



AGAHOZO-SHALOM UPDATE

September 2009



The Grand Opening Day

On June 23rd 2009, founder Anne Heyman and The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee formally opened the gates of the Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village to the world. The Official Inauguration was attended by over 600 people, including high officials, donors, and visitors from Rwanda, Ethiopia, the United States and Israel. The day's events included the dedication of the Liquidnet Family High School, the Edmond J. Safra Community Center, and the Majora Carter Basket ball courts. The

dedications were followed by the Main Ceremony which was beautifully prepared by the young residents of the village and included sketches presented in English, traditional Rwandan dance and music, as well as a performance by the internationally renowned Batsheva Dance Company. The event also included speeches by Anne Heyman, Nora Barron of the JDC, the US and Israeli Ambassadors, as well as several Rwandan officials, including Governor Ephraim Kabaija of our (Eastern) host province. First Lady Mrs. Janette Kagame who was to deliver the keynote speech was unfortunately ill; she later met with the Leadership and pledged her continued support. Meanwhile the Hon. Solina Nyirahabimana delivered a poignant message from H.E. President Kagame during the ceremony and stayed for the evening's entertainment.

Outline of major Accomplishments from May to August 2009

- **Completion of construction**
- **Distribution of textbooks to each child (a first in Rwanda)**
- **"Stand Up and be Counted/Ngira Nkugire" Event at New York's *Hard Rock Café* raises \$500,000**
- **Over 600 people attend Grand Opening Celebration Event**
- **The *Rwandan Development Board's* Tourism Agency names a baby Gorrilla "Agahozo" in honor of the Youth Village and its commitment to sustainability.**
- **First short term volunteer *group* visits and works in the Village**
- **Computer lab is fully operational**
- **Nurse sees 173 cases of illness, 158 are treated in the clinic, 15 referred to specialists**
- **First harvest of vegetables from farm**
- **Hiring of 3 additional staff and educators**



- **Donation of cows from First Lady, building partners, and other officials**
- **Donation of \$10,000 from Rwamagana district authorities for water/borehole**
- **Race for Rwanda Triathlon raises \$100,000**

Update on the Village

Leading up to the official opening was a huge effort from all involved to **complete construction** and enhance the landscape by planting more trees, and especially grass. A few wild areas were preserved near the community center to more street lights were placed village finally looks like an although vegetation is still feature of the campus, thanks volunteer artist in current site comprises 32 teenage orphans and their accommodations, the the school and the sports



serve as **bird sanctuaries** and along several paths. Today, the established community, young; **art work** is a prominent to Tanya Fredman, ASYV's first residence/art teacher. The children's houses (to house 500 Housemothers)¹, the visitors' community center/dining hall, fields. We also have the farm,

the waste treatment plant and other needed facilities, and the amphitheater is under way. Still to be constructed are: the permanent Learning Center/Library, staff housing, Clinic/Wellness Center, and Administration Offices. We would also like to eventually have club houses for each grade (125 teenagers), and a non-denominational chapel.

Water & Electricity continue to be a challenge however. When we first opened in December, it had quickly become evident that the municipal water was not going to be enough to supply the needs of the village. We worked with the Rwamagana district in order to dig our own borehole, but it turns out we need a second one to be able to adequately supply the school and kitchen/dining hall –especially as the village grows. Electricity is more reliable, but the cost is quite prohibitive -even though the village's consumption is at a bare minimum. Given this challenge, and ASYV's mission to be environmentally friendly, exploring **alternative energy solutions** will be among the priorities of 2010.

The village began to experience **Security** issues this past quarter, with two computers being stolen and a few other items missing. Management worked with the local authorities to track down the suspects, and most of the items were returned, including the computers. It is worth noting that the perimeter of the village is 6.5km, and until construction was finished, it was very difficult to control access to the houses. Since June, village employees have ASYV ID's they show at the gate, and visitors sign in and

¹ Many of these houses are temporarily being used as staff housing, administration, learning/art center, Clinic/wellness center, etc



leave a photo ID which they get back when they exit the compound. Given the thefts in June and the size of the perimeter fence it was decided to employ additional patrol guards to further enhance the safety of the huge grounds.



The Farm matured over the last quarter, and since August there has been no need to purchase vegetables for use in the kitchen. Our vegetable gardens yielded carrots, tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbages, and other succulent veggies –to feed the entire village! In addition, the Bakery began producing more bread than needed for village consumption, so that employees could purchase for their families. All in all, this past quarter our kids saw how one can use one’s environment and tools at their disposal to **promote self-sustainability**. The children enjoy spending time in the kitchen and the farm whenever possible. Just as a reminder, our goal is that the bakery will be self-sustainable (meaning produce enough surplus bread and pastries to cover all the costs of the bakery, including the salaries of bakers). The farm should also feed everyone in the village, both in and out of harvest season. We hope that

this will be possible within five years.

