

Kokolopori-Falls Church Sister City Partnership

Annual Report to the City Council

February 25, 2009

It has been three years since you voted to name Kokolopori, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as our “Sister City.” The all-volunteer citizens group called the Kokolopori-Falls Church Sister City Partnership (KFCSCP) has continued its efforts to support our end of this Sister City relationship. Our twin goals are to educate people in Falls Church about Kokolopori, and to support community development projects in our Sister City.

We have successfully launched projects in Kokolopori in the areas of microcredit, health care and education through our partnership with the international nonprofit organization the Bonobo Conservation Initiative (BCI). As a registered trade name of BCI, we are able to accept tax-deductible contributions, and utilize BCI’s network of staff and partnerships with the Congolese government and non-governmental organizations to implement our projects in Kokolopori. Our activities are integrated with BCI’s ongoing conservation and community development goals and activities there.

We are pleased to provide the following brief description of our accomplishments during the past twelve months.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Presentations: Ingrid Schulze, program director of KFCSCP, has shared her photos, videos and stories from her two-week visit to Kokolopori with numerous audiences over the past year, including:

- Our annual benefit reception held last May at Meadowlark Botanical Gardens;
- The Mary Riley Styles Public Library;
- Falls Church Rotary Club;
- Chi Beta Omega Chapter of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority;
- Falls Church Lions Club;
- International Club of George Mason High School;
- Falls Church Environmental Club of George Mason High School;
- Falls Church AAUW;
- River Road Unitarian Universalist Church's Africa Task Force; and
- Falls Church Garden Club.

She has produced a video of the Kokolopori health clinic facilities and interviews with clinic staff to produce a five-minute virtual tour of the health clinic, which can be viewed on our website at www.kokolopori-partnership.org. She also produced a ten-minute

video of an interview with two young conservation leaders in Kokolopori, Veronique Lilima Lokasola and Sebastian Botsuna. That video is likewise downloadable from our website.

These presentations and videos have brought our Sister City to life for many residents of Falls Church in a way that was not previously possible. As a result, many more residents of Falls Church are more aware and informed about the depth of the poverty and the rigors of life in Kokolopori, and the significance of the Falls Church's community development efforts there.

Membership and meetings: KFCSCP solicits membership donations from residents of the Falls Church area and has about 20-25 members per year. Membership contributions cover our administrative costs, such as copying hand-out materials, prizes and mailings for our student art contest, post office box rental, exhibitor fees, web-hosting and email service fees, Chamber of Commerce membership, and the up-front costs for special events. We also held six meetings in 2008 of our members and other volunteers in various homes in the City of Falls Church to discuss planning for our projects and activities.

Articles in the Falls Church News Press: Kokolopori and the activities of the KFCSCP were mentioned in the Falls Church News Press on the following dates:

Jan. 3, 10, 17, 24 in 2008

Feb. 14, 2008

March 20, 27, 2008

April 24, 2008

May 1, 8, 2008

Oct. 9, 2008

Nov. 13, 2008

Jan. 29, 2009

We were also featured in the March/April issue of the Falls Church Chamber of Commerce's *Spotlight* newsletter.

Booths at Local Fairs: Another way KFCSCP educates the public about Kokolopori is through booths at fairs in Falls Church. In 2008, we had a booth at the Tinner Hill Festival in June, the Fall Festival in September and the July concert in Cherry Hill Park where the Congolese band Bana Ndule played. We also displayed our materials at the October fair trade craft show at Curves.

SISTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM

Through the sister city partnership, Falls Church City Public Schools are partnering with schools in Kokolopori to institute a cultural exchange, curriculum enrichment and conservation education program. Goals include fostering friendship and understanding of

people's everyday lives and concerns in Kokolopori, and studying issues in geography, current events, African history, and rainforest and great ape conservation in Africa. It is hoped that by getting to know each other as real people, with shared hopes, joys and concerns, children from the two disparate cultures will gain a sense of empathy and global citizenship.

Student Art Contest: Seventy students submitted artwork for the Kokolopori Student Art Contest in March 2008, depicting what they imagined life would be like in Kokolopori or the surrounding rainforest. Falls Church Arts provided a panel of judges for the contest who selected at least three winners in each of four age categories (there were a number of ties). Winners received prizes and commendations at an awards ceremony at Stacy's Coffee Parlor on May 2, 2008. The artwork of the first place winner in each category was printed on notecards to be sold to benefit Kokolopori. The winners' art was exhibited at Stacy's throughout the month of May. Several of the artists donated their work to be sold at a silent auction last May to benefit the health clinic in Kokolopori.

