



Newsletter December 2017

Dear Friends,

Hello everyone. It's that time to send you all an update on our progress and what's happening with The Giving Circle locally and internationally!

Special Message from the President

This is a special year as we are changing Presidents of The Giving Circle. The full letter is included at the end of this newsletter but we wanted to include some highlights here!

Goodbye from Ron Deutsch:

I am both humbled and gratified to be part of this amazing group of volunteers. I am never short of amazed at all the work that gets completed by such a small organization that has no paid staff. Literally every penny people donate to the Giving Circle goes directly to families and communities in need. I am also gratified to know that I am passing the torch to a very capable incoming President, Leo Geoffrion. Leo had been a guiding force at the Giving Circle for many years and will do a great job leading the organization in fulfilling its mission and sticking to its roots. I thank each and every person who has provided us with your either your time, talent or treasure. We would not exist without the volunteers and donors that help bring every random act of kindness to fruition. You are all my heroes and I look forward to working with you for many more decades to come! I will continue to serve on the TGC board as the Vice President of Communications.

Hello from Leo Geoffrion:

I am humbled but eager to step in as president of The Giving Circle. Kelly first introduced me to the group when she asked me in 2008 to design a web application to operate the child sponsorship program in Uganda. From there, I've steadily become more and more involved with the group – particularly with the internal infrastructure of online resources to help support its many programs.

The Giving Circle is truly exceptional in its vigorous community involvement locally, nationally, and internationally combined with an all-volunteer structure that assures that all support goes to those in need – not to support staff and offices. We've grown each year, steadily increasing the size and diversity of projects completed.

I am delighted that Ron will continue his deep involvement with The Giving Circle, now taking responsibility for our public communications. At the same time, I will strive to strengthen our internal operations to have us better prepared for even bigger future projects all while maintaining the friendly informality of an open circle of people committed to providing a hand up to our neighbors around the world.

Please feel free to contact us if you would like to volunteer for our local rebuilding efforts, help in Uganda, assist with fundraising or if you have any other questions about the Giving Circle. We can be reached at (518) 469-6769 or by email at info@thegivingcircle.org.

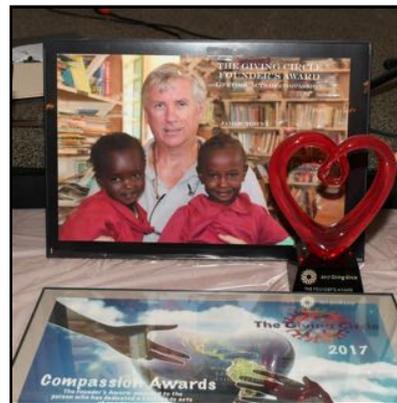
Looking forward to working with you all in the near future!

The 2017 Giving Circle Compassion Awards

The winners of the Annual [TGC Compassion Awards for 2017](#) were:

- Local Individual Resident: Maggie Fronk

- Local Non-profit: New England Congregational Presbyterian Church
- Local Business: Gary Dake, Stewart's Shops
- Founder's Award: Jim Towne
- The Serge Shishik Award Local TGC Member: The Mann Family
- TGC Uganda Individual Member of the Year: Hope Stevens Neikirk & Caren Baker
- TGC Ugandan-Based Individual Member of the Year: Emma Walubi
- TGC Courage Award: Don Petersimes



Thank you all for attending and contributing to our event to support all our programs near and far!

TGC Local Rebuilding

Local volunteers help to rebuild a mobile home for a family living in very poor conditions. TGC also provided a stove for another elderly single woman. This woman uses this stove to make jam to produce an income for herself. Work continues locally helping people who need it. Once again this year we partnered with Franklin Community Center to help provide Christmas for over 50 children in the community.

We will be organizing work trips to storm locations in Florida, St. Thomas and Puerto Rico so watch for more information!

TGC Disaster Relief

On December 22nd, thanks to your kind support through our [Operation: A Caribbean Christmas](#) and the [7 Day Challenge](#) campaigns, our Puerto Rico partner, the Puerto Rico Recovery Fund, was able to deliver the \$15,000 to 150 Supermercados Econo school families in the form of \$100 Gift Cards!! We partnered with My Brothers Workshop in St. Thomas, Misiónpeniel in Florida for supporting the migrant farm workers devastated by the storm, Puerto Rico Recovery Fund in Puerto Rico.

