

BOOKS FOR AFRICA

SPRING 2003

NEWSLETTER

New Director to Build on Success

By Apee Jobi

Appreciative of the organization's past fundraising, book shipments and partnership achievements, Books For Africa's new executive director Patrick Plonski says he intends to make an effort to increase book donations and shipments, and forge stronger ties with other U.S. and United Nations (UN) educational agencies.

Mr. Plonski says he intends to make an effort to expand BFA's fundraising ability and visibility, and strengthen partnerships across the board. He has specific short-term and long-term plans to achieve his ultimate goal of expanding BFA's success.

For his short-term plan, he plans to "expand BFA donor lists, finalize the partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)," and explore the opening in Chicago what he calls a "satellite office" to increase book shipments. And in the long-term, he plans to increase BFA's fundraising and strengthen partnerships with other organizations to take



BFA's new executive director, Patrick Plonski (right), started work on January 6, 2003. He is pictured here with intern Apee Jobi.

us "to the next level."

Prior to taking on the role of BFA executive director, Mr. Plonski served for five years as director of the Minnesota Agricultural Education Leadership Council (MAELC), a 16-member council established by the Minnesota Legislature to improve and restructure agricultural education in Minnesota

at all levels. Mr. Plonski, who holds a masters degree in history with an emphasis on international economics, is currently a Doctorate of Philosophy (Ph.D) student at University of Minnesota, focusing on international development. He hopes to bring the experience he has gained from working for MAELC to BFA to expand distribution networks and partnerships. Mr. Plonski joined us on January 6, 2003. He and his wife Judy have three children—son Alex and daughters Sarah and Julia. He also has a dog named Jimmy. When he is not working or busy with family duties, he enjoys reading history on international affairs, biking and swimming. Mr. Plonski has traveled to twenty-two countries in Europe and Asia and to Mexico.

In June this year, he plans to visit Tanzania, Kenya and Malawi to add Africa to the continents he has visited and talk to the BFA partners where we have a strong presence. "It is amazing how much this small organization has achieved in fourteen years," he said. "It is a great organization".

New Interns

By Pat Plonski

BFA is pleased to welcome two new interns from the University of Minnesota. Apee Jobi is a senior majoring in Political Science and Global Studies, and is currently researching how BFA can provide books to the millions of refugee children across the continent. Working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, we will begin shipping books to refugee children later this year. Apee is compiling a report on the populations,

locations and educational needs of each camp. He is originally from the Sudan.

Hallaluia Mulat is a junior majoring in Global Studies with a minor in African Studies. She is focusing her research on evaluating BFA's proposed HIV/AIDS educational project, learning more about what educational programs are already in place and how BFA's work may complement those efforts. Halle is originally from Ethiopia.

Both Apee and Halle will be with us through the end of the semester in May. We welcome them both!

BFA Partners With UNESCO

By Pat Plonski

It is with great excitement that we announce the establishment of a formal partnership between Books For Africa and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) office. This collaborative effort will clearly utilize the best strengths of both organizations to increase levels of literacy throughout Africa. The BFA/UNESCO partnership was fostered by an official visit to the BFA offices by Mauro Rosi of the UNESCO Paris headquarters in November of 2002. Most recently, BFA participated in UNESCO's February 13th, 2003 "Decade of Literacy" kick-off in New York City where keynote speakers included First Lady Laura Bush, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, Director General of UNESCO Koichiro Matsuura, and United States Secretary of Education Rod Paige. "A child who can read is a child who can learn", said Secretary Paige at the event, "and a child who can learn is a child who can succeed".

The partnership agreement notes that BFA and UNESCO "have mutual goals of seeking to advance global peace and understanding through education and literacy efforts" and that the two organizations "do hereby enter into this partnership agreement to work together to



UNESCO's Mauro Rosi (left) and Tom Gitaa of Mshale, an African community newspaper.

advance mutual goals."

"I am absolutely enthusiastic about the work that Books For Africa is engaged in, and we [have negotiated] a partnership in our effort to get books to all children," Rosi said in a formal statement issued upon the announcement of the partnership.

It is anticipated that this high level partnership will link BFA with Non-governmental Organization partners across the world that have formal relationships with UNESCO.

This partnership is viewed by all of us at BFA as a key mechanism for dramatically expanding the reach of our activities, thereby leveraging larger financial resources to send many more books to Africa in partnership with more organizations across the world. This partnership with the United Nations will help BFA to dramatically expand its scope by working with many more partners and move further towards the ultimate goal of ending the book famine in Africa.