The contest is currently in its third year, with a May 1 awards ceremony planned at the F. A. McGonegal Showroom. Several dozen student artworks from 2007 and 2008 are currently being showcased alongside artwork of students at The American School in Kinshasa in an exhibit at the American Embassy in Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Bill and Linda Garvelink, former residents of the City of Falls Church, are the current U.S. Ambassador to the DRC and his wife, and are proud to exhibit our students' art in their official residence.

TJ Elementary Bulletin Board: KFCSCP has mounted a colorful display about Kokolopori at Thomas Jefferson Elementary School that is updated monthly. It includes large photos from Kokolopori, a phrase-of-the-month in Lingala, the African trade language spoken there, and a brief news bulletin about what is currently happening in Kokolopori. For instance, the December display described how the Christmas and New Year's holidays are celebrated in our sister city.

Student fundraisers: Students at Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School (MEHMS) in the Husky Humanitarians Club are raising money through bake sales and other events to buy a non-electric autoclave for sterilizing medical implements for Kokolopori's health clinic.

Students in the Environmental Club at George Mason High School are busking for Kokolopori during nutrition break. Buskers are musicians and other performers who hope that passers-by will toss a coin into their hat or instrument case. During a one-week period, the buskers collected over \$100 from their fellow-students and teachers. The Club plans to repeat its efforts periodically throughout spring semester until they have reached their fundraising goal of \$650 to buy surgical kits for the health clinic.

Community Resource Fair: During the Falls Church Schools' mid-year Professional Days in 2008, KFCSCP offered information about curriculum resources and available guest speakers to teachers at the FCCPS Community Resource Fair, along with presenters from other local civic groups.

MICROCREDIT PROJECT

In spring 2008, the first round of microcredit loans was made, providing \$900 in capital to each of five cooperatives in Kokolopori. A training workshop was provided to the recipients on microenterprise management and requirements for meeting the terms of the loans. Participants are focusing primarily on palm oil processing, but some are also making soap, rearing goats, growing coffee, and running restaurants and sewing enterprises.

We decided to emphasize palm oil processing and making soap out of palm oil in the beginning for several reasons. First, palm oil is widely used in cooking and there is a ready market for it both locally and in regional markets. Second, promotion of hand washing is an important public health strategy for disease prevention and the local health clinic, also supported by KFCSCP will be a steady source of demand for soap. A second round of loans was made in late 2008, with \$500 disbursed to each of three additional cooperatives.

So far, the repayment rate has been slower than anticipated, because at present there is virtually no cash economy in Kokolopori. This is due partly to its geographic isolation and partly to the widespread infrastructure destruction during the recent Congo War that ended in 2003. The women's cooperatives who have received loans do not have the means to transport their goods to sell in larger markets, and the inhabitants of Kokolopori do not have the cash to buy their products locally. Beginning in fall 2008, Vie Sauvage has used part of the loan fund to purchase some of the palm oil, soap and other goods produced by loan recipients, so that they can have cash with which to repay their loans. Vie Sauvage will market these products in Mbandaka, Basankusu and in Befori when the river boat docks there. This infusion of cash will stimulate the micro-enterprises, augment the purchasing power of the community, and help build a local cash economy.

The Microcredit Project was being ably managed by Veronique Lilima Lokasola until she fell suddenly ill from gastrointestinal ulcers and died, last summer. A college-educated woman, Veronique was a bright and promising role model for the women running microenterprise cooperatives in Kokolopori, having risen to a managerial position in Vie Sauvage at the age of 29. We had planned to bring her to Falls Church this winter to take part in our citizen exchange program. She will be greatly missed by many people.

She has been replaced as the project field coordinator for the Microcredit Project by Josephine Mpanga, who has just completed a 30-day training workshop in microfinance in December. Her dedication to the program is evidenced by her willingness to walk 16 days to reach the training site in Kisangani, although she fell ill and was hospitalized along the way. We funded her return trip by motorcycle at the cost of \$618. Her training prepared her to establish sound accounting procedures, take steps toward official designation as a Micro Finance Institution, provide training to project participants, evaluate the loan applications and ensure the sustainability of the project.