Because of so many of you, once again, The Giving Circle helped to bring joy, relief and hope to people who are in need and suffered and continue to suffer so much.

From the Operation: A Caribbean Christmas alone (excluding the summer trucks to Fla and Texas and rebuilding in Texas) more than **\$30,000** was raised to help bring holiday joy Puerto Rico and Saint Thomas. In addition we raised \$2500 in school supplies for a school in St. Croix and St. Thomas.

We took a team of volunteers to rebuild homes in Houston partnering with SGS. In addition, the 2 tractor trailers full of supplies for #WeGive2Trucks went to Houston and Florida with all the supplies you all so generously donated to help those in need!

THANK YOU TO ALL who make, what we TOGETHER, make happen, locally, nationally and internationally.

“Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus”! They are ALL the people that make the Giving Circle, an ever expanding circle of compassion, possible!



TGC Outreach Team

We are so proud of our outreach team comprised of 3 amazing women: Rachael Dwyer, Patti Riggi, and Melissa Renee. Our team hosted The Giving Circle's Outreach Christmas Eve party for our homeless friends/family. This team provides year-round help for the homeless including providing dinners, supplies, clothing etc. Volunteers are always needed. Please check out the volunteer web site for dates and times needed for help at www.codebluesaratoga.org.



Human Rights Symposium

Again this year, The Giving Circle and the [Capital Region Institute for Human Rights](#) partnered to produce the 2017 Teen Summer Symposium on Human Rights, a four-day workshop open to incoming freshmen through graduating seniors, who are interested in history, social justice, politics, and international relations. The goals of the Teen Summer Symposium are to provide participants with a deeper understanding of human rights history and humanitarian issues today and inspire them to have a positive impact on the world. This program engages students in a range of human rights projects around the world.



The Giving Circle Africa

All of our African programs are designed with a goal of being **100% self sustainable in operation and growth**. We do this in many ways from working to expand sustainable plants, animals and fish farming, small businesses like our sewing business and more.

There are so many things happening in Uganda! Below are just some highlights:

- **Koi Koi U'Rafiki Savings & Loan Update**: each year, for years, Kelly and other volunteers have taught a math, accounting and savings class on our land in Wairaka to the village women. Each year, handing out calculators, small pads and pens, teaching the importance of saving each week, if even 100, 500-1000 shillings (3 cents to 0.28 cents, respectively). From this grew a small savings group driven and lead by the villagers with meetings held in one of our buildings in Wairaka. Fast forward with the great work by [Moses Wambi](#), and leadership of Koire Lydia Kadama (our TGCA treasurer) and others, we formed the KoiKoi U'Rafiki Savings and Loan bank. **This is a fully registered Ugandan bank**, providing loans, overseeing the accounting of all our sponsorship programs, and many villagers saving accounts. Two years ago, we were given a grant by the Soroptimist International of Saratoga County which helped us infuse more funds into our bank which increased our ability to grant micro-loans helping villagers to start small business and pay school fees. 2017 saw the construction of the banks first brick and mortar branch office at our Busoga grounds. Under the leadership of our Ugandan team, [Moses](#), [Emma](#), [Cecilia](#) [Kagya](#) and the direct leadership of the bank's Treasurer, Koire Lydia Kadama, and the board, we have attracted



national attention as well as attention by a large African Bank: the bank we do our business with in Uganda, Kenya Commercial Bank. After months of talks and investigation of our books, **We, The Giving Circle Africa's Koikoi U'Rafiki Savings and Loan, has become a agent banking "partner" / branch of KCB . What a huge accomplishment for which we are very proud.**

