



Operation  
Bootstrap  
Africa

# *Dignity*

Spring 2020 Edition

## **Meeting the Challenges of the Last 55 Years**

Thank you for walking alongside our African brothers and sisters by empowering them with education. OBA has been doing this for 55 years and is going strong.

When preparing to publish this edition of the Dignity newsletter, a global pandemic broke out. Enclosed is information about COVID-19 and how it is expected to affect Africa; however, I didn't want that to take away from celebrating the 55th Anniversary of OBA and the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the MaaSAE Girls Lutheran Secondary School. So, we added a few pages to the Dignity to adequately inform and celebrate. We will ask you to help protect our students and healthcare workers with a special COVID-19 response, but I didn't want to downplay the importance of celebrating something great. Perhaps it is especially important to celebrate now?

We have many participating authors in this edition. I want to thank (in no particular order) Jean Wahlstrom, Marvin Kanaan, Lauren Sekelsky, Briana Engh, Dr. Mark Jacobson, Dr. Seth Msinjili, Martha Ntolpo, and Mike Onan for sharing their insights and passions with our readers.

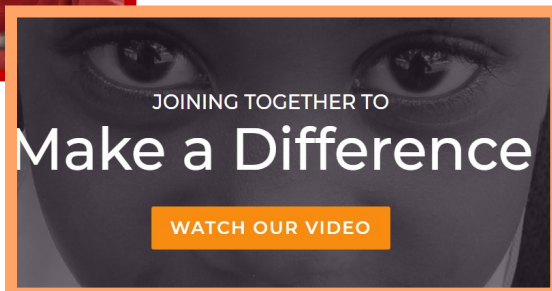
This is also an opportunity to thank Lauren Sekelsky for her service to OBA. We wish her luck on her future endeavors. We also welcome Briana Engh (Bri) to OBA. Her education, experience, and passion to serve, makes her a great addition to the family.

We have recently published a new video on our website. It features footage from MGLSS, Olchoki, and Ilboru Special Needs School. We welcome you to view the places you impact, and share it with others.

Please make note of the insert enclosed. This is intended to be a friendly reminder to include OBA in your estate planning. We will be including this reminder in most of our

Continued on pg. 2

mailings. This insert costs only a few pennies, but if it helps people to remember to do their will and create a legacy of education and hope for girls in Africa, it has the power to make a difference in many young lives. Please let us know if you have included OBA in your estate, even if it isn't used for a very long, long time. Keep safe. Thank you. Jason



## New Video On Website!

We have published a new video on our website. The OBA mission is highlighted in this video, and we welcome you to view it at:

<https://bootstrapafrica.org/>

# Congratulations to the Form 4 Graduates!

In October, 2019 the 20th class of Form 4 students graduated from the MaaSAE Girls Lutheran Secondary School in Monduli, Tanzania. These young women have overcome extraordinary challenges in order to complete their education and we couldn't be more proud. After graduation the students completed national exams which will determine whether they will continue their education at MGLSS or move on to a technical or vocational college. We wish all of them luck and pray for their continued educational success!




# Donor Highlight ~ Sarah Bardal



From Left: Milla, Nadupoi, and Sarah with a quilt Sarah made for their new home

Sarah Bardal has been a dedicated donor, volunteer, and champion of OBA for many years. As a volunteer she has spent countless hours in the office helping to keep us organized. Over the years she and her husband, Ron, have provided scholarships for many students, and together they have visited Tanzania 7 times. Each time she returns to Tanzania, Sarah encourages new friends to join her, and has introduced OBA's work to dozens more here at home. For Sarah, every trip to Tanzania is an adventure and an opportunity to give back, but perhaps her most meaningful experience was the first one.