The Philosophy

Agahozo-Shalom’s core mission, inspired by the Yemin Orde Youth Village, is to create “*communities of meaning*”. Implementation is done through two key circles of therapy: *Tikkun Halev* (“healing the heart”), which in practical terms translates into several Enrichment Programs in the afterschool hours, including working in the farm and taking care of cows, but also sports, art, and music activities designed to inspire and enhance our kids’ emotional wellbeing. *Tikkun Olam* (mending the world) is done through community service, which all the kids participate in, and sometimes initiate themselves. Recently, they started thinking about a Literacy/Tutoring program for primary school kids in the Rubona community, which they would like to initiate in 2010.

But there is much more that goes into creating a “*community of meaning*”. One of Agahozo-Shalom’s core beliefs is that, in order to heal the heart and mend the kids’ world, all Employees should feel and act as **parents** and **educators** as well as specialized professionals. To this end, everyone got creative and the results are promising. The **Finance and Administration** team, for instance, is working on *Mentoring Programs* for kids who’d like to know more about Accounting, general Administration, Procurement and even management. The kitchen team initiated cooking lessons which include following recipes and assessing nutritional values, the security guards share tips on safety and protection, the transportation manager will create a curriculum to teach general mechanics to those who are interested, etc.



In the school, teachers played their formal Advisors' roles for the first time, each meeting with their group of students for 15 minutes every morning. This practice, which has now become routine at the Liquidnet Family High School does not exist anywhere else in Rwanda. The groups are mixed by gender and classes, they decide what topic to cover, be it news of the day or any other subject they would like to discuss, and the advisor facilitates the discussion, then they head to their classes. Teachers are also role models in other ways and in every setting. They exemplify and promote both self and mutual respect, while being easily approachable and ensuring that critical thinking and inquiry are seriously practiced by their students.

The Informal Education team has the primary responsibility of recreating *elements of parental wholeness*. They strive to be as close to a normative family as they can be for these kids and instill in them those values which their parents would have taught them in the first place- about God, themselves, their community, and the world. In addition, this team also strives to empower the kids by teaching –and especially modeling- practical intelligence and creativity. Whether they're assisting with homework or teaching how to make a basket, House mothers and counselors continue to develop new ways to help the kids take advantage of every opportunity and enhance it for a better future.

In short, over the last four months, both kids and adults continued to practice tenets of our philosophy and to create a unique culture around the Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village concept. When the kids went for vacation in mid-July, several of their family members called to report that the changes were so palpable in these kids that they couldn't fathom what had happened to them. "You have saved his/her life" is a phrase our educators heard a lot in these phone calls. We should also mention that our housemothers visited the children while they were away; starting with those in the most vulnerable situations in their extended families. The village clearly became a more cohesive unit over the last few months.

Training and Expertise

In its aim to promote knowledge and best professional practices, the village's management held **two training seminars** in the last four months, one on the philosophy of the village and how it transpires in the daily work, and a second one on self-management and productivity at work. In addition to these village wide seminars, the **Health and Wellness team** received technical and expert support from members of the *Liquidnet Family*². These interactions greatly facilitated the subsequent discussions with kids on the taboo topic of sex education and general life orientation. The team also contributed ideas on how to help kids utilize the social work services at their disposal.

² A group of volunteers who are affiliated with *Liquidnet Holdings*, ASV's corporate sponsor.



In the school, we continue to *specialist* from the International Institute for the Enhancement of daily technical assistance to the *Instrumental Enrichment* courses, *Learning Environments* (MLE).³ institute, also held a two weeks a *Smart School*, this dynamic and thinking environment where students “learn to learn”, in a way which dramatically augment their cognitive abilities, well beyond the classroom. The school also had a one week seminar with New York teacher **David Sherrin** on *Classroom Management* and *Teaching Different Types of Learners* (visual, auditory, experiential, etc.). Overall, everyone continues to strive to find the balance between being a parent, an educator, and a professional all at once. There is still a long way to go, but good will and spirit are strong, and each day is better than the previous one.



