



# Able and Willing

International Education Foundation

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NEWSLETTER

Spring/Summer 2008

## A Word from Puma

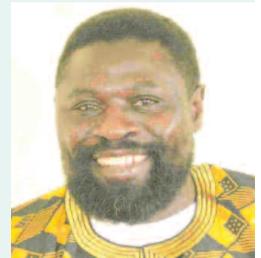
For more than ten years we have been talking with you about MYRT SCHOOL and asking for your support. I know that it can be tiring to hear about and be asked to help the same project over and over again. Friends, the good news is that MYRT School was completed last year and continues to be self supporting. This year, another success is on the way. We are completing the second project, WaMbuyu Tech, which has the twin goals of training students for real world jobs and of generating income for the school through the sale of items made by the students.

With all the machines, tools, books and other training equipment that we just sent to Congo, all shops should be up and running this summer.

A machine shop, wood work shop, welding shop, sewing machine shop, and food preparation, and a nursing program will all kick in this year. When completed this summer, the technical school will be self supporting and will help to build MYRT School #2 in Poleni village.

Again my friends, thank you for your continued support in helping to better the world even when times are hard. You are my heroes.

**Mbuyu "Puma" Wa Mbuyu,  
President & Co-founder**



## MYRT School Report

This past year has yielded a mix of good news and bad. The bad news starts with the price of energy, which is hitting the Congo hard, just as it is in the U.S., and is contributing to increased prices of all kinds of basic necessities. Here in the U.S. we are fortunate to not have to choose between sending our kids to school and putting food on the table. The Congo is not so fortunate.

A significant consequence for the MYRT School has been a significant increase in the number of children having to drop out of school - 125 students in the last 2 months, or 25% of the total enrolled. (Rates had never been above 5%) Increases in the basic cost of living mean that some parents can afford tuition of \$10 per month or other school supplies for only one of their children, possibly the brightest or the eldest, or the only boy. Others, with even less family income, must choose between educating any of their children or putting food on table. Even some children from families in the Work-For-Tuition

programs and some orphans with free scholarship have dropped out. This is very sad to hear.

The good news is that, despite the difficulties of the time, MYRT School continues to support itself and remains among the best schools in Lubumbashi area. All of our programs are still running. Here are the highlights. The fifth edition of the school newsletter, started in November 2007, has been published. The book reading club continues to organize debates and conferences on different topics, the last of which focused on relationships and responsibility for young people. The Boy and Girl Scouts continue to meet and organize community service, most recently organizing a clean-up weekend around the village in Tshamalale and the village Poleni, home of MYRT School #2. Last but certainly not least, the staff has been stable since earlier in the school year when several teachers left for higher paying jobs with international mining companies that are starting up again after years of neglect.

## Meeting New Challenges: MYRT Self-Sufficiency - Students Dropping Out

Our dream has always been to build schools that are so self-sufficient that they can replicate themselves by contributing expertise, labor, and material for building more schools. This we believe is what we can do to break the chain of dependency on foreign aid – a bad habit that leads nowhere. Ever since 2005, we believed we had achieved our first self-sufficient school. MYRT School now pays its staff and meets monthly expenses without outside support, and it has contributed substantially to the expansion of its existing campus in Tshamalale and a new campus in Poleni village and plans for another campus in Kipopo.

Unfortunately, price increases of almost everything in the Congo demand new ideas if progress is to be sustained.

### The problems of price increases:

**Energy:** Gas prices in the Congo have shot up 70% in eight months, to over \$7 a gallon and rising. (Remember that typical family income in the Congo is less than \$100/month). However bikes and feet are the predominant forms of transportation, and the Congo River supplies most of the electric power. Therefore the impact of oil prices is mostly reflected indirectly in the increased prices of products that are imported.

**Food:** Food accounts for about half of a typical family's expenditures, which provides for one simple meal a day. Imports, especially foods that require some manner of processing, are a major part of the local diet. Because of transportation costs, imported staples like rice and sugar have more than doubled in just the past year. In contrast, price increases of locally produced food, like eggs and corn flour, have been more modest. We believe that increased food prices are the biggest factor in families losing their ability to pay tuition and other school-related expenses and therefore pulling their children out of school.