On that trip Sarah visited schools in the Monduli area, and there she heard about a young girl who had run away from home in order to go to school. The girl—Milla—had walked for hours over harsh terrain, in constant fear of wild animals, through the dark of night, and straight into Sarah's heart. Once Sarah heard the story she knew that she and Ron had to sponsor Milla and help her realize her dream of getting an education. Today Milla has graduated from the secondary school where she and Sarah met and now has a career in early childhood education. She is also happily married to the man of her choosing, with a 7 year old daughter, Nadupoi, who will be given every opportunity to get an education of her own. Sarah has stayed in touch with Milla for over a decade, has visited her on each trip to Tanzania, and considers her to be family. During that time Sarah and Milla have also worked together to help 3 other girls from Milla's village escape child marriages and get an education. They embody the Swahili saying 'bega kwa bega' which means 'shoulder to shoulder'. They show that when we work together side by side we can change the world. 



# ***HyRac Team Brings Hope***

Technology has become a necessity in the modern classroom and workplace. African students are not privy to the amount of technological exposure that the US and Europe have become accustomed to. Technology has not been at the forefront of worry, as basic needs such as food and water are still resources that are not always present in Tanzanian life. Internet access and familiarity with computers is becoming a need in education and HyRac Tech is hoping to bridge that gap between continents.

HyRacTech is a social tech company that is focused on empowering people with the resources and education they need to succeed in this digital generation. Their organization's core mission is to inspire and empower students by providing them with the technological tools to succeed. Three presenters from the HyRac team led a three day workshop at MGLSS speaking on the benefits of technology, and how the HyRac box could aid the young women in future post secondary and professional fields. A week after the workshop, the team visited schools in Northern Tanzania. They helped install a HyRac box on site, and answered all of the questions

regarding the installation and the box itself. Twelve attendees from seven schools were present at the HyRac workshop.

The Hyrac box works similar to wifi, but works with an offline system. The box would help students learn coding, mechanics, and other material for future STEM careers. Additionally, this would equip African students with technological access and offline learning from primary school age, where it has never been available.

Developing countries consist of over 4 billion people and they have one of the youngest populations. In Africa alone, the average age is 19.5 with over 1.3 billion people. This box will help promote early access and exposure to technology. This way, children can become acclimated to having a computer or tablet around from a very young age, preparing them for future endeavors academically. Ingenuity and resourcefulness have come together to create hope for progress in the Tanzanian tech field. Our students have the opportunity to be on the forefront of business and technology, thanks to the HyRac box.



# ***We've Moved!***

As of January 1, 2020 you can find us at our new address:

***5701 Kentucky Ave N.  
Minneapolis, MN 55428***

## **Please Welcome Our New Staff Member-Briana Engh**

Briana has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology from the University of Minnesota Duluth, and an Associate of Arts degree with an emphasis in teaching. Her background is in non-profits, organization, and project management. She is excited to be part of an organization that brings change, and helps provide tools to strengthen those without resources. In her spare time she enjoys travel, animals, and is an avid cook.



# 25 Years of MGLSS

Martha Lekitony Ntoipo stood at the podium in front of hundreds of people celebrating the 25th anniversary of her alma mater. Her words were strong and beautiful. She spoke on the history of MGLSS, and how it opened its doors in May 1995 with 45 girls from different villages. The goal being to empower women to make their own choices, and to pass that belief on. When MGLSS was founded, it was merely 2 classrooms. One classroom was used as a dormitory and the other for lessons. So far, the school has 1,007 form four graduates and 361 form six graduates. These women have become experts in the fields of education and nursing. MGLSS graduates have pursued careers in Medicine, Law, Social Work, Journalism, Aviation, Theology, and Accounting. Martha and her fellow alumni have banded together and sponsored an MGLSS student. *"We are proud to say that eleven (11) of us committed to sponsor one girl as a way to appreciate the efforts and sacrifices so many people have made to get us where we are, we have done that and Nabulu Sindiyo has sat for her Form Four Exams last year and passed with a division 2, 20 points and joined our ALUMNI family as an ALUMNI sponsored by the ALUMNI."* Martha noted that in Tanzania, people often say "MGLSS is a school whose education is free", and followed by saying that in reality, MGLSS is one of the most expensive schools in Africa. It is not expensive in regard to cost of money, but the sacrifices of numerous people leaving their families. She called out to the sponsors. "I stand before this congregation to tell you that you are the wealthiest people alive, you have not just changed our lives, you gave us life through your sacrifices and hard work. You have made a great impact on our individual lives, our community and our nation at large." Education is the most important thing to Martha, and the blessing that sponsors have bestowed on her made it possible for her to become the eloquent woman she is today. We want to thank our sponsors for all they have done with us to ensure that young women have every opportunity available to them. They are the future of Tanzania.