- Next Trip: We have a small team going with Mark to Uganda in January! There, Mark will plan for our activities for 2018! Early 2018, we will begin to plan our summer trip (usually leaving the end of June for approximately 2 weeks). If you are interested or would like more information, please email [Mark](mailto:Mark@thegivingcircle.org) at mark@thegivingcircle.org or [Kelly](mailto:Kelly@thegivingcircle.org) at kelly@thegivingcircle.org.
- Midwife Program: The growth of our health clinic/birthing center in Kagoma has been astounding, that matched only by its results. The clinic is serving the whole village and people will walk long distances from huts located further out in the bush just to see Elizabeth. **The results**: for the first time in this village, this year, there was NOT ONE SINGLE death due to diarrhea, malaria, malnutrition or wound infection! Because our amazing nurse, Elizabeth, sees so many people, we hired an assistant! Please meet Emmanuel Wangadya (interestingly he was a student of Moses' and a grad of our Busoga junior school). For us, even better, in just a couple of months we will have another addition to our clinical team! One of our most special boys, who has been with us from day one! **Mwesigwa Denis** will graduate nursing school and become our 2nd nurse!! We all have tears of joy and pride. Denis is the brother of Kelly and Mark's son, Andrew, who passed away from sickle cell anemia. Denis is the perfect example of the good **WE ALL** have done together. Denis was born with full blown HIV AIDS and was very sick when we first started in Uganda. Today, thanks to his sponsor, and so many of our donors, his health is very good and he is about to be a nurse! He is the first in his family to graduate. He was the first of our sponsored children to go to college. Now, he will be back working with TGCA family...it does NOT get better then this. The nurse-midwife program is all thanks to [Hope Stevens](#) [Neikirk](#) & [Caren Cenciarini](#) and all their friends and supporters! Our clinic is successful in part due to the amazing members of the Soroptimist International of Saratoga County.
- TGCA Farming is expanding: Last year we had endured a 9-month drought and 2 full planting cycles of corn on this land. TGCA decided on planting a drought-resistant cassava crop and we partnered with an agricultural university who developed a disease-resistant, high-yielding variety called "Naro cas1". We are providing food security for our beloved Ugandan families. In addition, there is an income from this as TGCA is now a supplier of this new disease-resistant, high yielding variety "Naro cas1", selling its cuttings to other farmers.



- Aquaponics & Solar: A HUGE THANK YOU and Congratulations to the Washington State University Tri-Cities Electrical Engineering Team Aquaponics and Professor [Scott Hudson](#). Their project "Solar Aquaponics System for Kagoma Gate Village" received 1st place, yes, you read that correctly: **FIRST PLACE** at the IEEE Undergraduate Presentation Competition Wednesday (4/12/17) at the University of Idaho. We are overjoyed that our long time supporter of The Giving Circle and friend, Scott, was part of this years team going to Uganda! During this trip, Scott and his students designed and brought solar light to the newly completed 2 class room school block at Kagoma Gate. Amazing work!
- Security and School Buiding: completion of the fence surrounding the school complex and the last (the 5th and last) school buiding at Kagoma Gate. This makes us a complete primary school.
- Sanitation: completion of new latrine building at Kagoma Gate.
- Expansion of programs for the deaf & disabled at Busoga School e.g. new accessibility ramp so they can get to the playground and other classrooms up the hill.
- Dreammaker Program: We have since expanded our programs to welcome children with **any type of disability**, making our school a safe, welcoming, educational home for **AL**children. In 2017-18, we will expand to welcome over 100 children with disabilities. Because these poorest families with disabled children simply do not have the funds to afford school, we must fully fund these very important programs. Costs include: special teachers and their training and equipment, 3 meals per day, boarding, supplies, uniforms, personal care support, and for many of the disabled children, we must also provide transportation. All healthy children walk to school, some for many, many miles. For the deaf and disabled children, this simply is not possible nor safe. You can decide to do a one time contribution or become a dreammaker and help sustain this program on a recurring basis.

- Koi Koi House: we now have 8 of our koi koi kids in high school. All are healthy. We've added 3 new children including Veronica who received her new arm from the E-nable program from Siena College!
- Quality of Education: this year 38 of our students took their P7 exams which qualify them to be able to attend high school (only if you pass). When the January 2017 results (for the 2016 exams) were announced, every one of our students PASSED including 1 who scored a 7 - which is the top score in the nation!
- Rain Water Collection Tanks: These rain water harvesting systems (gutters and TWO collection tanks) were installed at Kagoma Gate.
- Nutrition: a continued thank you to Keenan's Kids who sustain our nutrition program in Kagoma Gate as well as providing other needs such as water filtering systems, an additional cook to help support the hundreds of children we feed and other much needed supplies.
- Construction of monument dedicated to Musee Galveri - Kagoma Gates founder!
- Education:
 - Kagoma Gate P7 class: 2017 marked the year of the first P7 class in the history of Kagoma Gate. In November, they sat for their national exams. The results of these will be announced at the end of January 2018. Any child that passes this exam will be the first to attend high school EVER from this village!
 - In January 29th and 30th, Mark will be in Uganda conducting the first TGCA Teacher's University Conference and Workshop. This workshop will be a gathering of some of the leading voices of education in Uganda. More to come!
 - Scholarships are expanding:
 - **Scott Hudson Science Scholarship** awarded to the top male and female P7 students most enthusiastic for learning math and science and helping others to learn. The winners will receive over 1.7 million ugandan shillings (or \$500 USD) to cover all costs for their freshman year in high school.
 - **Bobbi Keating Nursing Scholarship** for two students interested in nursing as a career. These winners receive a full 3-year scholarship which will complete their degree.
 - **Andrew Mubiru Scholarship** in memory of Andrew and for a child with good academics but also a good citizen (exhibiting kindness and compassion). The winner will receive over 1.7 million ugandan shillings (or \$500 USD) to cover all costs for their freshman year in high school.
 - **Fantauzzi Family Chess Scholarship** for that child who shows the best performance academically along with being the best chess player. The winner will receive over 1.7 million ugandan shillings (or \$500 USD) to cover all costs for their freshman year in high school.