**Medicines:** Malaria, HIV/AIDS, and cholera – all preventable or at least manageable - continue to impede development in Congo. Bad water conditions in areas of Lubumbashi have been blamed for recent cholera outbreaks. Since medicine for these

ailments is imported, prices have increased and dangerous fake medicines proliferate.

**Construction materials:** Last year prices for cement and other building materials increased nearly 50% because of increased demand for new construction. This year prices continue to increase because of transportation costs. Most material is imported from great distances.

**Wages not keeping pace with price increases:** As in the U.S., family income in the Congo is relatively stagnant, especially compared to price increases. Families pay more and get less. The problem is particularly acute for families paid in Congolese francs who, because of unfavorable exchange rates, are able to buy even less than if their income were paid in dollars. (MYRT School pays its staff based on the current exchange rate, easing the inflationary burden on school staff. )

### What can Able and Willing do?

Until now, the major source of school revenue has come from the modest tuition fees to families not participating in the Work-For-Tuition Program or from families caring for orphans. The MYRT School board raised tuition to \$10 last year in response to a government mandated increase in the minimum wage. Even though salaries and other school expenses have increased, the school board and parents want to avoid another tuition hike, which would simply force even more students to drop out.

Since local commodity prices are relatively stable, being less affected by oil and transportation costs as well as currency exchange rates, it makes more sense now than ever before for focus on expanding local productivity by improving and expanding MYRT's workshops.

This plan will make it possible to achieve the following:

- Increase school income, thereby keeping tuition low.
- Create better, cheaper structural components and furniture for the two new schools

- Increase skilled labor force and entrepreneurial skills
- Create the groundwork for new businesses serving the broader community

Fortunately, a generous donation from The Five Together Foundation in January has allowed us to accelerate these plans.

Details are provided in the following articles.

## Shipment For Congo Schools

### Thanks for Your Donated Items & Work

On April 20, a container left the port of Baltimore loaded with machinery, computers, books and other equipment for schools in the Congo. Nearly half of the load is destined for the WaMbuyu Technical School, part of the expanding MYRT School System near Lubumbashi. The rest of the load will be dispensed to other schools in the region by Able & Willing and their shipping partners, the Methodist Church of Southern Congo.

#### Donated Items

Much of the equipment for WaMbuyu Tech was donated in response to a call for donations in our previous newsletter and updated on our web site. We called for specific types of equipment and books that the school would need.

Donated items included shop machinery, hand tools, sewing machines, medical kits, computers, tents, a tiller, and over twelve boxes of carefully selected books. Many of the items were newly purchased.

Puma selected and donated a variety of culinary equipment for new cooking classes. The shop classes will manufacture some of the equipment that can be used to set up small food processing businesses. Puma also donated a 40KW diesel generator so that the school would have ample power for all of the workshops.

#### Purchased Items

To make sure that the metal-working and wood-working workshops were adequately equipped, Able & Willing purchased \$10,000 worth of machinery and parts from Grizzly Industrial, Inc. Purchased items included a metal lathe, band saw, oscillating drill press, table saw, gear-head mill drill, wood planer, and a metal shearing machine.

#### Bikes for the World

Able & Willing volunteers helped on a bike collection drive in Frederick, Maryland sponsored by Bikes For The World (<http://BikesForTheWorld.org>). In exchange, our volunteers selected six special bikes and several boxes of spare parts at their warehouse. The bikes will be used by students at WaMbuyu Tech to make special pedal powered transport vehicles. This will help to save money on transportation.



Bikes are a major mode of transportation.

#### The Other Half

A 40 foot container is so large that it would be difficult for us to collect enough to fill it, let alone afford the \$14,000 in shipping expenses. Fortunately, we shared the space and expense with the Methodist Ministry of Southern Congo. They obtained 100 computers from Computer Ministries (<http://ComputerMinistries.com>) and purchased over \$1,000 of school supplies to be distributed to schools in Lubumbashi.

## Thanks for your help!

### It takes a lot of work and money to ship a container of goods to the Congo!

Special thanks to **The Five Together Foundation**, which made a generous and timely gift and enabled us to equip our workshops with some quality professional shop equipment.

One of the hopes of The Five Together Foundation was that the donation could be used as leverage to raise more money. We believe the best way for Able & Willing to accomplish this is to *invest in the schools productive capacity* - not only producing an appropriately skilled labor force and responsible citizens but creating successful business partnerships that serve the needs of the community.



