

MISSION TRIP: UGANDA

Bill Levin, Georgia-Cumberland Conference global evangelism director, shares some of the highlights and his reactions from a recent mission trip to Uganda, Africa.

We are back from Uganda and we had a wonderful, moving, and yet deeply challenging experience. We have come to love Uganda. As you are well aware, the needs there, as in so many other parts of the world, are overwhelming, but the potential is awesome.

EXPERIENCES

At the beginning of the trip, my wife Jan and I joined the Atlanta Buckhead Community Fellowship group and headed to the UNIFAT mission school in Gulu Town, Uganda. During the past year, the Atlanta Buckhead Community Mission Group raised more than \$35,000 to assist the school. With those funds, they filled a 40-foot container with 5,000 school books, 25 computers with computer/media equipment, tons of clothes, lots of sporting equipment, 10 office desks, and more than 100 shoe boxes with gifts for the children. The container was then shipped from Atlanta, Georgia to Gulu. They were also able to purchase material to place

a fence around the campus. We joined 15 members from Buckhead Community who came to work on the fence and to become personally acquainted with the staff and students at UNIFAT school.

John Otto, one of the members of Buckhead Community, is from Gulu. Due to medical issues and the political climate in Uganda, Otto had not visited his homeland in more than 20 years. A few men from Buckhead Community and I were privileged to go with John to see his mother, brothers, nephews, and nieces for the first time in more than two decades. What a wonderful reunion.

On July 19, 2007, Shelly Litchfield, an educator from Collegedale Academy in Collegedale, Tennessee, came to Gulu with two Collegedale Academy students: Amanda Mitchell and Travis Pyke. These students were part of an 11-member team of classmates that raised more than \$25,000

for the Invisible Children campaign. Collegedale Academy was the third highest contributor in the list of 370 schools raising funds for this project.

As we were leaving Gulu, Jan and I visited an internally displaced person camp. These are government instituted "political camps" which are home to a huge number of Acholi refugees in northern Uganda. We have heard reports that the number of people displaced is from 800,000 to more than 2,000,000. It is our sincere hope that in 2008 both medical and preaching teams from the Georgia-Cumberland Conference will inundate this area with the practical love of Christ.

Five ShareHim teams from the Conference came to Masaka, Uganda, to hold meetings in the district from July 13-28, 2007. Speakers Jonathan Balaban, Bruce Bergherm, M.D., pastors Chris Bullock and Rudy Skoretz, and Scott Thurmon, with their support team members Nicolas Beidel, Cody Limone, Stelle Skoretz, and Britteny Thurmon, tirelessly ministered to the community and shared the Gospel the entire two and-a-half week stay.



JAN LEVIN

UNIFAT school assembly in Gulu, Uganda



DAVID KIM

A medical clinic at one of the ShareHIM meeting sites in Uganda

The two medical teams did an amazing job. They cared for more than 1,000 patients in just a few days. The Masaka team was headed by David Kim, M.D., and assisted by Diane Brown, Tamara George, and Eunice Lim. The Kampala medications, with an approximate retail value of \$20,000, were dispensed free of charge. Every day, 40-50 people had to be turned away because of time constraints.

The Ugandan team leaders, pastors, and church members were ecstatic with the response of the people. They say each baptism in Masaka is like 10 baptisms in other parts of the country, so when 129 people were baptized on Sabbath, July 28, 2007, there was a great deal of excitement. Daniel Ssuneni, pastor, said, "Many people came to me and told me that they have never heard of any group coming and giving medical help with free medications." He then said, "This experience has opened the hearts of the Masaka people to hear the message presented each evening." George Kambugu, pastor and district leader, exclaimed, "I have never seen anything like this for Masaka in all my years of ministry."

On another front, Scott Thurmon made arrangements and left funds (raised through the Marietta, Georgia, church) with the district leaders of the Nabinene Seventh-day Adventist Orphanage, Primary, Secondary, and Vocational School to start construction on a rain water capture system with a 6,000-liter storage tank. Currently, there is no water on campus. Yusef Kalimunda, a Ugandan businessman and chairman of the Nabinene Vocational School, is heading the project.

Following the rain water capture system project at Nabinene, we have left funds, which were raised in Georgia-Cumberland Conference for Uganda, with the Uganda Adventist Union office to sink a borehole which will provide a more permanent water source there. The research for that project will be done here in the United States.

At Nabinene, we also helped the school by giving away clothes, shoes, toys, soccer balls, jump ropes,

Frisbees, flashlights, and medications. We toured the new boys' and girls' dorms that ADRA built. They are wonderful!

Jan and I, along with the medical team, left for Bushenyi to visit Dr. Manual at the Ishaka Adventist Hospital in western Uganda. The hospital is grossly understaffed and has a very small budget to work with—110 beds with only two physicians.

There is a great need for professional medical personnel, and an increased budget to adequately do their job. Our medical team decided to give their remaining medications to the hospital pharmacy, which they appreciated. The donated supplies tripled the pharmacy's stock.

We then went to Kasese where an Adventist woman, Evon David, from Washington, D.C., began an orphanage several years ago next to the Adventist church and school. There are 30 children at the orphanage ranging in age from two to 16 years old). It was apparent that the staff and housing facilities provided a good environment for the children. We were able to help the orphanage with clothes, toys, soccer balls, jump ropes, soap, flashlights, and over-the-counter medications.

From that point, Jan and I went across the country to the city of Jinja to visit David Brass, pastor, and his son, Matt. Matt and his wife, Larisa, live in Lenoir City, Tennessee, and adopted two Ugandan children six years ago. When we arrived in Jinja they were in the process of adopting three more children. There were 65 children, ages four and younger, the facilities were very clean, well-ordered, and we witnessed a dedicated and loving staff. We were also surprised to find modern appliances—refrigerators, washers, and dryers, which were the first we had seen in Uganda.

Larisa Brass and her sister, Mindy Burgin, have established the Kirabo Foundation (

Jan Levin with students at the Nabinene Seventh-day Adventist School

tion.org), which is based in Jinja. Its primary purpose is to provide help to orphaned and disadvantaged Ugandan children by providing educational scholarships. There are 42 Ugandan children in school this year because of this foundation.

These are the highlights. Many more stories can and need to be told. Our Church has been commissioned to bring hope of Jesus to a dying world and the message of His soon return.

In July, 2008, the Georgia-Cumberland Conference is planning to return to Uganda to build on the work already established, and enter new areas which need help desperately. There is something very rewarding about stepping out of our comfort zone and moving to the front lines. You may arrive feeling unsure and possibly vulnerable, but I know you will leave knowing you have made a difference—for now and for eternity.

You are invited and needed to participate—you can make a huge impact. Make Uganda a matter of prayer—there are many ways to get involved, so ask God what He can do through you.

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