HEALTH CLINIC PROJECT

Doctor Saidi: Maura Constance, a Falls Church nurse-practitioner, completed the Marine Corps Marathon on Oct. 26, 2008 as part of her successful effort to raise funds for the 2009 salary of the Kokolopori clinic doctor. Maura, who chairs the Health Clinic Committee for the Kokolopori-Falls Church Sister City Partnership, received sponsorship donations from 45 people, including a generous anonymous donor who made a \$3,000 challenge grant. Red, White and Bleu also sponsored a wine and cheese tasting benefit to support the doctor's fund.

Dr. Pondolo Saidi, who was hired one year ago with funds raised through Maura's first marathon, treats about 30 patients a day in Kokolopori. The cases he sees most often are infectious diseases including malaria, parasitic and fungal infections (including filariosis, a parasitic worm), various respiratory diseases, cuts and wounds, malnutrition, and diarrhea. He also delivers babies and teaches workshops about public health and hygiene. For a virtual tour of the Kokolopori clinic, see the five-minute video on the Projects page of our website at www.kokolopori-partnership.org.

Allocation of funds raised at May benefit: The funds raised through our benefit reception in May enabled us to hire a qualified nurse (\$1,800) to assist the Doctor during surgery, conduct health surveys, prepare reports, and provide training. Another \$1,567 purchased a six month's supply of urgently needed medicines (eg. antibiotics and anti-parasitic medicines), and chemicals for the laboratory and to prevent microbial infection prior to surgery. \$900 paid for the analysis of our survey data on malnutrition (see below), and another \$1,960 paid for transportation of the nurse and medicines to Kokolopori. \$3,388 of those funds remain to be spent in 2009.

Solar-powered Lighting: A manufacturer of solar power generators, Solar Stik, Inc., has committed to donating one of their Solar Stiks (an \$8,500 value) for Kokolopori's health clinic. The solar power generator is comprised of two 50-watt solar panels on a sturdy mast that can be manually adjusted three times a day to track the sun and maximize energy collection, plus batteries and an inverter. The setup is extremely rugged yet lightweight. The portable battery pack stores 100 amp hours and can provide either AC or DC power and run with either 120 or 220 volts. The solar panels work in low light as well as bright light.

The company's CEO, Al Zaccor, who lives in the City of Falls Church, or the company's President, Brian Bosley, will travel to Kokolopori in the summer of 2009 to personally install the solar panels, and train health clinic staff in their use and maintenance. The panels will power electric lights for the clinic. Until now, emergency night-time medical procedures like surgeries and childbirths have been conducted by hand-held flashlight. Family Medicine in Falls Church also made a generous donation in support of this project, as did several individual Falls Church donors. Solar power is also urgently needed for a variety of other uses like charging laptops, batteries, and running a small vaccine refrigerator.

Cisterns: Thanks to generous donations from two anonymous donors, the Falls Church Lions Club, Falls Church Rotary Club and River Road Unitarian Universalist Church, we have raised half the funding needed for a metal roof and rainwater collection system for the clinic. A 2,000 liter cistern, 2 large plastic barrels and other accoutrements have been shipped up the Congo River and a concrete slab is ready to be poured. The cisterns arrived in Befori, the closest riverboat stop to Kokolopori, in early February. Until now, women fetch water for the clinic and carry it in five gallon jerry cans on their backs from the river, one mile away. But as word of Dr. Saidi's presence spreads and more and more patients arrive daily, concerns about sanitation and hygiene rise along with the need for more water. The remaining funding to be raised will pay for metal roofing, gutters and downspouts, and water purification chemicals.

Nutrition survey: With funds raised in Falls Church, the Kokolopori health clinic staff conducted a sample survey in the 35 villages of Kokolopori early in 2008 to gather data about the nutritional status of babies, young children and pregnant and nursing women. The purpose of the survey was to assess the most important needs for early nutritional intervention.

The survey found that approximately 9% of children under the age of five in Kokolopori are malnourished, half of these severely. Malnutrition was identified by measuring the ratio of weight to height, the diameter of the upper arm, and the presence of edema in the feet. Contributing factors identified included presence of parasitic worms, too-early introduction of solid food into the diet of nursing infants, and the fact that 25% of pregnant women and 20% of nursing mothers are also malnourished.

Recommendations included opening one or more nutrition centers where vitamin A, iron supplements, iodized salt, supplemental feedings, and anti-parasitic agents like Mebendazole can be dispensed. In addition, women need training on the nutritional needs of pregnant and nursing women and young children, and on the importance of exclusive breastfeeding until at least six months of age. Also, because women in Kokolopori have no access to family planning resources, too-frequent pregnancies can also contribute to malnutrition of both mother and child.

