

# Local Lions Club innovator meets first four Lions-sponsored students attending special high school for blind in Kenya

*Prepared by Jane Lee, board member, Hopewell-Keroka Alliance, August 2016*

*Nairobi, Kenya, July 18, 2016* – Pennington, NJ, resident and Lions Club member **Dr. Lillian Rankel** today visited the **Salvation Army's High School for the Blind in Thika, Kenya** – located about 45 minutes northeast of Kenya's capital Nairobi in East Africa – and met the first four specially selected visually impaired or blind learners whose total tuition, uniform and other costs associated with four full years of secondary schooling currently are being funded by the local Hopewell Valley (NJ) Lions Club chapter.

The Hopewell Valley Lions last year began funding two students each year, with the ultimate goal of sponsoring eight high-school students total (two each grade) each academic year thereafter for the foreseeable future. All the selected students are graduates of the **St. Joseph's Kiomiti Primary School for the Blind**, Dr. Rankel says, an elementary school with which she has forged a special bond in recent years in rural Kisii in southwestern Kenya, about seven hours west of Nairobi.

The Thika High School for the Blind currently has more than 300 students from around Kenya, including some children from Somalian refugee camps in northern Kenya, the latter of whom receive tuition funding from the United Nations, according to Alfred Kamau, a 30-year science educator and current principal of this special school for the blind for the past 17 years.

Dr. Rankel, who formerly taught Advanced-Placement Chemistry at Hopewell Valley Central High School (HVCHS) in Pennington for 14 years before retiring in 2010, has pioneered innovative laboratory approaches and tactile materials in making science education accessible for blind learners.

In support of the Thika high school, Dr. Rankel and her husband and fellow educator Dr. Andrew Jackson have hand-carried over large suitcases brimming with thousands of dollars' worth of supplies for blind or visually impaired learners during multiple trips from New Jersey to Kenya since 2007. Dr. Rankel also has hosted training for Thika teachers on how to teach chemistry and physics to blind or visually impaired high-schoolers.

"Blind students just need some modified materials and techniques and tactile lab equipment to succeed in learning chemistry and physics," Dr. Rankel says. "When we hosted the workshop for Thika teachers in 2009, the teachers thought they would need a full new curriculum. But that's not true. Science teachers simply need tactile techniques, modified approaches and a bit of ingenuity. Any visually impaired or blind student is capable of learning chemistry or physics, other sciences or advanced mathematics, with the correct assistive approaches."

According to Dr. Rankel, additional low-vision or blind students could attend Thika High School for the Blind if more scholarships were made available. Tuition, room and board at Thika High cost about \$500 for each student each year. With donations to the Hopewell Valley Lions Club Charitable Foundation, additional scholarships could be offered for students in need to attend high school, she says. **Tax deductible donations** may be sent to Hopewell Valley Lions Charitable Foundation, P.O. Box 128, Titusville, NJ 08560.

In addition, Drs. Rankel and Jackson, along with fellow HVCHS educator and native Kenyan Dr. David Angwenyi, co-founded in 2008 the **Hopewell-Keroka Alliance (HKA)**, a tax-exempt, non-profit, all-volunteer, charitable organization that has raised about \$170,000 over the past eight years for wide-ranging health, education and infrastructure improvements within the greater Keroka area of southwestern Kenya.

HKA's goal is to build an ongoing humanitarian and cultural bridge between the Hopewell Valley and Keroka communities over time. **HKA New Jersey** selects and manages its projects with the collaboration, guidance and leadership of **HKA Keroka**, a sister non-profit organization comprised of community leaders and volunteers on the ground in the greater Keroka area.

A 25-member delegation of HVCHS students, faculty members, chaperones and community members plan to join up with Drs. Rankel and Jackson and fellow HKA mother-daughter board members Jane and Mandy Lee in Kenya later this week to celebrate with Keroka-area residents, among other accomplishments, the near-completion of a recently drilled water borehole – the first of its kind – for the greater community.

This borehole should provide fresh water to residents of multiple Keroka-area villages for the first time before the end of this year, eliminating the need for village residents, mainly women and children, to hand-haul water, by bucket or other vessel, from local springs or other sources one or more times each day, a task that can take up to 12 hours each day for some village families, as found during a special HKA-conducted water survey of area residents in late July 2016.

