

## Celebrating 22 Years of Work in Africa !

1994 saw the start of construction on a two room school in Zaire (now, the Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC) in a village with no electricity, wells, toilets or literacy. Myrt School now includes preschool through high school and is rated the best on all levels in the Katanga Province based on national exams. WaMbuyu Tech is rated tops by by the Belgian Technical Corporation. The newest project is a special needs school in Kenya. Read about the projects below and on our website, <http://AbleAndWilling.org>.

**Able & Willing is searching for volunteers** to teach at any level or train teachers at Myrt schools in Congo. Food and lodging is furnished. Call or text Jim Carpenter at 301-514-1356

## In This Issue

The first two articles of this newsletter are from Puma WaMbuyu, founder of Able and Willing International Education Foundation (AWIEF). This time, he gives a bleak outlook for the school caused by low enrollment levels, caused in turn by hard economic times. In the third article, **The Road Ahead**, Jim Carpenter tries to put this in perspective and describes our strategy to respond to these challenges. Andie Sante describes one strategic program in **Tennis Program Expands At MYRT**. Jim describes latest plans for an improved learning environment in **Solar Powered Learning Lab**. And last, Maggie Lusweti updates her project plans in Kenya in **Kenya School Update: Licensing and Funding**.

## A Word From The Founder

Friends, for a long time I believed that it was possible, even easy, to do good and improve the quality of life for many people all at once in a short period of time. These last few months make me believe that to be wrong. Doing good is not a once-and-done thing. To achieve lasting good, to really change people's lives requires an on-going, even a life time commitment, like raising a child. When I started Able and Willing, my expectations were so ambitious. I thought that in just a few years, my work helping improve the lives of people here would be finished. I thought Myrt School and WaMbuyu Tech would stand on their own, thrive, make school available on a permanent basis to all, including the many children in need. But I am older and wiser now. I am in this for the long haul, and I need your support as much as ever. As the sayings goes, "it takes a village to

raise a child," and "no one can be free, until we all are free". Together we can.

I and all the students of Myrt School / WaMbuyu-Tech thank you all so much for your support past and future.



*Mbuyu Wa Mbuyu*

"Puma"

## Myrt & Mbuyu Tech Update

by Mbuyu Wa Mbuyu (Puma)

The school year 2016 – 2017 for Myrt School and WaMbuyu Tech is a year of a skinny cow – one too skinny to be milked because its owner can't afford to feed it. He can't kill it for food either because it is the only cow he has. So the whole family starves and waits, wondering if one of them will die. They all wait and hope for an extended hand from somewhere. If nothing happens all are in peril. This describes Myrt School now.

A week after of the school opened Myrt School campus was almost empty. A total of 23 students for all grades together. Of these, 11 are in scouting for education program, meaning they worked in exchange for tuition during the vacation time. Only 12 students were paying the tuition.

This was the worst start ever. In 2014 Myrt School had 70 students enrolled after the first week. In 2015 56 enrolled.

This dire situation is occurring because the people in this part of Congo depend entirely on mining companies. When they are in distress, as they are

now, so are all who depend on them. No jobs, no pay, no ability to feed, clothe, or education the children. The situation is especially dire because the people must depend so much on imported goods, including food. I deeply fear for the future of the young people in this village.

On the positive note all of our graduates are doing fine and all our teachers and other personnel came back to work with plenty of energy and enthusiasm. They are ready to meet the students and teach again. We just need more students to come back.

To all the friends of Able and Willing who support us from far and near, we ask for your help on behalf of our students in scouting for education, the orphans, and the parents who are willing to work for the education of their but lack the means to pay for it.

Please sponsor a child for \$250 a year for an orphan or \$500 a year for the student in work for education programs.

## The Road Ahead

by Jim Carpenter

I was shocked to receive Puma's articles (above). I have rarely heard him so distressed. But knowing Puma's determination and pure genius I am sure that he had a plan.

For 22 years Puma has shuttled back and forth from Maryland to DRC, holding down a job as an IBEW master electrician here and directing work at the schools there. Every year presents new challenges and I have personally witnessed on many occasions his skillful direction and dedication to the schools and the surrounding communities, as well as his talent for successful handling of special challenges.

Puma's determination has paid off extremely well for the once impoverished rural village of Tshamalale. Besides building one of the best

schools in the Katanga region offering preschool through high school and technical school, Puma brought electricity to the region, directed construction of a now thriving three acre community market, revived Boy and Girl Scout programs in the district, founded the football (soccer) league, acquired services for health education and inoculations, and shepherded students from first grade through college. And much more.

I also know that his funds are at rock bottom and he must rely for now on the continued generosity of our friends to help fund his plans for recovery.

So my challenge was to get an accurate description of his plans to relate to our friends. From this distance through a broken communication system,

it's not like brainstorming around a campfire in the old days with Puma, school staff and local community leaders. The general plan is clear but I could see barriers and questions. I struggled to get clarity on the details of the strategy.