Martha and other MGLSS alumni with Jason Bergmann, Director of OBA

Reverend David Simonson and his wife Eunice began to raise funds for education in the new country of Tanzania in 1964. By August 1965, Operation Bootstrap Arusha (later Operation Bootstrap Africa) was born. He sought churches around the United States to share his mission. OBA provided the funds for the villages to purchase presses that made mud bricks. The parents in the tribes crafted the bricks, and with them built over 3,000 rural schools and clinics. In 55 years, our mission has not changed, only the impact.

Tanzania now has higher building standards, and has adopted new building practices. Mud brick huts are in our past. The structures now built from OBA funds are as strong as the children learning in them. We supply enough money to hire contractors, and create sustainable buildings with amenities such as solar panels and water collection systems. With these resources, students and teachers can learn to grow from their environment and pass that on to the next generation. Building schools brought much to Tanzania, but other needs arose as time progressed. Young girls wanted to leave their lives of servitude, and became educated. OBA took the initiative in 1995 to sponsor young girls and construct the MaaSAE Girl's Lutheran Secondary School. Yearly scholarships provide a safe and cohesive learning space for them, rather than being a child bride.



**55** Years  
of  
**OBA**

OBA's reach has grown over the years as well. We currently sponsor schools in Kenya and Madagascar as well as Tanzania. We have branched out by supporting modern hospitals, creating lunch programs, and a plethora of other projects. The Olchoki lunch program was implemented in January 2020. Since then over 67,200 meals have been provided to the students. As we continue to grow, so will Tanzania.



Children at Olchoki enjoying lunchtime



# Jean Wahlstrom Reflects on 25th Anniversary Celebration

In 1998 Jean Wahlstrom and her husband Marvin Kannanen were sent by the ELCA to be missionaries in Tanzania. Jean worked at the MaaSAE Girls Luthern Secondary School for 12 years. She spent that time as a Chaplin, and teacher. She lead worship, preached and taught biblical classes. She was present at the 25th Anniversary celebration of MGLSSS. This is her reflection.

“Wow! Uffda! Thanks be to God!” My response to Jason’s request that I reflect on the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Girl’s School. “Uffda” is the only Norwegian this Swede knows.

I cannot begin to describe my feelings on that very special day! There were hundreds of folks gathered that day to celebrate. We listened to guests give speeches, and they were

many. There were three bishops, a former Tanzanian president and a former prime minister. The school had transformed the basketball court into sectioned seating under blue and white awnings, complete with decorations. There were student choirs and a guest Maasai choir to provide up-lifting music. Tanzanian gracious hospitality demanded they all be fed with traditional foods. At first it felt as if I’d never left.

Then I looked at all the young women

dressed in black and beaded finery. Like an electrical shock, I realized they were the first Form Six graduates sitting in the front row of the alumni section. I couldn’t keep from staring and trying to name them all, placing names to faces changed by twenty years. I’d seen some of them, but this was the first time we were together. At first it felt as if my memory had totally let me down, but slowly as we watched them during the program, the names and personalities and stories came back to me. My heart thrilled to see what God had done to them. They had become strong, dynamic, and even more lovely. They had used their

education to benefit not only themselves, but their families and their society.

That day I knew I represented all their teachers, donors and families who had supported these women while students. My eyes went down that first row and in silence I reviewed their stories. There was


Martha (please read carefully her speech), Joyce (now a lawyer and head of an NGO that works for the benefit of Maasai women), Neema (now a Lutheran pastor about to start a Ph.D program in Germany), Elisipha (now a Social Worker), Anna (now a pilot working for the National Park system). Others have become doctors (two training to be surgeons), pharmacists, lab technicians, teachers for all age levels, bankers, administrators, agricultural developers, journalists, wives, mothers, computer programmers, civil engineers,



Jean with the the First MGLSS Graduates



and one even came with her business card to proudly tell me of her own company where she serves as a design consultant having completed a degree in architecture. I was overwhelmed with joy, and humbled by the examples of these women and what they have achieved. My husband once said, "We educated little girls and now they've become the new breed of Maasai warriors: educated women!"

