



Rotary Club of West Ottawa Paul Harris Fellow Award¹

Conferred on Benson (Ben) Osome, Oct. 4, 2016

(The following text was read at the award presentation ceremony)

Our club has a long history of finding many qualified and deserving non-Rotarians to honour. This Paul Harris recipient certainly exemplifies this tradition. He has significantly enhanced the welfare of several villages in Kenya through his volunteer and fundraising efforts.

With a hot, dry climate, Kenya is a country where one third of homes have no access to a safe source of drinking water. This problem is especially challenging outside of Kenyan cities. Almost 90% of rural residents do not have water piped into their property. We've all seen and heard the all-too-real stories of people walking kilometres in the searing heat each day to fetch safe water for their families. In fact 40% of rural Kenyans spend more than a half an hour per day getting access to safe water.

Without safe water, the consequences can be deadly. Thousands of Kenyan children under the age of five die each year because they don't have access to safe drinking water.

Our recipient had seen enough suffering over the years, so since 2008 he has dedicated a lot of his time and resources to helping as many fellow human beings as possible. He wanted to change lives, and he has.

He and his wife have focused on providing the leadership required to install and maintain safe drinking water systems at primary schools in rural communities in Kenya. Just imagine how this initiative has improved the lives of those students, and transformed their communities.

So far, they have provided safe water systems to 12 schools, raising over \$63,000 to cover the cost of digging wells and the purchase and installation of water tanks and piping. They have also provided hands-on oversight and management of the installations. That can take up to 3 months on-site. They pay for their own travel and accommodation expenses during this whole process. They donate their time and their money to help others.

Our award recipient and his wife decided early on that they needed each community to make a commitment to the project at its school. Consequently, agreements are in place with local authorities that provide the funds needed to maintain the wells. All 12 systems continue to operate and have changed the lives of more than 31,000 students and villagers.

This recipient's story may sound familiar to West Ottawa Rotarians, and it should. That's because the recipient's wife is a member of our Club. She has already been recognized and awarded by the Club for her work in Kenya. But unbeknownst to many of us, this year's recipient has been a leader and volunteer as well. This past winter, they had three projects to oversee in Kenya, but with his wife unable to travel, our recipient got all three jobs done by himself.

The Rotary Club of West Ottawa felt it was time we recognized this dedicated volunteer for his selfless efforts, which have improved the lives of so many Kenyans. Ben Osome, please come forward to accept your Paul Harris Fellow Award.

¹ Named after the founder of Rotary International, the Paul Harris Fellow Recognition program was introduced by the trustees of the Rotary Foundation in 1957 to encourage donations to the Foundation. The Rotary Club of West Ottawa adopted the program to create the Club's *Paul Harris Fellow Award*. The award recognizes individuals who have given distinguished service that exemplifies the ideals and objectives of Rotary. To bestow the award, the Club makes a contribution of \$1,000 US to the Rotary Foundation in the name of the individual to be honoured; that individual is then named a *Paul Harris Fellow* by the Foundation.

A nominee for the award who is not a member of the Rotary Club of West Ottawa must meet at least one of four criteria to be named a Paul Harris Fellow. The nominee must: 1) have made an outstanding personal or business contribution that has significantly enhanced the welfare of the community at the local, national or international level; 2) have made an outstanding personal or business contribution that has significantly improved understanding and generated mutual respect between or among people of different races, cultures or countries; 3) have performed outstanding community service in support of youth, the elderly, the underprivileged, the disabled or the developmentally challenged; or 4) exemplify the qualities of the good citizen and provide a role model of the ideal community builder.