Jim and Puma talk to Jacob Toll (right), one of the five in the Five Together Foundation.

**Thanks to all that donated** new and used items for the shipment. If you have not already done so, please send us a note describing the items and their market value so we can send you an official acknowledgement for tax purposes.

We owe a special debt of gratitude to **Mission Central**, a division of the **Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church**, who arranged the shipping and provided storage in their spacious warehouse. This service was beyond their normal mission for which we are deeply thankful. Thanks to **Dr. Jeffrey Hoover**, a long-time friend, missionary in Congo since 1979, and professor at Katanga Methodist University.

Special thanks to the **Washington International School** (<http://www.wis.edu>) for 80 Dell computers with Windows XP and MS Office. Thanks to **Steve Hoare**, Director of Technology and **Tina Thuermer**, teacher, Alumni Coordinator and returned Peace Corps volunteer (Zaire), and to the **students** who configured the computers.

Thanks also to the **Ebersole family** of Rosemont, MD for helping to pack the computers.

Thanks to **JP Muhly** for his expertise in bikes and help with the shipment.

Thanks to **Marshall Wisner** of Jefferson, MD for use of his barn and tractor to help load the truck and to **Harriet Crosby** for use of her barn.

A special thanks to **Way Station in Frederick** for hosting our fund raising dinners.



JP Muhly (left) & Marshall Wisner (on tractor) load a rental truck on way to warehouse for shipping.

## 2008 Project Plans

### I. Teacher Training & Exchange Programs

The Waza Alliance for Quality Education, a non-profit organization based in Indianapolis, will be conducting training seminars for teachers at MYRT School this summer. The seminar will focus on improving instruction in science and math and using assessment tools to improve teaching skills. The seminar will be open to all MYRT teachers and selected teachers from other schools in the Lubumbashi region, about 50 teachers in total. The Waza Alliance also plans to set up two pilot programs for exchange between schools in the U.S. and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). One of the pilot exchange programs will be between MYRT School and a school in Indiana.

#### Waza Means Thinking

In Swahili, “waza” means “thinking” and suggests the mission of the organization. Incorporated in 2007, the Waza Alliance for Quality Education is dedicated to improving the quality of education in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The seminar hosted by MYRT School and the exchange programs are the first steps to implementing the Waza Alliance’s strategy of partnering with schools in DRC.

#### Congo’s Schools Need Help

Schools in the DRC need a lot of improvement. In 2006 – 2007, only 35% of high school seniors taking the national exams passed and received their diplomas. (MYRT consistently ranks among the top five schools in the region for students passing the exams.) Of those who passed, 90% received scores that were marginally acceptable. With so many problems resulting from the international war fought on Congolese soil, education has suffered. Many schools have been destroyed and the government has not had the money to pay teachers and maintain schools.

#### Team Members

The team from Waza Alliance consists of two

board members, Faustin N’Tala and Sylvia Hyde. Both have extensive experience in teaching in U.S. and foreign schools.

Since 1973, Sylvia has taught at all educational levels from elementary school through university. She was an exchange teacher in Armenia as part of Project Harmony funded by the U.S. Department of State and has been involved in collaboration with schools in other countries. Before she joins the Able & Willing task force in July, Sylvia will take a student group to France and then help develop a teaching unit in Switzerland and Belgium, focused on the effects of Belgium’s colonial period on DRC. Currently, Sylvia teaches French at Carmel Clay Middle School in Carmel, Indiana.



Sylvia Hyde will use her international teaching experience to set up exchange programs between schools in Congo and U.S.

Faustin N’Tala, president and founder of the Waza Alliance and longtime friend of Puma, knows about the challenges facing the educational system in the Congo. Born in 1967 in Kolwezi, Zaire (now DRC), he graduated from the Institut Supérieur de Pédagogique in Lubumbashi and taught for nine years at the English-Speaking School of Lubumbashi. In 1998, Mr. N’Tala got a scholarship to study at the University of Indianapolis and received his bachelor’s degree in 2002. Since then he has been teaching at the Interna-



Faustin N’Tala, an old friend of Puma’s, will lead the teachers training seminar.

tional School of Indiana while working for his Ph.D. at Indiana University in Comparative & International Education.