I noticed the current students carefully watching these alumni, their older sisters. You could almost hear their wheels turning inside their heads: each saying, "One day I will be one of them." I had come to this event, not to hear speeches, but to celebrate the achievements of the graduates. I was only one of the 'cloud of witnesses' (Hebrews 12:1) who had the privilege of cheering them on. 

### ***Marv Kanaanen Gives History on MGLSS***

Marvin Kanaanen taught English as a missionary at MGLSS and has procured a wealth of knowledge of the institution. We asked him to provide us with a brief history, and he did not disappoint.

"Of the 300,000 Maasai in Tanzania when the Girls School started, only 24 Maasai girls were in secondary schools. MGLSS tripled that number in its first year, along with admitting the lesser known Barbaig, Dorobo, Hadsabe, Iraqw, among others. The school began 40 years ago as a dream of Edward Moringe Sokoine (former Prime Minister of Tanzania) and was brought into being through the efforts of Bishop Laiser, Koko Ruthi, and Missionary David Simonson. In 1995 the school started with American volunteers Jane Tellekson, Abby Bowen, and Marjorie Hardison (among others) teaching. Through the process of education, the little, timid bush girls have become scholars, doctors, lawyers, teachers, and

other leaders. An unnamed student who, when asked to turn out the light, tried to blow the bulb out like a candle—ended up with a Ph.D. from an American university. It was common that students would bang their head against the windows because they'd never experienced glass before, or they could easily climb the steps to the classroom but would jump down because they'd never learned to go down steps before. They all seemed to have difficulty remembering to turn the faucet off after they'd gotten water. They preferred the water from the tap rather than from the solar filter because it tasted like the water from home, a lesson they all learned when they'd be sick and their classmates weren't. Some had never heard a word of English. They were terrified of me because I was large, white, and male—but they all overcame that hesitation rather too quickly.

The school gave them an unimaginable chance to live a better life. The school brought them hope. Hope is an addicting power; it gives people power who'd had none. It empowers them. It was true in the beginning; it is true today. Jane Tellekson reported that during the third week of the opening of school, the students came to her door as a group and demanded to know why they were there. "To learn," Jane told them. Her words were like the shot that starts the race. They came, they learned, and they even asked for more homework. Now they're out to change their society."



## A Recent Letter from the Nursing School

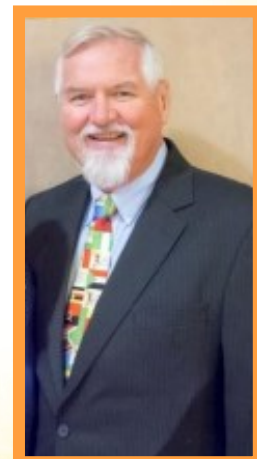
As we live with incredulity at how dramatically and powerfully COVID19 is wreaking havoc on our American way of life, our economy, and our definition of normalcy for our futures – it is going to do even more in Africa. The African continent and Tanzania in particular, are similarly unprepared for coronavirus but more critically, the pandemic strikes dramatically less developed health systems, frighteningly fewer resources, weak economies, and weak political leadership with less influence upon its population.

We hear daily of the heart wrenching shortages of ventilators and masks in our frontline hospitals. In Arusha and the surrounding region, with a population equal to that of Minnesota, ALMC has the only two ventilators for the whole region. We may be able to pull in some 30 anesthesia machines to serve as ventilators but you get the point. In Tanzania our efforts need to focus on the basics of keeping our staff protected, identifying those for whom our care can make a difference, and playing a leading role in responding to the pandemic.

