

Wanted: Clean water for Kishapu, Tanzania

Written by Patrice Edwards

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Aptos couple travels to village to bring clean water solution

John Shoka and Mary Braham of Aptos are newly retired and living in a comfortable condo near Cabrillo College. But rather than kicking back, they have set themselves a set of ambitious goals including bringing clean water to the 15,000 villagers of Kishapu, Tanzania, and reducing the incidence of Malaria, the number one killer there.

John, who taught Government at California State University, Sacramento, for 35 years, grew up in Kishapu. His father was a Sukuma tribal chief from 1933 to 1965. All of John's relatives have moved away from Kishapu over the years as the area lost its vitality.



“We want to help restore the vitality of the village and help the people have a better life. I want to give back to Tanzania and the community,” said Shoka.

John and Mary have founded a non-profit organization, Kishapu Community Development Center (KCDC), to work in partnership with the villagers to find solutions to these challenges. (www.kishapu.org) In 2007, John and Mary's brother Dan traveled to Kishapu to meet with villagers to find out what their needs were. The top concerns were a lack of clean water, malaria, which affects 50% of the population, and overall economic development.

The couple has just returned from an exciting and successful five-week trip to Kishapu where they registered their non-profit organization as an international NGO (Non-Government Organization).

They accomplished four objectives they had established for their trip. 1) They delivered 100 insecticide-treated mosquito nets to the health center; 2) Met with local officials to assess the best way to make clean water accessible; 3) Had drawings for a community center completed by local architects; and 4) established a relationship with another NGO to provide leadership training to 10 to 15 Kishapu villagers.

John and Mary also explored a relationship with a second NGO that could teach the villagers organic farming techniques to improve crop yields and the health of farm animals.

Before independence in 1959, the British had built a reservoir at Kishapu to provide drinking water. After the area gained independence, the reservoir was not maintained, and the water became polluted by grazing animals. Now, the water can only be used for constructing mud bricks, drinking water for livestock, and washing clothes.

The nearest drinking water is a small natural spring a half-day's walk from the village. Most villagers make the trip on foot and carry the water back on their heads or in carts, and the water must be boiled before drinking. The lack of irrigation in the area limits agricultural crop yields; currently villagers grow cotton, corn, beans, potatoes, millet and sorghum and raise cattle, goats

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and chickens.

During their recent trip, John and Mary met with local water engineers to review the findings from a survey of options for making clean water accessible. The engineers concluded that rehabilitating the reservoir would be too expensive and difficult to maintain, and recommended additional research to explore the feasibility of creating one or more wells in close proximity to the village.

Since their return, the KCDC board has met to discuss next steps. Board members include John, who is president, Mary, Max Shoka (John's son who lives in Pleasant Hill), David Thiermann and Franklin Marshall both of Santa Cruz.

"We are finalizing our business plan and fundraising is our number one goal," said Mary who is registered nurse and holds a PhD in psychology. "One of our top priorities is funding the additional water research to determine the best course of action," she said.

John is particularly excited about building a community center, which can be built in stages as funds are raised. "The center will be a place where people come to learn and work together to improve the health and well-being of the community. It would also provide accommodations for people from outside the area, such as professionals and officials, who will contribute to the process," said Shoka.

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Photos of John and Mary's trip to Kishapu are posted on their website (visit <http://www.kishapu.org>) and tax deductible donations can be made online.