EDUCATION PROJECT

Djolu Technical College: In 2008, KFCSCP and the Bonobo Conservation Initiative (BCI) supported the Djolu Technical College, about 50 miles from Kokolopori, the only institution of higher education in a 40,000 square mile region, and the sole hope for bright young people in the area to get a college education. The College has a five-year track record of success already, with 40 students currently enrolled and a dozen or so who graduate each year. The curriculum includes courses in subjects like Environmental Management, Sustainable Agriculture, Forestry, Hygiene and Public Health, Marketing, and Civil and Land Law.

Eight permanent teaching staff serve the College, as well as eight visiting professors from the University of Kisangani who travel by motorcycle and dugout canoe for rotations of two months at a time. At this time, the College rents classrooms in a local school, and lacks electricity, computers, running water, phone service, an internet connection, metal roofing, and often even school supplies. Nevertheless, despite obstacles that would be considered virtually insurmountable by western standards, Djolu Technical College is effectively bringing higher education to students in this impoverished region.

Together, BCI and KFCSCP posted a project description for the College on the Global Giving Website. In order to earn a permanent spot on this popular website that vets qualified projects all over the world and channels donations to them from individual donors, we successfully met the Global Giving Challenge. In a three-week period, we obtained more than 75 donations totaling \$3,000 for our project. To date, more than \$5,000 has been raised in this way. We now have the opportunity to post appeals for additional projects in Kokolopori, and obtain support from philanthropists nationwide.

In launching this online appeal, we announced the establishment of a scholarship fund in memory of Veronique Lilima Lokasola, who passed away last summer. Because Veronique recognized the importance of education for the future of her community and her beloved forests, the fund will support the education of talented students from Kokolopori or Djolu with a desire to study conservation biology, health science or rural sciences at the college or university level.

Satellite Internet Connection: The Internet Society granted \$10,000 toward the establishment of a satellite internet connection for Kokolopori. This nonprofit organization, with offices in Washington, D.C. and Geneva, Switzerland, is dedicated to ensuring the open development, evolution and use of the Internet for the benefit of people throughout the world. The Democratic Republic of Congo Chapter of the Internet Society applied for and was awarded this grant on behalf of the KFCSCP, and will make arrangements with an internet service provider in Kinshasa to travel to Kokolopori to install the service this summer. The satellite dish, modem and laptop will operate on electricity from the solar power generator donated by SolarStik, Inc.

Other than talking drums, the only means of long-distance communication in Kokolopori is shortwave (HF) radio. Internet and email access would benefit schools, health care providers, conservationists, and micro-entrepreneurs in Kokolopori, and help build a sense of community between Falls Church and Kokolopori.

We are presently considering whether the internet connection might be more beneficial if it were installed at Djolu Technical College, located 50 miles away in the territorial capital, which has no internet access either. Despite being the territorial capital, Djolu hardly has more modern amenities than Kokolopori. This location would benefit Kokolopori residents since the college is the only realistic opportunity for most bright Kokolopori high school graduates to attend college at all. The technical college is an integral part of Vie Sauvage, our Kokolopori/Djolu area partner organization's conservation strategy, and location in Djolu may permit use by paying customers, which

would make the system more sustainable over the long run. Furthermore, because textbooks are so expensive in DRC, the College's library currently houses only 45 books, and the 13 theses written by graduates of the class of 2007. Access to the internet would open up a world of resources to these college students as well as visitors from Kokolopori. If we can raise further funds, it should also be possible to send text messages via shortwave radio from Kokolopori that can then be converted to email at Djolu Technical College.

School supplies arrived: Funds raised in late 2006 were used to purchase school supplies in mid-2007 for the 8 primary and 2 secondary schools in Kokolopori. The notebooks, pens, textbooks and maps finally arrived in Kokolopori in the spring of 2008 after numerous delays in their journey up the Congo and Maringa Rivers. The tribal chiefs who govern Kokolopori reached consensus on the type of supplies to be purchased for each school. One copy of each textbook needed for each grade was purchased for most of the schools. There was not enough funding to purchase enough textbooks for each individual student to use. But the arrival of these textbooks was a major step forward for a school system where the lessons had previously been supplied solely from teachers' memories.