These and so much more - check out the [blog](#) for more details and pictures of our progress! **Education is hope, education is freedom.**

To sign up to receive our newsletters or to volunteer, please click [here](#).

Full Letters from the Presidents!

A Good bye from Ron

What an incredible year the Giving Circle had. It's hard to believe that just 12 short years ago we were just an idea hatched by our founder Mark Bertrand and his wife Kelly. Mark had collected some 7,000 toys to bring to the kids in Louisiana, knowing they would not have a Christmas as a result of the storm. The problem was he needed a way to get all those toys down south. The organization I was working for had tractor trailers going to Louisiana and we had enough room to get all the toys down to the families. Those toys could not have been more welcome – the kids and parents were elated that people cared enough to send gifts to all of their children. It provided them with something they were sorely lacking – a sense of hope. By early 2006, the Giving Circle was officially incorporated as an all-volunteer non-profit by a small group of dedicated people with one simple mission – alleviate suffering and help people and communities in need.

It seems fitting that 12 years later we are getting back to our roots. We just successfully completed Operation: Caribbean Christmas to help families in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands have a better holiday. We sent over \$30,000 in gift cards and greeting cards to make sure many families had a happier holiday and more importantly let them know they are not forgotten. It's fitting then that my nearly 10-year term as President is coming to an end now, a full circle – starting and ending with a holiday mission.

This year we were able to do some amazing things – we helped some local families in need and also hurricane victims in Texas and Florida. We were able to raise money and send a team to Texas to help families rebuild and developed a relationship with a group in Florida where we will be sending a rebuilding team soon (as well as to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands). The work being done in Uganda is nothing short of miraculous. Since we started there you can't even believe the work we've done. Just this year alone we were able to launch the first of its kind school for deaf and disabled children,

strengthen our existing schools, graduate national chess champions and lay the ground work for a sustainability program that will support the schools and children we sponsor long after we may be gone.

I am both humbled and gratified to be part of this amazing group of volunteers. I am never short of amazed at all the work that gets completed by such a small organization that has no paid staff. Literally every penny people donate to the Giving Circle goes directly to families and communities in need. I am also gratified to know that I am passing the torch to a very capable incoming President, Leo Geoffrion. Leo had been a guiding force at the Giving Circle for many years and will do a great job leading the organization in fulfilling its mission and sticking to its roots. I thank each and every person who has provided us with your either your time, talent or treasure. We would not exist without the volunteers and donors that help bring every random act of kindness to fruition. You are all my heroes and I look forward to working with you for many more decades to come!

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Amazon Smile Program

The Amazon Foundation now has a way for registered users to donate 0.5% of their purchases to the registered charity of their choice. The Giving Circle is now registered to participate in the program. All proceeds from the Amazon Smile program will be used toward the operating expenses of the Koi Koi House orphanage. Participating is easy and only requires a one-time setup by going to [Amazon Smile Set Up](#) and logging into your regular Amazon account. You will need to choose The Giving Circle, Inc. in Saratoga Springs, NY as your charity of choice, but you will only need to do this step once. Donations are only activated when you purchase at smile.amazon.com, so be sure to change the bookmarks & favorites on all your devices. [Click here](#) for more information on the program.



All of these projects were done by volunteers of The Giving Circle!

Sincerely,
The Giving Circle Team
www.thegivingcircle.org

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The Giving Circle

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