

Curling club hosted fundraising bonspiel

Written By KAREN LETWINKA

On Saturday, Nov. 17, the King Curling Club played host to The Olive Branch for Children's 4th Annual Curling Bonspiel.

Founded by former Vaughan resident, Deborah McCracken-Nangereke, The Olive

Branch for Children (TOBFC) is a community-led charitable grass roots organization, operating in the Mbarali District of Tanzania since 2005. What started out as an adventure trip for Deborah, turned into a love story ? falling in love with Putiyei, her Maasai warrior and guide at the time, the children she has now adopted (55 at last count including her own biological daughter), and the people of the community and villages The Olive Branch supports.

The main objective of TOBFC is to help remote communities in Tanzania assess their primary needs such as health and education and establish programs designed to assist the most vulnerable in those communities. Since its inception, 28

Montessori schools have been established as well as mobile medical clinics, financial autonomy programs, home based care programs, food support programs, mobile libraries, construction projects, youth development programs, entrepreneurship workshops, and the Kubuni Innovation and Creativity Centre.

With these various programs, The Olive Branch for Children touches 65,000 people in 40 communities.

My husband and I met Deborah and Putiyei 4 years ago at the King Curling Club

Year End Banquet. Deborah and Putiyei travel to Canada every year for about 6 weeks to visit with family and friends, launch her annual fundraising gala

(April 12 this year), speak at other fundraising events across the country, and, of course, curl. After speaking with Deborah at that first banquet and hearing her story and passion for The Olive Branch, my husband was hooked. Three years later, the summer of 2017, my husband, son and I, along with my cousin, a nurse, were boarding a plane for Mbeya, Tanzania.

Melding our talents with those of Deborah's children and working in the community were life changing experiences for us. My husband taught Deborah's twin boys, Kulwa and Doto, the skill of carpentry, setting up a workshop and building chairs for the Montessori schools. With these skills, the boys are now work out of the newly established Kubuni Innovation and Creativity Centre (?Kubuni? means to create in Kiswahili) and constructing many more items for the community ? triple bunkbeds, doors, windows frames, tables, trusses, etc. As well, they have used their recently acquired welding skills to build a mobile ambulance (with MIT, Boston and Mbeya University students) and to design a toilet aid for elderly seniors in the villages to make their toilets more accessible to them as they lose their manoeuvrability.

My cousin worked with the mobile medical clinics out in the villages, doing HIV and blood pressure testing, infant and maternal health care, provision of wound care, including burns, and many of the other services offered by the clinics. My son helped my husband in the carpentry shop, assisted other volunteers to prepare teaching materials for the annual local Montessori teacher training, took photos for social media, and helped Deborah with various tasks. Having brought with us lots of arts and craft supplies, I worked to foster the children's creative side, having them also make Christmas cards which we sold at last year's curling bonspiel. As well, I taught some of them how to juggle, and

I believe Deborah had the children entertain the family with these new skills during their Christmas festivities last year.

Our gifts are meant to be shared and, on the flip side, Deborah's and Putiyei's daughter, Wini (now off to university to study corporate law), helped and taught me how to do my laundry the old-fashioned way ? in a bucket. I had the chance to get to know an amazing young woman and hear her dreams. The other children taught us the importance of family, playing and working hard together. This is no small feat when you put this many kids together in a family, vying for

Deborah's and Putiyei's attention. But Deborah and Putiyei make it work, stating that although there may be 55 children to love, their heart and love can be divided up between all of the children and still be given wholly to each individual child.

Attend the 14th annual fundraising gala on April 12, 2019 at the Bellevue Manor in Concord. Details and further information will be posted on The Olive Branch for Children website and on their Facebook page,

www.facebook.com/theolivebranchforchildren/. This is your chance to meet

Deborah and Putiyei and hear their story first hand!

Consider making a monthly or one-time donation through the website,

www.theolivebranchforchildren.org/. Unlike other non-profit organizations, 96% of donations made to The Olive Branch for Children go directly to the work on the ground in Tanzania. The many Canadian volunteers and the low operational costs in Canada enable them to ensure fundraisers' dollars are used where they are needed.