FUNDRAISING

On May 1, 2008, 130 guests gathered at The Atrium at Meadowlark Botanical Gardens in Vienna to raise funds for the health clinic in Kokolopori. Bana Ndule, a Washington, DC-based Congolese band, delighted the revelers with its uniquely African rhythms. Guests feasted on West African specialties from Bukom Café in Adams Morgan, followed by an array of familiar treats from Falls Church eateries.

Event Chair Barbara Cram presided as Master of Ceremonies for the evening's program. She read an excerpt from a congratulatory letter received from former Falls Church resident Bill Garvelink, who is currently serving as U.S. Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo. The evening's program proceeded with the presentation of an award to the City of Falls Church from Jamestown 2007 which recognized the important role that our Sister City partnership with Kokolopori played in our participation in America's 400th Anniversary Celebration. On hand to accept the award on behalf of the City were Mayor Robin Gardner, Vice Mayor Lindy Hockenberry, Councilmember Dan Maller, and many members of Falls Church's 400th Anniversary Committee representing an array of Falls Church City organizations.

Ingrid Schulze next took the podium, to share photos and tales from her trip to Kokolopori in January. She showed moving images of hardship and tragedy, as well as others that conveyed the joy, kindness and determination of the Mongandu people. Sally Coxe, president of the Bonobo Conservation Initiative, closed the program with congratulatory remarks to our citizens. She highlighted the conservation significance of that part of the Congo River Basin, and the new hope felt by Kokolopori residents resulting from this international attention to their development needs.

A hand-made basket, a blacksmith-forged knife, and a dress sewn on hand-powered sewing machines in Kokolopori, all donated by the people of Kokolopori, were among the one-of-a-kind offerings that enticed guests to place bids at the silent auction table. A wide array of offerings from generous local businesses was also up for bid, as well as paintings by Falls Church students who won the Kokolopori Student Art Contest this year. A number of local businesses and civic groups also provided generous sponsorship support of the evening's festivities.

Funds have also been raised through the following activities over the past year:

- A bingo game;
- Student fundraising activities;
- A dessert reception at Cherry Hill Farmhouse after Bana Ndule's concert in the park;
- A foundation grant and donations from local churches and civic groups;
- The Marine Corps Marathon;
- A wine and cheese tasting at Red, White & Bleu;
- An online appeal at GlobalGiving.com; and
- A collection taken during the Civil War Thanksgiving re-enactment at Cherry Hill Farmhouse.

KFCSCP has also explored developing a carbon credit program to raise funds for rainforest conservation and community development projects in Kokolopori. We presented a proposal to the Environmental Services Council's Climate Change Task Force on how such a program might be incorporated in its proposal to the City of Falls Church for reducing our community's carbon footprint. The carbon fund would offer Falls Church area citizens a means to offset some of our greenhouse gas emissions—in addition, we emphasize, to continuing to reduce our personal carbon footprints—by purchasing voluntary, non-tradable carbon credits (sometimes termed “vanity” credits).

FINANCES

Total raised in 2008: \$46,149, including \$9,757 in-kind (compared to \$45,022 in 2007)

Total spent in 2008: \$48,331 (up from \$29,728 in 2007)

95% of the donations received in 2008 were restricted to projects in Kokolopori, 2% were used for Falls Church area sister city projects, and only 3% of the money we raised was spent on KFCSCP's administrative expenses.

In summary, this third year of our Sister City Partnership with the people of Kokolopori has opened up exciting new opportunities and identified urgent new challenges. The photos and videos that Ingrid Schulze brought back from her trip to Kokolopori have painted a vivid picture of life in Kokolopori, and opened up that vista to many more people here in Falls Church. Now, the availability of an internet connection will do even

more to bridge the enormous distance that divides our communities, enabling us to form friendships with Kokolopori area residents, including students, and gain a deeper appreciation for their resilience and way of life.

Initiatives undertaken in 2008 have made progress toward fostering micro-enterprise, building the local economy, establishing a source of clean water and solar lighting for the health clinic, addressing malnutrition, and supporting higher education for the region. However much remains to be done. We are currently convening our volunteers in a strategic planning process designed to build KFCSCP's institutional capacity and position us for long-term sustainability.

We appreciate the City Council's continued support of our participation in Sister Cities International, which provides Falls Church with this unique opportunity to exercise our global citizenship. We know you will share our conviction that this experience continues to prove richly beneficial to both parties in this Sister City Partnership.