To appreciate the strategy it is important to understand our goals, the nature of the changes in the area and the position of Myrt School in the changing community.

## Operational Goals

In the rural village of 1995 these operational goals seemed achievable until 2004.

- Quality education in academic, citizenship, sports, and vocational skills.
- Opportunities for orphans and students from poor families.
- Self-supporting.
- Safe and healthy environment for students, staff and community.

In 1995, a tuition of \$1.00 a month was enough to pay salaries and minimal operating expenses for the one classroom of first grade students. With friends of AWIEF covering construction costs of new classrooms and expanding facilities for the next graduating class, tuition rose gradually but remained affordable for most families. For the orphans and families who could not afford the increase, Puma created innovative aid programs that were mostly covered by income from tuitions.

In 1995, health and safety concerns seemed easy to solve: more wells, toilets, health education and inoculation programs,... The treacherous roads isolated the village from outsiders so theft was not a problem – there was simply no place to hide stolen goods. Security walls were not needed.

## New Challenge: Higher Education

In 2004, students graduating from middle school needed to go on to high school and vocational training. This required more equipment and teachers specialized in subject areas creating pressure to raise tuition.

Puma adapted by creating more revenue producing projects that service the local community while instructing students in business and vocational skills. AWIEF provided computers, books,

generators (diesel, solar and wind), tools and shop machinery for WaMbuyu Tech. The school's reputation grew based on national exam results and quality and variety of facilities for preschool through high school and technical school.

## Changing Community

In 2010, Puma built an electrical substation at the school and connected it to the national grid powered by the Congo River. The surrounding communities celebrated with speeches and festivities with the popular Katanga governor blessing the tremendous achievement.

The economy of Katanga Province was nearing the end of a 10 year boom based on world copper prices. The state seized the opportunity and paved the road to Myrt School, installed water and sewer system and a bus stop at the school. Property values sky rocketed as wealthier people built walled family compounds along the road and hired security guards with machine guns.

## Danger

By 2014 Myrt School and WaMbuyu Tech was increasingly vulnerable. Nighttime burglars punched a hole in a wall and stole most of the computer equipment. Strangers began strolling through the campus. Shop tools began to disappear. Income from the service projects dwindled as tools vanished. The wealthier parents felt the school without a wall to be unsafe for their precious children. The economy continues to decline with world copper prices, creating additional pressure on families and the school. Paid attendance began to drop as Puma describes above.

The need for student aid for orphans and poor families continues to grow as school revenues decline.

## Adapting and Progress!

Puma knew in his gut exactly what to do. The wealthy families are still around. He must attract more paying students by providing a safe environment and appropriate services while relying on the continued generosity of our friends.

Construction of a security wall began in the summer of 2014. ***I just received word that the last brick was laid to complete the wall around the 2.7 acre campus.*** The wall is 8.2 feet high and

about 1,500 feet long.

In 2015 a tennis court was completed (see next article). Our school is the only school in the province offering tennis, basketball and football (soccer). The school is now building new bathrooms. The computer lab will soon be upgraded (see article below). These projects will restore the school's reputation and attract families that can pay tuition.

## More To Be Done

Work that needs to be completed as soon as possible includes protecting the brick wall with stucco, adding a new security gate and finishing the bathrooms. Myrt School needs funds for the aid programs for orphans and students from poor families to continue their education. Our funds are depleted. Please continue to help.

## Tennis Program Expands At MYRT

by Andie Sante

The ongoing effort to grow the tennis program at MYRT has seen some big strides this summer. The program is important to the students of the school and also the community for so many reasons. Not only does tennis provide and promote physical health and mental agility, for the people of the Congo, it is an empowering sport to learn.

In August 2016, Able & Willing was very fortunate to gain ownership of not one but three racket re-stringing machines, two electric and one manual. The electric machines were acquired in the Sports Authority close out sales at drastically reduced costs. The school is very thankful for those at the company who enabled these purchases. All three machines were purchased and shipped by privately donated funds. Until now, there was only one other re-stringing machine in Katanga and the cost for a racket repair was out of reach. If a racket broke, it became unusable. Now rackets can be kept in good repair for use by the students. In addition to being able to replace broken racket strings, with or without electricity, having these machines means teaching an additional skill, furthering the program even more. More rackets, tennis balls, and racket string were also shipped to the school.

Before he left America to return to the school, Puma was fortunate to receive a tennis lesson from Mark DiChiara, the Director of Tennis for

Georgetown Prep Tennis Club in Rockville, Maryland. Mr. DiChiara is an award winning tennis instructor and Puma was very excited to learn from such a gifted teacher and was very grateful for the generous gift of this lesson. In fact, the techniques he learned in that lesson allowed him to defeat Mr. Erick Kalubanba, the "Honorary Tennis Champion" of Katanga! The match lasted 2 hours and 45 minutes with Puma winning it in straight sets 6-4, 6-3.

