



**October 1, 2009**

## **Lynchburg Rotary leads charge to educate kids in slums of Nairobi**

Lynchburg, Va.—The Rotary Club of Lynchburg raised \$25,000 and received additional grants from Rotary International for \$37,500. Armed with \$62,500 they have made a major impact at the Mercy Care School in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya.

In keeping with Polio-Plus, Rotary International's flagship project with Bill and Melinda Gates to eradicate polio from the planet, all 650 Mercy Care students and faculty were immunized as part of the project.

Although the elementary school has existed for 14 years, the high school is only two years old. Lynchburg Rotarian Betsy Garrard, a retired teacher, created chemistry, biology and physics labs, required for accreditation. She said the first experiment in the new biology lab was the dissection of a pig.

A computer lab with 10 seventeen-inch laptops using solar energy was also installed.

Lynchburg-based E. C. Glass High School is the sister school to Mercy Care. The Lynchburg students work with the Mercy Care Foundation to support the school on an ongoing basis. Students will host the 2009 African Fundraising Dinner and Silent Auction at E.C. Glass High School on Saturday, October 10 at 6 p.m. at just \$15 per ticket. Attendees can come and taste authentic African flavors and be entertained by students from the Virginia School of the Arts, while helping to raise funds to continue with the work that has been started.

The grant also provided textbooks for each student, so that one book is no longer shared among 30 kids. In classrooms with no electricity, dirt floors, and tiny windows, the black boards were simply black paint on the wall. Now rooms have white boards with multicolor pens to make the work more visible.

A large water tank has replaced the leaky hose that was the school's water source. Two new latrines have been added to the two existing ones, serving 650 people. Musical instruments, audiovisual materials, a Dell projector and a DVD player have helped to bring the world to these young people.

As chair of the Rotary Committee, Garrard spent four weeks helping to plan the project, working at the school in Nairobi that is in the Mathare Valley, meaning “Valley of Hopelessness.”

“Rotary is bringing new hope to these young people,” Garrard said. “In the U.S. on any given day there is a long absentee list at most public schools. At Mercy Care the absentee list contains two or three names at the most, in a school of 650. Teachers report no discipline problems and students are eager to learn and grateful to be at school.”

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*A student and teacher at Mercy Care School in Nairobi try out one of the newly arrived computers, provided through the Rotary grant.*