Puma and Faustin first met in the early 90's when Puma was making plans to build a school in Tshamalale village and Faustin was setting up an agricultural demonstration plot down the road. The villagers often asked why two educated men like Puma and Faustin would choose to help a little rural village like theirs. The two of them

shared a vision of improving education in the Congo and they agreed that it was better to start in a rural village, away from the distracting influences of a big city.

Puma came to the U.S. in 1992 and Faustin in 1998, Puma in Frederick, Maryland and Faustin in Indianapolis, Indiana. They have kept in touch and vowed to work on their shared vision. This summer, they will again get to work together on that vision.

### **Interested in an Exchange Program?**

The team from Waza Alliance will be working on the details of the pilot exchange programs between two pairs of schools in the U.S. and Congo. The experience gained this summer will help them establish partnerships in a systematic and careful way so as to ensure the viability of the partnership in the long term. If you are interested in following the progress of the exchange program and opportunities for participation as they develop, simply drop an email to [Exchange@AbleAndWilling.org](mailto:Exchange@AbleAndWilling.org) and tell us about yourself and your interests.

## ***2008 Project Plans***

### **II. WaMbuyu Technical School**

#### **A Key to Growth and Independence**

For Able & Willing to continue to fund the cost of building new schools, it is imperative that the schools be self-supporting. With the installation of the equipment and books from our shipment, the recently chartered WaMbuyu Technical School, part of the MYRT School System, will be ready to start paying their share of the expenses and more.

#### **Installation Tasks**

Definitely the hardest task for Puma this year will be to set up all of the workshops and make them into revenue generating and job creation centers. Hopefully, the shipment will end its 10,000 mile / 6 week transport across ocean, from Baltimore to Dar es Salaam, followed by a 1,000 mile / 6 week transport across land by July 16 when Puma arrives.

The first task will be to get the container through customs, then unloaded and the contents delivered. It won't be easy to move the 2300 lb generator and other heavy machines, several over 900 lbs., without hydraulic powered forklifts. That will be a challenge for classic Congolese ingenuity. Next, the shops will be wired to a new service panel and connected to the new generator. After the equipment is installed, students can begin making cabinets for the tools and spare parts and workbenches for the sewing machines.

The computer labs will be updated with some of the 80 "new" computers while the remainder will be distributed to other schools. The library will be stocked with the twelve boxes of books.

## Earning Income

Teachers must be hired for the new technical programs, which include metal working, wood working, welding, sewing, cooking, nursing, and electronics. All of these programs, with the exception of nursing, have the potential to produce marketable products. The metal and wood shop machines are capable of making nearly anything imaginable. The key is to determine items in local demand and the cost of production. This will be part of the classroom projects.

A priority will be placed on making key components used by new business partnerships which can continue to earn income for the school. For example, the students in the cooking class will try out the equipment that Puma donated for making popcorn and other food for sale in the village. If this proves profitable, the wood and metal shops can make roadside food stands, duplicating the equipment, for business partners in other communities.

Another idea that Puma will explore is making student desks for other schools on a monthly rental basis. Most schools are in great need of furniture but can't afford the initial cost. A rental fee that includes a replacement plan would likely be affordable by many schools. Such plans would introduce a new business model for schools and other busi-

ness which operate on a small monthly cash flow and no credit.

## Sewing and Cooking Classes & Businesses

In September 2007, a delegation of about one dozen women approached Puma for help in their cooperative business of making clothing, dolls, and canned food. They needed help in buying some small equipment, like pots and pans and sewing machines. They also needed a place to work.

The sewing and cooking workshops will be just the initial response to their request. With a dozen sewing machines, the workshop will provide classes in sewing and be available for some profit sharing ventures.

## Nursing Program

MYRT School will work with the nursing school in Lubumbashi and the medical department at the University of Lubumbashi to set up nursing program.

The idea of teaching nursing classes was a response to a recent outbreak of cholera in Lubumbashi. Cholera is an intestinal disease that is preventable by good water sanitation and treatable by proper care.

## 2008 Project Plans

### III. Poleni School Construction Funds Needed

Last year a start was made on a new elementary school in Poleni village, about six kilometers from Tshamalale village where the original MYRT School campus is located. Poleni villagers, including the village chief, helped to clear the land, dig a well and septic pit, and erect a shelter for making bricks.