Tom Warth Hits the Trail

By Suzanne Koepflinger

BFA founder Tom Warth is heading back out onto the trail. Having traversed the width of Minnesota and the Ice Age Trail in Wisconsin, Tom is setting out to hike the length of Minnesota this spring. Beginning on May 25, 2003 at the Canadian Border, Tom will walk each spring and each fall for the next four years, with a goal of reaching Iowa by the time he turns 70. As he puts it, "I just had my 67th birthday, a friend had

hip surgery and the dog can hardly walk because of arthritis. I think I better get moving!"

You can join in the adventure. Pledge a donation to help send more books to Africa, or join Tom on the trail for a day or a week. A donation to BFA is one of the most cost-effective things you can do with your charitable dollar. A gift of two hundred dollars funds the shipment of \$20,000 worth of schoolbooks, which will be shared by roughly 200,000 disadvantaged children in Africa!

Call the BFA office at 651-602-9844 today for more information.

Africa Reflections

In October of 2002 former BFA executive director Robert Kowalczyk led a group to visit some of BFA's partners in Botswana and South Africa. Following are some of their reflections on the experience.

"This being our first trip to Africa we had no preconceived ideas of what to expect. We had heard through Rotary Clubs of the dire need for books in the primary and secondary schools throughout the continent but we had no real concept of how serious that need is. Visits to several schools in and around Maun, Botswana soon crystallized the seriousness of the problem. The libraries were very small and the selection of reference material nearly non-existent. Yet there were some, and the teachers and staff were very, very proud of what they had".

—*Dave and Connie Bergsven*

"The people we met were so full of hope and energy to make life better for others. In the schools we visited could be seen the determination of the teachers to do as much as they can for the children. And the children... smiling, friendly, eager, bubbling with giggles. They shared their ability to read and how they were learning to use the library system. All of the school resources seemed important to



School children in Botswana.



The team in Botswana.

them right down to many using pencil stubs as they did their class work. Getting up at 4:30 am in order to get ready and walk to school was just a regular part of the day for many of the children. The values and hopefulness that so many people shared as well as the beauty of Africa will always be with me".

—*Karen Kendrick*

"It is truly amazing to see how the things we take for granted that are given to our children, such as books, school supplies and the like, are treasured by the schools, the teachers and the children. Seeing the children in their own environment, in their libraries reading books, seeing how thankful they are for what we consider so little, was truly an eye opener. We had no idea before we left Minnesota what an impact these children would have on us".

—*Art and Adrienne Summerfield*

"In my four recent trips to Africa I have greatly enjoyed the magnificent natural beauty and colorful culture. But the children of Africa have been the most enjoyable of all. They are friendly, inquisitive, effervescent and tough. We were always greeted warmly wherever we went. Their children have not yet acquired the stoicism and grim acceptance of life that comes with age. All children, even the

young ones, seemed to recognize the importance of books and education. Education is a ticket to a better way of life".

—*Frank Babka*

"Visiting some 8 schools in and around Maun, Botswana, we were encouraged to see that they have made some strides in establishing libraries, where none had existed, due primarily to lack of books. To see the children and teachers proudly showing off their new libraries was indeed heart-warming. We also had an opportunity to meet with various educators from the district of Maun and also in Cape Town, and always the message was the same – 'thank you for what you have already done, and can you do more?'".

—*Jim and Marie Schafer*

"I'll never forget visiting the Maun primary schools. The rooms were about 20' by 15' with the books in crates and wooden shelves. These were the first books and libraries these schools had ever had. Everyone was so proud of their library! There were posters stating the value of reading and how it can pave the way for opportunity. It was obvious how precious they considered the books. I understood then what Books For Africa has accomplished and how it has positively influenced the lives of African children." —*Steve Fredericksen*

If you would like to learn more about Books For Africa please call 651-602-9844 (fax 651-602-9848).

E-mail: info@booksforafrica.org Web: www.booksforafrica.org



Books For Africa
253 E 4th Street
St. Paul, MN 55101

NONPROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
MINNEAPOLIS, MN
PERMIT NO. 4593

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

NOTE: If your name and/or address is incorrect or if you no longer wish to receive BFA's newsletter, please make name and/or address corrections or write "delete" on your mailing label and return it to BFA.

You might have noticed a change in our newsletter. From now on, contributors will be listed once a year in our annual report. A complete list of contributors from the most recently completed fiscal year will also be posted on our website: www.booksforafrica.org. Just click on PEOPLE at the left side of the screen, and then CONTRIBUTORS at the top of the screen.

Thank you to all our contributors. You are the ones who allow Books For Africa to continue its mission.

Join us on Sunday, May 18th for a Moroccan tent sale.

African, Asian, and Middle Eastern art, fabrics, jewelry, furniture, and much more will be available for purchase, with a portion of all proceeds going to benefit Books For Africa. Many of the items for purchase were produced by women's cooperatives or in refugee camps and are being distributed by Alsadu, Inc., a member of the FAIR-TRADE network.

**See you at 1886 Laurel Avenue
in St. Paul on the 18th!**