

The Maranyundo School Opens in Rwanda

When the Maranyundo School in Nyamata, Rwanda, was officially dedicated on February 28, 2008, among those who joined in the colorful and joy-filled celebration was a delegation representing Westover School. The all-girls middle school is just one of a number of projects being undertaken in Rwanda to help rebuild the country's infrastructure after the 1994 genocide, which left some 800,000 dead — mostly members of the Tutsi minority population, as well as members of the moderate Hutu majority.

The five Westover representatives on hand for the dedication ceremony were: Head of School Ann Pollina; Barrie Hogan Landry '62, who serves as the head of development for the Rwandan school and who helped forge Westover's link to the new school; Jennifer Jones '60, a landscape architect who helped design the grounds for the school; and Jennifer's daughters, Dr. Deborah Jones '88 and Sarah Jones '90. The Maranyundo School, which opened earlier in February, was established to offer a middle-school education for Rwandan girls, with a strong focus on mathematics and science. Supporters of the school believe that Westover, renowned for its Women In Science and Engineering program, can serve as a model and resource for the Rwandan school.

In February 2007 Ann, Barrie, and Jennifer, along with other members of the project's board, had traveled to Rwanda to visit the construction site and to meet with Rwandan educators. It was hard to imagine that in just a year's time, with constant collaboration between the Rwandan and American teams, the school could be built. To celebration this amazing achievement, a much larger group of 63 supporters, mostly Bostonians, traveled to Rwanda to bear witness to this event.

"As we drove up to the school," Barrie recalled, "we were thrilled by the sound of the strong rhythmic beating of drummers, dressed in bright bold greens and whites, announcing our arrival. And when we first saw our beautiful campus, an oval circled by 9 brick buildings, with white tents majestically marking the site of the opening ceremony, our breath was taken away.

"However," Barrie added, "the real joy came seconds later when we saw the 60 young girls with huge smiles of anticipation, standing proudly in their brand-new, robin-blue uniforms, white socks pulled up to their calves, gathering their chairs, to form rows to face the gathering dignitaries. The moment was magical, with clouds giving way to a brilliant sun, shining down and blessing this amazing gathering. We were humbled to realize that where we were standing was on a plain



Among those on hand for the official dedication of the new Maranyundo School were (from left) Barrie Hogan Landry '62, Sarah Jones '90, Dr. Debby Jones '88, Jennifer Jones '60, and Head of School Ann Pollina.

within 200 miles of the Great Rift Valley where human life had once begun."

During the dedication, Ann noted, Rwanda's First Lady, Jeannette Kagame, asked those assembled, "Do you remember what it is like to be in terror?" Ann said that Madame Kagame



Head of School Ann Pollina with some of the 60 seventh grade students who make up the first class at the new Maranyundo School in Rwanda. Behind them is the quilt that was created in 2007 by Westover students in their Needle Arts class.



Sarah Jones '90 greets a group of children while visiting Rwanda.

then recalled that “the land on which the school is built was a concentration camp for Tutsis. Now it is a school where Hutu and Tutsi girls are taught side by side.”

Ann said what struck her the most “is the startling growth and progress I saw in the year between my visits. The road to Nyamata is now a beautifully paved highway, when last year it was

a dirt road for most of its length from the capital, Kigali. The Maranyundo School has electricity and full internet access. Kigali is teeming with construction. Rwandan officials,” she added, “have a carefully thought out, ambitious but achievable economic development plan. The infrastructure is growing by leaps and bounds and education is a priority.”

Barrie said, “The Maranyundo Initiative aligns itself with the country’s larger vision for social and economic reform for all its people. Rwanda’s most important assets are its people. In the next 20 years, Rwanda hopes to establish itself as a regional service and information center, which will depend heavily upon an educated work force. The Maranyundo Initiative’s emphasis on math and science dovetails with this important goal.” Rwanda also seeks to increase its teacher pool, which was all but wiped out in the genocide, and to increase the number of students going on to secondary schools. The Maranyundo School, Barrie said, “will serve as a model for building other secondary schools and will provide a blueprint for partnering within the private sector.”

“The next step,” Barrie said, “is to double the size of the school. We originally designed the school for 90 students but

the new Minister of Education is requiring us to double the size of the school because of the terrific need. We see this as a very good thing. We currently have 60 7th graders and will accept 60 more in 2009 and 60 more in 2010.”

To date, Ann said, Westover’s contribution to the Maranyundo School has included a science curriculum designed by Westover’s science faculty, the donation of microscopes to its laboratory, paid for by a gift from the Dorcas Fair. Westover’s administrators are looking into how faculty and students can serve as mentors — via the internet — for their Maranyundo counterparts. Westover also is exploring the possibility of having several students and a faculty chaperone visit the Rwandan school as early as this summer — as a forerunner to a possible exchange program between the two schools for both students and faculty.

Both Debby and Sarah Jones put their professional skills to work during their visit. Debby, an internist at New York Presbyterian Hospital at Columbia, worked at a rural hospital and made home health visits with a Rwandan doctor, while Sarah, who works in marketing in London, discussed philanthropic options for the school.



Head of School Ann Pollina (left) with Sister Ann Fox, head of the Paraclete Foundation, who was the catalyst behind organizing support in the United States for the founding of the Maranyundo School.



Part of the celebrations marking the official dedication of the Maranyundo School.