So, in this time of peril, we again reach out to you dear and faithful friends of our health ministries, to once again lend a hand in this hour of need. There is no other claim to your generous support than to say, this is indeed our hour of greatest need.

Blessings,

*Dr. Mark*



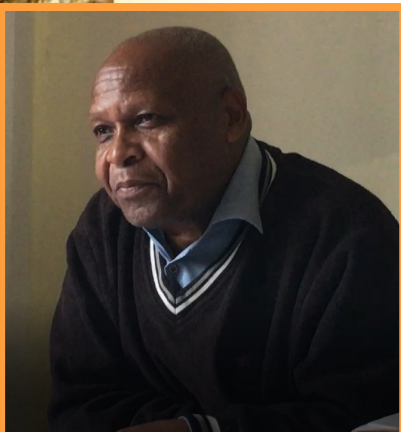


Dear Sponsors of my Students at Maasae Girls Secondary School,

It is very difficult for me to find what to say to you during these difficult times for the whole world. We were ordered to close school for one month when there was one incidence of Corona confirmed in our country, that was 18th March. Now we have 88 confirmed cases and four deaths. Are we going to open school on May 2nd as planned?? We had to send students home, but for the majority of them, we did not send home but to some understanding relatives, otherwise they would never come back when the school opens. But the question is "how equipped are we for their safety on their return?" Pray for us. So far I have not heard of any incidence touching our students or their families. Thank you for your continued support during these difficult times. Your love to us is something we can never pay back. We pray to God for you all for His mercy.

*Seth Msinjili*

**Headmaster**





# A Tax Strategy to Benefit You and Your Favorite Charity

With last year's changes in the tax law, you may have found yourself taking the standard deduction of \$24,000 (for a joint return) instead of itemizing deductions as you had done in previous years. This means you did not receive a tax benefit for your charitable contributions. That would have been our situation, but I'm going to go way out of my comfort zone and tell you what we did instead. You see, I'm 50% Norwegian and 100% Lutheran. We don't talk about our personal finances, but I decided there may be other Bootstrap supporters who are in a similar situation and could benefit from our story.

## Mike and Connie At a Glance:

Mike: 68, employed full-time

Connie: 65, employed full-time

Planning to retire in the next couple of years and mortgage-free

Federal Tax Bracket: 22%

State Tax Bracket: 7%

Total Savings from Tax-Deductible Donations:  
29 cents per dollar

Annual Charitable Gifts: \$10,000

Other Itemized Deductions: \$10,000

With \$20,000 of eligible tax deductible expenses and charitable donations in 2018, we would have taken the \$24,000 standard deduction and received no tax benefit for our charitable contributions. This same scenario would likely repeat itself for at least the next three years. So instead we opened a "Donor-Advised Fund" (DAF) and deposited an amount equal to three years of charitable donations (\$30,000). This meant that in 2018 our itemized tax deductions were \$50,000 instead of \$20,000 and we received a tax benefit of \$7,540 beyond the standard deduction amount.

$(\$50,000 - \$24,000 = \$26,000, \times 0.29 = \$7,540)$

For the next three years, we will provide our usual \$10,000 of financial support to our church and Operation Bootstrap Africa by using the \$30,000 in our DAF. During those years we will take the standard deduction on our tax returns.

## Important Things to Know About Donor-Advised Funds:

- It is a financial account held by a sponsoring (non-profit) organization, which means you can tax deduct your deposits in the year you make them
- Anytime after you deposit funds you can request that money be sent from your account to another non-profit
- Once you deposit money in a DAF you cannot withdraw it
- You can invest your DAF balance in stocks, bonds, CDs, etc.
- A DAF is beneficial for anyone who has taxable income, whose current itemized deductions are less than the standard deduction, and who has enough cash or other assets to deposit into a DAF as to exceed the standard deduction

## About the Author

Mike Onan served on the OBA board for 5 years, and recently worked in the office for 17 months. Mike has a professional background in accounting and has been part of the Bootstrap family for 24 years. He and his wife, Connie, visited Tanzania in 2000 and have since sponsored 3 students through OBA.