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Volunteer Services

The Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village believes that in order to foster true development and create a better world, there has to be a continued exposure to –and exchange of- new ideas, skills, as well as different cultures and ways of doing things. In addition to our long term volunteers who reside at the village for a minimum of one year, we have begun to work on and implement a program for short-term volunteers at the village. Our first group of short term volunteers went in May, when the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and Tufts University Hillel sent 20 students to volunteer at the village. In addition to bringing shoes and books along with them, they helped build the seating area for the new sports fields and interacted with the kids in the village on many levels – sharing in after school activities, visiting them in their homes and truly exchanging ideas and exposing each other to worlds they can only imagine. We were also lucky to have two more Ethiopian Israeli Volunteers who grew up at Yemin Orde come and share their life and professional experience with the children and staff at Agahozo-Shalom. There is something very special about these exchanges, and they are always inspiring to both our staff and kids. We look forward to our next Ethiopian Israeli volunteers who are slated to arrive at the village soon. In New York active recruitment for the 10 long term volunteers for our next year is nearing completion, with nine out of the 10 slots having been filled with only the search for an IT volunteer still underway.

³ See www.icelp.org



Support & Fundraising

Despite the incredible financial challenges of the past year we have defied the odds and the naysayers and managed to raise the funding necessary to pay off our construction costs in full (although we do still have an outstanding construction loan of \$1.5 million). Since our April update we managed to raise \$2,221,271.96. Of this amount, \$940,416.70 came from individuals and family foundations, \$658,296.00 from corporate donors and \$21,559.22 from other organizations such as schools, federations and synagogues. Of this amount \$14,000 was raised by b'nei mitzvah, 12-13 year old Jewish children who are beginning to take on the responsibilities of Jewish adults and who view social action as part of that responsibility. **Special events** accounted for the rest of the money raised. On May 6, 2009 at the Hard Rock Café in New York City, Agahozo-Shalom held our first annual "Stand Up & Be Counted" event which was generously underwritten by Liquidnet Holdings, Inc. and which amazingly raised \$500,000. The remainder came from two Race4Rwanda events, which are our signature fundraising activities (see www.agahozo-shalom.com), with \$1000 coming from a student run event at Penn State University and \$100,000 from the Liquidnet Family's participation in the New York City Triathlon. There are many reasons why Agahozo-Shalom resonates with youth of all ages, and both high school and college age youth have proven to be tremendous supporters and advocates for Agahozo-Shalom. This summer, with the assistance of our two **summer interns** we created a youth outreach toolkit to give volunteers which includes numerous fundraising ideas together with "how to" instructions. *All of these documents can be downloaded from our website.* College age youth have also been instrumental in expanding our use of social networking media as we have continued to build our online community of supporters and advocates through our Facebook Cause page Race4Rwanda which has reached well over 1000 members online to date! Regular updates on the Village news from Rwanda to Israel and the US are posted on the site as well as calls to action for members to get actively involved. The page also has a mechanism for donating funds and modest contributions have been received through our site <http://apps.facebook.com/causes/race4rwanda>.



Finally, our generous supporters continue to hold drives for us, encourage corporations and businesses to donate and in July of 2009 we were able to send another container of gifts **in kind** to the village. Included in this shipment were: house and home supplies, electronic equipment, office furniture, new shoe donations, school supplies including white boards, toiletries for 250 kids to start the new year with, books, and soccer gear. Shipment of the container was also paid for by donor support specifically for this purpose.



In Rwanda, we received a total of 8 cows from friends and supporters of the project (keep in mind that a cow is the greatest and most prized gift one can give/receive in the Rwandan culture) and this was a great start for our dairy farm. We are now actively soliciting gifts of cows as we will need at least 60 cows in order to produce enough milk for the entire village population.

A Special Plea

While our ability to pay off our huge capital costs after only 2 years is a remarkable achievement, we do face a particularly challenging few months ahead of us as we struggle to meet our monthly operating costs, especially since we are taking in another 125 orphans and hiring the relevant staff to support them. Our next major priority is to fully develop and start to implement our sustainability plans for the village; but until those plans are able to generate income we are wholly dependent on donations. Please learn more about this promising project, not only for Rwandan orphans, but as a model for Africa, and help us create lasting change in these lives. You can also contact us directly through the website www.agahozo-shalom.org

Looking ahead to the next 4 months

- Identify, select, and welcome next 125 orphans into the village
- Hire more staff/educators
- Purchase more supplies and furniture
- Fully equip the science labs at school
- Get at least 10 more cows donated
- Hold a management training seminar
- Hold a strategic session on sustainability and begin the implementation of sustainability plans
- Approve the reforestation curriculum under development by Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael
- Hire 2 specialized staff in New York to help with fundraising and volunteer program
- Create an International Board of Directors that includes Rwandans residing in Rwanda
- Raise \$350,000 by December 2009 which covers the costs of preparing for the incoming class as well as the operating expenses for the remainder of 2009.