

LAKE PLACID NEWS

ROTARY CLUB NEWS: Rotary busy keeping Ugandan girls in school



The Rotary Club of Lake Placid is proud to support several worthwhile international projects such as a school for girls in Uganda. Here is their

story, and the story of one girl, Godith.

In 2008, a Rotary Club in Nova Scotia began collaborating with the Mbarara (Uganda) Rotary Club and a local nongovernmental organization KAWODE to help meet the needs of a tiny rural community in southwest Uganda. Too many of their girls were not able to attend secondary school. Why? Unlike the U.S., hundreds of thousands of citizens in “*the Majority World*” cannot access school beyond primary school without tuition funds. Girls are often overlooked: they are needed at home to tend siblings, fetch water, fetch wood. Parents are not convinced that paying for their daughters to attend school would be beneficial to all concerned. This is changing: the value of education for girls is now more recognized.

Birere Secondary School is a 45-minute, bone-rattling, dirt road ride from the closest town, Mbarara. Day scholars and boarders attend this co-ed school. There is no electricity or running water. There is a starry, starry night sky and a peaceful, serene pleasantness among the banana groves. A small group of women, Kasana Women for Development (KAWODE), is determined to pull their community into a better situation and they work endlessly to achieve this goal.

The Rotary Club of Mbarara, the school and the women of KAWODE put together a plan to ensure more girls attend school: they built and furnished a solar paneled dorm for 40 girls, built a five-person latrine, installed 30,000 liter water tanks and began to provide scholarships to girls. Rotary clubs in the US and Canada, businesses and individual supporters have kept dozens of girls in schools over the last 13 years.

Here is the story of one girl, Godith.

Godith is invincible, in spite of the fact that she was born with a malformed and non-functioning hand. One of six children in her family, she has learned to work around her hand, and she hides it. She wears a shawl that she slings over her shoulder and drapes around her unusual hand. I knew her for many weeks before I realized her hand was useless to her. Such a malformation can bring with it different myths among uneducated people, but this feisty young lady doesn't let her hand cause a problem for her.

Godith is practical; she's the student who will ask the "*why*" or "*what*" question that no else thinks of, or has the courage to voice. This can sometimes cause teachers to lose patience with her, but she generally sticks to her guns. She's a kind girl, often the one who will be a consoler.

Her mom made a point of finding me at the annual PTA meeting, scheduled to coincide with my visit to Birere. Godith attended school at Birere, under Rotary scholarship for 4 years, then was able to switch into the nursing stream, which meant she attended school in Mbarara. She was missed when she left Birere; her cohort told me that her family managed to scrape together the nursing school funds because she had been supported by Rotary through secondary school.

Keeping girls in school is well worth any effort and every dollar! Thank you for your support of our Rotary Club, which helps us to support projects near and far.

(Jeanine Parker is a member of the Rotary Club of Ottawa South)