# Your gift creates change and hope

## Ways to Give:

- Give Directly from Your IRA—If you are 70<sup>1/2</sup> or older your contribution will count towards your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) and will not be included in your Adjusted Gross Income (AGI). You may contribute up to \$100,000 annually from your IRA. In some situations lowering your AGI may be more beneficial than itemizing charitable deductions.
- Make a Stock Contribution—Gifts of stock are generally tax deductible at the full fair-market value and exempt from long-term capital gains tax.
- Create a Donor Advised Fund—A donor advised fund allows your assets including cash, appreciated stock, mutual funds, real estate, and more to be invested and grow tax-free. Contributions to your fund are tax deductible in the year that they are made, but may be granted to eligible charitable organizations over a period of multiple years. Donor advised funds are a useful tool for donors who are affected by the new, higher standard deduction threshold and wish to combine multiple years worth of giving into one year in order to itemize.
- Legacy Gifts—Include a gift to OBA in your will or trust, designate OBA as a beneficiary of your IRA or life insurance policy, or give to the OBA Endowment Fund.

*For more information, please contact the OBA office.🌐*



OBA is proud to have been recognized as a 4-star organization by Charity Navigator for 7 consecutive years, and for meeting the highest standards of financial health, transparency, and accountability. This puts us in the top 10% of all nonprofit organizations in the United States. We are a mission-driven organization, committed to ensuring your support goes where it is most needed!

For over 50 years OBA has been making a difference in Africa as an independent 501(c)(3). Your contribution is tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

Operation Bootstrap Africa and its affiliates are not financial advisors and cannot provide tax, legal, or accounting advice. Please consult your financial planner to learn how gifts to OBA may benefit your unique tax or financial situation.

# Menstrual Care Kits for MGLSS Girls



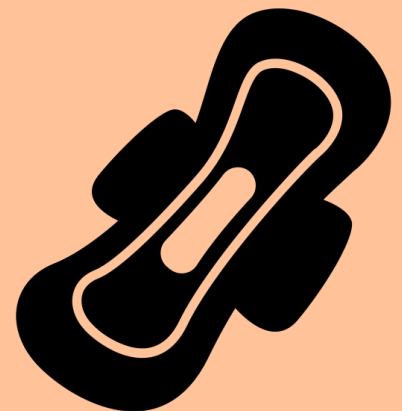
Menstruation is never an easy subject to talk about. In Africa, this subject is not only taboo; it is a private shame. Often, if a young woman is having her menses without the proper tools, she could miss out on school, church, and work. Conventional feminine products are usually deemed too expensive and are supplemented with dirty rags, or nothing at all. In order to refrain from missing out on life, they sometimes take extreme measures in order to keep daily life going. Improper treatment during this time can lead to urinary tract infections, rashes, and problems with fertility.

OBA is working with women in the United States to provide a sanitary solution to this reality: reusable menstrual products. Organic materials will be used to provide a sanitary and safe alternative to missing out on everyday life when going through

menstruation. Menstrual Kits will be created with 3 different styles of pads, and a wash bag for sanitizing.

The reusable material is cut to look like a sanitary pad to a young woman, but can fold into a washrag for discretion, so it can be placed on the clothesline. A single kit can last up to 3 years, with low cost replacements.

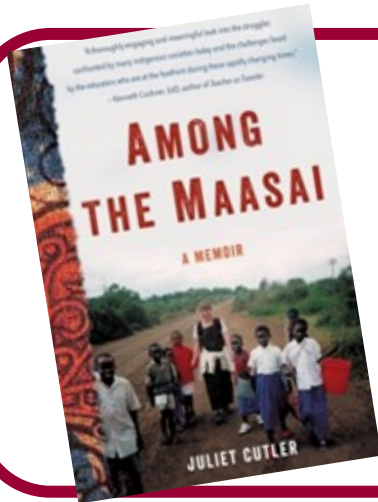
The final goal is to source these products from socially conscious businesses in Tanzania. Using companies such as these, we will support their local economy, and help them reach other Tanzanian people who may spread the word and make it a norm. The taboo around menstruation will start to dissolve as we help promote positive body image and continue to ensure the safety of each young African girl. Rather than having our girls spend days in isolation, we are giving them time to learn and fulfill their potential.





