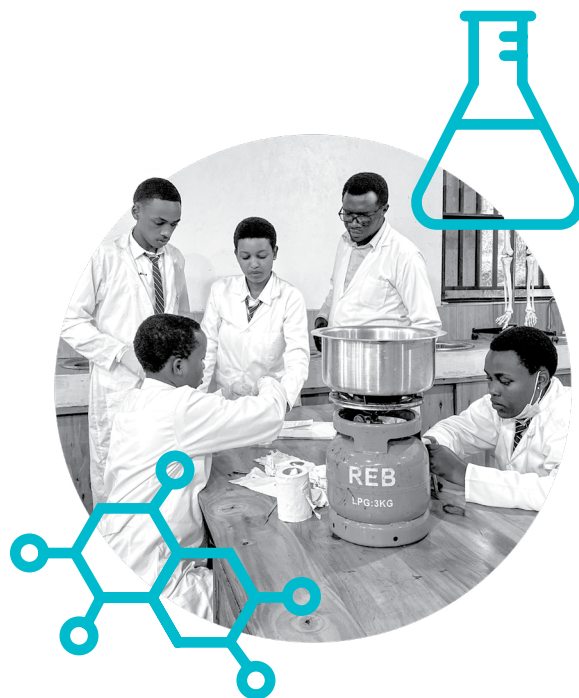
Joyeuse is from a small village in Rwanda's Eastern Province and spent her whole secondary education at RLS, where she was a leader from the get-go. In her 3rd year, she competed for and won an opportunity to travel to see Rwanda's gorillas as one of Rwanda's top-scoring 9th graders. Her diploma in Math, Computer Science and Economics was a combination she chose for both challenge and practicality.

Now Joyeuse attends her classes and works part-time at the IT desk at F&M. She was delighted by colorful fall leaves, pumpkin carving and the Thanksgiving holiday. She recently was accepted to be an "HA" (Housing Advisor or Resident Advisor) in the dorms next year, which is just one more example of her maturity and leadership!

Joyeuse wrote a moving letter to current RLS students, saying, among other things:

"Your past does not define your future. There is no barrier too great that you cannot overcome. I never envisioned myself achieving what I have today, but RLS stood by me every step of the way. Seize [this opportunity] with both hands!"

Joyeuse recently snagged a job as a Summer Conference Assistant on campus, where she'll put her leadership and organizing skills to work and will undoubtedly meet some new and interesting people. Hooray, Joyeuse!



Rwandan Government Introduces Updated National Chemistry Exams

IN RWANDA'S NATIONAL EXAMS, the hard sciences have always involved both theoretical exams and "practicals", or exams where students have to demonstrate lab skills.

Recently, the government has announced it will change part of the assessment for the Chemistry exam to a project-based assessment. This type of assessment requires some real-world based applications and teamwork from students, which is more in-line with our school's preferred way of teaching.

The first assessment this year tasks students with producing candles that meet certain criteria.

A decade ago, a Rwandan government minister remarked that some students graduating from Rwanda's top universities lacked the practical training to carry out electrical engineering. The government has continuously looked for ways to better prepare high school graduates for both theoretical and practical skills, and as we work to "be the best", we'll be looking at how we can best prepare our students.





Akagera National Park, Rwanda

MISSION STATEMENT

We provide high-quality secondary education in Rwanda by offering a secure and nurturing school environment that transforms vulnerable youth into future leaders and problem-solvers who champion environmental sustainability and social change.

VISION STATEMENT

We envision quality secondary education that is universally accessible and equitable, with the aim to equip Rwanda's youth with the necessary skills and tools to develop into the next generation of skilled and compassionate leaders.

VALUES STATEMENT

We set standards for responsibility and high achievement, and develop an inclusive, supportive, and trusting student body that is able to leverage critical thinking and make a meaningful impact in their communities and beyond. Founded upon the principles of Christianity, we recognize and acknowledge students from all religious backgrounds and beliefs by promoting a school culture of respect, awareness, and tolerance. Core to our philosophy is experiential learning, a pedagogy that empowers students through cross-disciplinary instruction, project-based learning, global awareness and character-building.

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