



The voices of singing children spread through the community center with power and pride as the inaugural ceremonies for the Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village (ASYV) commenced last Tuesday, June 23. After weeks of preparation by the students and staff of the village, some 500 guests and honorees attended the highly anticipated formal ceremonies. In attendance were some of Rwanda's principal dignitaries including several Ministers, the United States Ambassador, the Israel Ambassador, the Governor of the Eastern Province, and international visitors from Europe, Israel and North America.

As the senior project manager for Agahozo-Shalom from JDC, I had the privilege of being at this event with several of my colleagues who have been working for ASYV for the past two years. Nora Barron of the JDC Board of Directors returned to see the completion of the project that she had first witness fourteen months earlier when a delegation of the Board of the JDC came to see the construction site of the village. During the ceremony Nora addressed the gathering on behalf of the JDC and the Board of Directors. "From our Board members to our entire staff," she acknowledged, "the JDC is so very proud to be part of the team which has created, constructed and will manage the village in its formative years."

I had the pleasure of sharing the celebrations with Anne Heyman, the Village Founder (and a partner in every aspect of the growth and development of ASYV) and her family, all of whom are wonderful supporters of the project. Representatives from JDC, the Heyman-Merrin family and other supporters including representatives from Liquidnet Holdings, Inc. looked on with pride as the day began with two ceremonies dedicating the Liquidnet Family High School and Edmond J. Safra Community Center. Seth Merrin formally dedicated the Liquidnet Family High School to honor the tremendous contribution Liquidnet Holdings Inc. has made to the building and establishment of this beautiful campus. Anne Heyman dedicated the Community Center on behalf of the Edmond J. Safra Foundation, making special note of the early and critical support the Foundation gave to Agahozo-Shalom.

Songs, tree plantings, and a walking tour through the school were all part of the joyous celebration. The Liquidnet senior staff reveled in the chance to observe the computer lab (which was fully equipped and wired by Liquidnet family members just a few months ago), where students were showing guests some of the models they have learned over the past six months, since the first class of 125 students moved into the village and the school. In a different class, students were demonstrating some of their physics lessons, including a short lecture on optics. Though the lesson was a bit over my head, it seemed to reach another participant in the group who proudly exclaimed, "now I understand how a lens really works for the first time!"



One of the guests was Larry Bacow, President of Tufts University, who spent several days at the village interacting with our students and staff. Larry, along with all of the visitors, was “blown away” by the maturity and level of knowledge of many of the Agahozo-Shalom children. In fact, the students were extremely eager to engage and connect with the visitors, whom they are so grateful to for their new community and home. One night, while sitting at dinner with five boys, I opened the conversation to allow them to ask me some questions that were on their mind. I expected to hear questions on the completion of the next phase of construction at the village, when the soccer field would be ready for play, etc. Instead, they asked about the legitimacy of the recent election of Ahmadenijhad in Iran, the global economic crisis and the impact it has on raising funds for projects like this, and President Obama’s plans for Africa. One student, Mahjidi, the captain of our soccer team and head of the Religion Club, will be writing his own autobiography and asked me to bring back a book on the history of the American Presidency as well as a copy of “Audacity of Hope” because he wants to see “the style and themes used by president Obama in his book.” Again and again, I was amazed by the students taking every opportunity to explore and learn about the world at large.

The ceremony highlights included inspirational words spoken by guests to the students of Agahozo-Shalom and the performances of the village youth with the Israeli Bat Sheva Dance Company. As students and visitors came together a true sense of unity and brotherhood was palpable in the community, revealing that *Tikkun Halev* (repair of the heart) and *Tikkun Olam* (Repair of the World) justly serve as the foundational elements for this very special place.

The inauguration week marked the completion of one phase of our dream--and it was truly wonderful. Together we have indeed created a new reality on this small hilltop in the heart of Rwanda.