

Hannah Davis brings literacy project to Ghana

By Sam Bari

When Hannah Davis was at the end of her senior year in high school, she was feeling antsy. The next step was college, and she hadn't decided what she wanted to study. At 18 years old, Hannah wanted to get a better idea of what the world was about and what she wanted to do with her life.

She had always been interested in Africa, so in the spring of 2006, she decided to take a trip to Ghana. She chose Ghana for her first adventure abroad because she wanted to go to a country where English was the primary language, to make communication easier. She worked with her high school advisor and class counselor to create an independent study on education in Africa, which counted as one of her courses for the semester, and then took a few extra weeks out of school before spring break.

Hannah went to Africa alone. The organization she chose to go through was about to shut down, and gave her little support. "They pretty much just picked me up from the airport and drove me back at the end of the trip," Hannah said. "It was incredibly difficult. But now I am extremely happy to have done it."

"The trip was made possible with the help of my grandfather," Jamestown resident, Steve Mecca, and the Jamestown Rotary Club, "who helped sponsor me," Hannah said. "When I arrived, I volunteered to work at an orphanage while doing an independent study on education."

When she returned, she talked to a few groups around the state, as well as the Jamestown Rotary. They offered support to start a literacy project in Ghana if she wanted to go back to Africa. Hannah accepted the offer, and in the summer of 2007, the Ghana Literacy Project was born.

Hannah partnered the Ghana Literacy Project with the Jamestown Rotary Club and Women's



Hannah Davis and Frances, a student, in front of the Methodist School in the village of Pokuase in Ghana

Trust, a New Hampshire based non-profit organization that addresses health, education, and micro-financing for women.

She did research when she first arrived this summer, and talked to teachers, parents, students, and other people around the village of Pokuase, one of the places where she stayed. Hannah found that two of the biggest problems were the crowded classrooms and the drop-out rates, especially for girls, and particularly during the transition period from middle school to high school.

Consequently, the first program for the Ghana Literacy Project was named the Girls' Exploration and Empowerment Club (GEEC). The program takes the brightest at-risk girls from public schools that usually have be-

tween 70 to 90 students per class per teacher, and brings them into a supplementary class, taught on weekends. The curriculum focuses on computer, literary, and science skills, as well as giving the girls career counseling, Hannah said. "We will be having many guest speakers, interns, and international pen pals," she added.

Hannah said that the first GEEC is taking place in the village of Pokuase, right outside the capital city of Accra. GEEC is a five-year program, lasting from the equivalent of eighth to twelfth grade, which helps the girls through the rough transition phase. As of now, 12 girls are in the program, and a minimum of 12 more will be added each year for the next five years, for a minimum of 60 girls. The program has two part-time teachers, Sammy Gyabah and Abigail Mettle, and may hire more as the club grows, she said.

"We have also started a scholarship for each of the girls, so if at any time their families are unable to pay for them to continue, we can step in and make sure they don't have to leave school. Through eighth grade, school costs \$50 per year; for high school, it costs \$250 per year, and for university, it costs about \$500, which is an estimation, but not too far off," Hannah said.

She also said that the organization is always in need of funding. The club only requires \$4,000 a year for supplies, speakers, teachers' salaries, and other necessities. To send girls to university it will cost \$500 a year per girl, in whatever amounts their families cannot afford. And flights to Ghana cost upwards of \$3,200 a year for two flights. Hannah and the Ghana Literacy Project welcome all donations in any of these areas, or airline miles or any similar voucher. People can donate at

<http://www.jamestownclassic.org/Donate.cfm> or can contact Hannah directly at hannahdavis0220@hotmail.com.

Hannah Davis is now 19 years old. She was born in Baltimore, but moved to Exeter with her family when she was an infant. They have lived in Rhode Island ever since. They moved to Jamestown in 1998, when she was 10. Hannah is a sophomore at New York University studying International Development and Conflict Resolution, so she is now a resident of New York City. However, she returns to Jamestown often to visit her mother and three sisters, Alyssa, 18, Kendra, 16, and Camille, 14, as well as her grandparents, Steve and Linda Mecca. Hannah's father lives in Newport.

"I am interested in literacy, post-conflict areas, and other cultures," Hannah said. "I study French and Arabic, and I am trying to learn Twi, one of the most common local Ghanaian languages. Ideally, I would like to work in conflict and post-conflict countries. I am extremely interested in compassion, in real understanding of others. I'd like to incorporate that into my work, both here and abroad."

At this young age, Hannah Davis has accomplished more to make the world a better place to live than most people achieve in a lifetime. Through her hard work and the participation of those who support her efforts, literacy may one day be enjoyed by all.

Todd paintings on exhibit at library

The Conanicut Island Art Association is featuring the work of Jamestown artist Thomas A. Todd in the large meeting room and hallway of the Jamestown Philomenian Library, 26 North Main Rd.

Previously, Todd's paintings have been featured in one-man exhibits at the Newport Art Museum, The Allens Lane Art Center in Philadelphia, The Art Alliance, The Philadelphia Cricket Club, Widener University, and the Philadelphia Independence Seaport Museum.

Todd is a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, and a member of the American Institute of City Planners. He was a founding member of Wallace, Roberts, and Todd, a preeminent firm in architecture, landscape architecture, and city and regional planning. Todd's extraordinary portfolio includes the Master Plan and Landscape Architecture for The U.S. Capitol Grounds; The Baltimore Inner Harbor; Abuja, the new Capitol City of Nigeria; and The Atlantic City Convention Center.

His education began at the Germantown Friends School in Pennsylvania, and continued through Haverford College and Bryn Mawr College (B.A.) The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and The University of Pennsylvania (Master of Architecture, Master of City Planning, and Chandler Fellowship.)

Todd's retrospective is now open to the public, during regular library hours. The building is handicapped accessible. Admission is free. A reception for the artist will be held at a later date.

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