The plans for this year call for building classrooms for first and second grades and an office. At this point, we still need about \$10,000 for the project.



Poleni villagers help prepare the site for their school.

## 2008 Project Plans

### IV. Kipopo School Construction A Key to Long Range Plans

On a site with 100 acres, the MYRT Campus at Kipopo village will become the hub of local partnership enterprises. Located over 20 kilometers from the original MYRT School campus, the Kipopo campus will require a dormitory and kitchen for orphans and students who live long distances from the school.

Although the original campus took over 10 years and \$250,000 to build, we hope to build an even larger campus with more workshops in Kipopo in four years and under \$150,000. The industrial shops we are installing this year will help produce the skilled labor and material that will save money. About a quarter of the cost could be saved by cut-

ting six years of travel from the U.S.

At this time we do not have enough money to do serious construction this summer. Puma is planning low budget activities to prepare the site. Activities include establishing boundaries by planting trees and bush hedges, building roads and gates, and clearing land for agriculture, soccer and building sites. The Scout troops will be helping on these tasks as they camp out in the tents we sent in the big shipment.

We still hope to get some donations for as much construction as possible. The faster we can progress, the less the total cost will be.

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## 2008 Project Plans

### V. Other Projects

Every year Puma, the school staff, and villagers organize many low cost activities. Here are a few that we are sure will continue.

**Health education.** MYRT School partners with AMO-CONGO to present health education seminars for adults and teens in the village. AMO-Congo is a non-governmental organization set up in 1993 by Congolese doctors to alleviate the problems caused by HIV-AIDS.

**Scout activities.** This year Puma will combine Scout camping and contests with community service aimed at preparing the school site in Kipopo village.

**Business partnerships.** Puma and the board of the WaMbuyu Foundation, established last year in the Congo to create business partnerships in the

nearby villages, will look for new opportunities.

**Aid to other schools.** The MYRT School System intends to promote quality education in schools throughout the region. Besides the teachers seminar and school exchange program projects described earlier, WaMbuyu Tech will distribute some of the computers and make school furniture.

**Village improvements.** Ideas for making the village a better place to live often come out of the meetings with teachers and parents. Previous projects include planting fruit trees and trash removal.

**Building maintenance.** There are always plenty of things in the school that need repair, such as damage due to termites, painting, and fixing septic systems.

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## Sixth Grade Students Raise \$500

Students at **Walkersville Middle School** raised \$500 in poster contests. The sixth grade students made posters about education in Congo and voted with pennies for the winners. This is the third year that the school has raised money for Able & Willing, totalling over \$1350.

Puma gives presentations about schools in Africa and what Able & Willing is doing to help. Puma also tells African folk stories and shows some of the model cars he made out of scrap wire when he was their age growing up in the Congo.



Puma accepts a check from teacher and winners of the poster contest

**Do you know of a school** that would like to learn about and help schools in Africa? Several schools, as distant as Hawaii, have found value in contributing to the work of Able & Willing.

## Tracking Friends Doing Work in Africa

**Norris Tweah** (top, left), one of our board members, is back in Liberia on a Scott Family Fellowship to help the flowering new democracy maintain accountability and transparency. Other fellows are shown with Ed Scott.



**Jean de Dieu Tshileu**, a young man born in Goma, grew up near Lubumbashi and recently graduated from Eastern Mennonite University, called us last year for help with his dream. He is now in Congo working on that dream to build a school supported by local agricultural projects.

**Antoine & Angele Kabwasa** (photo with Puma telling folk tales to children in Frederick, MD.) Bad news: their school in Kikwit, DRC was destroyed by a tornado. Good news: Angele's book is published and available on Amazon.com.

### ***Song of the Mermaid and Other Folk Tales from the Congo.***

Beautiful and funny short stories for children. The author shares with the readers stories that she learned as a child in her native Congo, where storytelling or singing is considered a highly respectable skill. This book is beautifully illustrated and also full of colorful exotic names, places and animals. From my favorite: "Why Roosters Crow To The Sun Each Morning," I finally found out where the chickens really come from. Despite the exotic and intriguing setting, the message and lesson from each story is of universal value: "Do not lie, do not cheat, respect others."

The background information provided by Angele and her editor will intrigue both children and adults and make them want to learn more about the author's native country, the Democratic Republic of Congo. So if you really want to learn where the chickens came from, you know what to do.