We are continuing to seek out ways to expand the tennis program at MYRT. If you are interested in learning more about it, please contact Able & Willing at [AskUs@AbleAndWilling.org](mailto:AskUs@AbleAndWilling.org).



*New tennis court on Myrt School campus.*

## Solar Powered Computer Learning Lab < \$5,000

by Jim Carpenter

My goal is to create *a plan that anyone in the world can replicate*. I invite anyone with ideas to participate.

Here are the specifications of the lab:

1. 30 workstations on a local area network.
2. A server with terabytes of educational material in multiple languages accessible to all workstations and cell phones.
3. Each workstation fully loaded with software for office, graphics, database, web server, Internet browsers, email, programming environments, and much more.
4. Each workstation capable of controlling external electrical devices by programs that students create.
5. The lab stockpiled with electronic parts for learning the basics of electronics and programming by actually making things controlled by the workstations.
6. The lab operating 8 hours a day on batteries charged by 3 solar panels, 350 watts each, in 6 hours of full sunlight.
7. The lab connected to satellite L band (very slow but free) with compact antenna, tuner and computer for \$115 from Outernet, the free "library in the sky". Other Internet connection modes are being evaluated.

### Progress To Date

We already have the equipment on hand to satisfy the first three items of the specifications. We have a batch of Lenovo ThinkPad laptops ready to ship to Myrt School that are loaded with Ubuntu, LibreOffice and lots of other free open source software. I am still adding content to the 2 TB file server and researching additional server functionality for classroom learning.

Myrt School already has electricity thanks to Puma's effort in 2010 that built the substation on the national grid. However, the region only receives power on certain days of the week and at night.

We expect to begin installation and training at the beginning of next school year after the political situation settles. Our budget for this part (items 1-

3) of the project is \$5,000, including shipping and my travel expenses. A donor has already pledged the money.

### Not Replicable

As currently envisioned, this project - even items 1-3 - is not easily replicable. The project's 30 identical laptops were obtained through a series of community fund-raising projects in partnership with an electronics recycler. Also, we expect some resistance to the move from Microsoft Windows to Ubuntu. Without the switch, cost would be prohibitive and full advantage of huge industry trends would be missed.

### Breakthrough!

New technology is the key to making the project replicable. The next wave consists of cheap, small, versatile devices that are also easy to connect to external devices. They now cost under \$50 and run on less than 2 watts! They run open source software which means that unlike Microsoft

Windows, everything is totally free. One model, called the Raspberry Pi, seen at right, measures 2.25 by 3.5 inches, weighs 1.5 oz, has quad core CPU with integrated graphics core, four USB ports and ports for HDMI, audio, composite video and Ethernet as well as connectors for a camera and serial display (DSI). It has on-board WiFi and Bluetooth, and 40 programmable pins for controlling external devices. To a geek like me, this is heaven.

Touchscreen 7" monitors are available for around \$75, consume less than 2 watts. We could get used 17" LCD monitors cheaper on eBay but they're heavy and costly to ship, and they gobble up watts, which could trash the solar power budget. Keyboards and mice are cheap and supplies are available to Myrt School.



*This Raspberry Pi 3-model B is one of several small computers priced under \$50, even as low as \$9.*

## Kenya School Update: Licensing and Funding

by Maggie Nato Lusweti

I have been in touch with NEMA (The Kenya National Management Authority) which is a government agency responsible for all matters relating to the environment and construction of buildings. It oversees all matters pertaining to environmental licensing, auditing and inspection. All buildings, public or private have to be approved by this agency.

The process of approval is not very clear. After several unsuccessful efforts to reach an Official at NEMA county offices, a Bungoma West Sub county officer advised that before we start construction, we need to provide a site plan and present a photocopy of our title deed.

This information conflicts with previous advice that we could build first and then get licensing from NEMA. I'm still seeking clarity on this matter.

NEMA provides two types of licensing that we could use:

- ECD Center (Early Childhood Development center) that would cater to all children including special needs and neurotypical children. This license permits centers to charge fees to sustain it. Once the ECD center is up and running, we could build an elementary school to include our special education component.
- Vocational/ Community Based rehabilitation center to train special needs children in vocational skills. This license permits the center to make products for sale and generate income to sustain it's operations.

In the meantime, I have put a budget together with a business plan and hope to raise some funds and get the construction started before April 2017. We may need to start off with 2 classes, 2 toilets, an office and a playground. Starting the first phase with twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) would help us hit the ground running. With your donation, we can make this happen. ***Please make your donation to the Kenya Project at Able and Willing***

### *Please Help*

The parents in these villages are able and willing to work on building the schools. The students are able and eager to learn.

Able & Willing is committed to helping the parents and students and their community improve their educational opportunities.

Please continue your partnership with Able & Willing and invest in a better future in Africa.

I would like to make a tax-deductible contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

My Address

Send to:

AWIEF

P.O. Box 4303

Frederick, MD 21705-40303

*or donate securely on-line*

Please use my email to save postage and printing: \_\_\_\_\_

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