# OBA Book Club

A place to share books by and about the OBA Family, our projects, and the communities we serve



## Among the Maasai

Juliet Cutler served as an ELCA volunteer English teacher at MGLSS in 1999–2000. For the last 20 years, she has remained a strong supporter of education for Maasai girls. Her first book, *Among the Maasai*, tells this story. All proceeds from the sale of the book will support MGLSS and other causes that uplift Maasai women and girls. To learn more visit: [www.julietcutler.com](http://www.julietcutler.com)

## Let's Get Social

Find us on Facebook  
at

[www.facebook.com/  
OperationBootstrap  
Africa](http://www.facebook.com/OperationBootstrapAfrica)

and on Instagram at  
[@BootstrapAfrica](https://www.instagram.com/BootstrapAfrica)

## OBA Needs You!

### Intern with OBA

OBA seeks a talented and motivated individual to assist with communications and social media. Internship is eligible for a paid stipend and/or college credit. Must be available 10–15 hours per week during business hours.

To apply, send your resume and cover letter to  
[admin@bootstrapafrica.org](mailto:admin@bootstrapafrica.org)

### Volunteer with OBA

Do you live in the Twin Cities metro area and want to get more involved with OBA? We are always looking for volunteers to help around the office with mailings, filing, and other projects. Please contact OBA at [info@bootstrapafrica.org](mailto:info@bootstrapafrica.org) to sign-up.

### Operation Bootstrap Africa Board of Directors

*Gene Mickelson (President), Stan Guimont (Vice President),  
Dean McDevitt, (Treasurer) Kjell Ferris, Gary Floss, Michael  
Hedley, Jack McAllister, Marllys Peters-Melius, Peyton T.  
Taylor Jr.*



5701 Kentucky Ave N. Suite 200  
Minneapolis, MN 55428

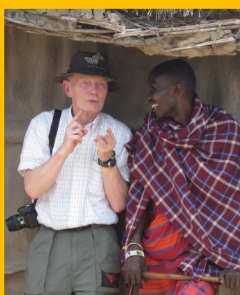
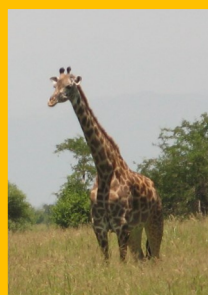
Non-profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Twin Cities, MN  
Permit No. 2038

Dignity is a publication for friends of Operation Bootstrap Africa, a Minnesota-based non-profit dedicated to helping people help themselves through a variety of educational programs in Africa.

In partnership with African communities and organizations, Bootstrap provides support and assistance to projects and programs based on locally-established priorities.

Gifts to OBA are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. OBA may assess up to 10% for administration of these gifts.

Website: [www.operationbootstrapafrica.org](http://www.operationbootstrapafrica.org)  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/OperationBootstrapAfrica](https://www.facebook.com/OperationBootstrapAfrica)  
Instagram: [@BootstrapAfrica](https://www.instagram.com/BootstrapAfrica)  
Email: [info@operationbootstrapafrica.org](mailto:info@operationbootstrapafrica.org)  
Phone: 1-612-871-4980 OR  
Toll-Free at 1-888-755-1318



## ***Join us for the experience of a lifetime in Tanzania!***

Travel to Tanzania with Operation Bootstrap Africa on a Discovery Tour! Visit OBA projects including schools and clinics, embark on safari to view some of the world's most abundant and beautiful wildlife, and engage in cultural activities.

Tours cost approximately \$6,000 per person, including airfare, meals, lodging, tips, and all land travel costs. Costs not covered include beverages, immunizations, anti-malarial medication, a Tanzanian tourist visa, and travel insurance. A Zanzibar extension and other optional excursions may be arranged at an additional cost. Tours are limited to 12 participants. Contact the OBA office for more information or to secure your spot on a future tour.

***Upcoming  
Tours  
October  
2020  
May 2021***