## “Why I choose Able & Willing . . .”

In our last newsletter we had a column dedicated to you—the friends and backbone of Able and Willing—as a way of extending our appreciation to the faithful. Individual donations continue to represent the core of our funding and we enjoy reading your comments about what our mission means to you. In that spirit, we have chosen to feature a few of your thoughts below...

**Pam Allochis** writes that the last newsletter “gave me a feeling of hope for the DRC. I spent eight months in Zaire in 1991 as a Peace Corp Volunteer just before things really started to disintegrate”. Despite an early evacuation, she recalls that period of time as a “profound experience that still shapes my thoughts and ideals” and allows her to truly “understand and appreciate what Able & Willing is accomplishing in DRC.”

**Lisa Cherbuliez** echoes the sentiment as another former volunteer, expressing appreciation for “all you are doing to rebuild a small part of a beautiful country for such wonderful people”

And as a representative for former volunteers everywhere, **Steven Most**, President of Friends of Congo reports learning of Able and Willing while researching humanitarian projects in DRC. With a lack of peace and security diverting resources from education, “AWIEF’s proven track record in building schools through grassroots efforts permits [our contribution and organization] to have a direct impact on the lives of the Congolese.”

Able & Willing is also privileged to have a strong following at its semi-annual feasts in downtown Frederick, MD. **Bob Hanson**, a “Puma’s-Kitchen”-regular says that he attends the dinners to hear Jim and Puma’s updates on the progress abroad. “I’m always impressed,” he notes, particularly with how the

MYRT School has become self-sustaining and how the organization has continued to grow without reliance on government funding.”

Longtime supporters, diners and Quaker Friends **John Darnell** and **Greg Tobin** cite an admiration for Puma’s continued dedication to the cause. Similarly, **Peter Meyer**, a research economist and former colleague of Jim Carpenter’s at the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, also has a special respect for Puma. He recalls an “electric” presentation back in 2002 as his introduction to AWIEF, and remembers resonating with the “empowering approach” it offered to international development.

Lastly, **Randy Williams**, in trying to craft something that “hasn’t already been said”, confesses that the Kitchen dinners are really all about the food. “It’s remarkably good,” he raves. “Everything is authentic and made from scratch; in combination with the artisans and photographs, you truly feel like you are somewhere else”

And there’s no place we would rather be than surrounded by our longtime friends.

Have a comment you would like to share? Mail a note or send an email to:

[feedback@AbleAndWilling.org](mailto:feedback@AbleAndWilling.org)

and we’ll work to include you in our next edition.

**Shannon Murphy**  
Secretary, AWIEF



## Help needed to keep construction going on new schools.

With most of our current budget invested in the various workshops that will keep MYRT School afloat and keep kids in school, we desperately need money to continue the school construction projects in Poleni and Kipopo villages.

The parents in these villages are able and willing to work on building the schools. Won't you help by investing in the start up costs?

With your help, our long standing aim - to build self-supporting, quality schools that can produce human and financial resources to build more schools – is coming to fruition, despite these hard times. This is the way to break the demoralizing and self perpetuating chain of dependency on foreign aid.

### I would like to make a tax-deductible contribution of:

\$50.00       \$100.00       \$500.00

\$1000.00       Other \_\_\_\_\_

Gift on behalf of: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Send to:      AWIEF  
                  P.O. BOx 4303  
                  Frederick, MD 21705-4303

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AWIEF, P.O. Box 4303, Frederick, MD 21705

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## 2008 Project Plans

*Highlights*

### I. Teacher Training & Exchange Programs

Educators from Indiana instruct teachers & set up exchange program for schools in Congo and U.S.

### II. WaMbuyu Technical School

- Install new equipment for classes in
  - Metal working
  - Sewing
  - Nursing
  - Wood working
  - Cooking
  - Computers
  - Welding
  - Electronics
- Make school furniture, transport vehicles, ...

### III. Poleni School Construction

Finish classrooms for 1st & 2nd grades

### IV. Kipopo School Construction

- Prepare land, roads, gates, ag fields, borders,...
- Begin building classrooms, dorms, kitchen,....

### V. Other Projects

- Health education
- Scout activities
- Business partnerships
- Aid to other schools
- Village improvements
- Building maintenance