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**Photos and captions:**



**Thika's first four NJ Lions-sponsored students:** Shown above (*left to right*) at the **Thika High School for the Blind** in southwestern Kenya are: HKA's **Dr. Andrew Jackson**; **Alfred Kamau**, a 30-year science educator and current principal of this special school for the blind for the past 17 years; student **Scholastic Moraa**, attending her second year at this high school; **Everline Nyamoita**, attending her first year; **James Muriu**, a 30-year educator and head of the

science department and physics teacher at this high school for the past 17 years; **Charles Osoro**, attending his first year at the high school; **Dalmus Kai**, attending his second year at the high school; and HKA's **Dr. Lillian Rankel**, an active Hopewell Valley (NJ) Lions Club member.

Members of the Hopewell Valley Lions Club chapter plan to fund all annual educational costs for Thika students Moraa, Nyamoita, Osoro and Kai for their full four-year high-school experience -- and for up to eight students total (two each grade) each academic year thereafter for the foreseeable future. All sponsored students are graduates of the **Kiombi Primary School for the Blind** in rural Kisii in southwestern Kenya, about seven hours west of Nairobi.

Drs. Rankel and Jackson have built special ties between the high school and primary school in recent years.



**A positive spot for specialized learning:** But just one inspirational wall sign displayed above at the **Thika High School for the Blind** in southwestern Kenya in East Africa one afternoon in late July 2016. Notice the Braille raised lettering below . . . .



**New science laboratory at high school for the blind in Kenya:** Surveying a recently completed science laboratory for blind or visually impaired students at the the **Thika High School for the Blind** in southwestern Kenya (*left to right*) are: **James Muriu**, a 30-year educator and head of the science department and physics teacher at this high school for the past 17 years; **Mandy Lee**, a board member of the Hopewell-Keroka Alliance (HKA), based in Pennington, NJ, and a rising senior at Georgetown University in Washington, DC; **Alfred Kamau**, a 30-year science educator and current principal of this special school for the blind for the past 17 years; and husband-wife team **Dr. Andrew Jackson and Lillian Rankel**, HKA co-founders and treasurer and president, respectively.

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*(Sidebar)*

*Glub, glub, glub . . .*

**Swimming pool at high school for blind in Kenya needs repair**

*Nairobi, Kenya, July 18, 2016* – Well, better late than never, one supposes.

A dated, ailing swimming pool at the Salvation Army's High School for the Blind in Thika, Kenya – located about 45 minutes northeast of Kenya's capital Nairobi – requires major repair, and its refurbishing is the No. 1 priority on the school's To Do list, if precious funds were even available, says school principal Alfred Kamau.

While other major improvements have occurred throughout his 17 years, to date, of administering the school – including the creation of science labs and dormitories, an updated kitchen, and increased annual enrollments, among other achievements – at the 300-student school for blind or visually impaired high-schoolers, a useable pool remains elusive, Kamau says. It currently sits idle, half-filled with brackish water and algae, floating tires and other debris, and swimming minnows.

The **estimated overall local cost** to repair the 20-year-old swimming pool in full, including a new filtration system and pump, pipe replacement, patched pavement of walkways and a stock of necessary water-treatment chemicals: 1.7 million Kenyan Shillings, or \$17,000 US total.

**The idea:** As part of the Hopewell-Keroka Alliance’s (HKA) planned “Level Playing Fields” initiative, the goal would be to empower student athletes within the Hopewell Valley (NJ) Regional School District or greater Hopewell Township (NJ) recreational sports teams to take the dive into raising needed funds not only to repair this pool for blind students outside Nairobi, but also to build, repair or regrade – thereby level – soccer (“football”) fields at three schools for the benefit of more than 2,000 local students total of all ages throughout the mountainous tea-growing multi-village Keroka area in southwestern Kenya, some seven hours outside Nairobi.

“Blind children can swim well; swimming is one sport at which blind children can compete, win and excel,” says HKA co-founder and long-time HVCHS science educator Dr. Lillian Rankel, a former competitive swimmer, who lifeguarded and taught swimming lessons to blind and sighted children as a high-schooler herself. Dr. Rankel has become a passionate advocate for science education, especially related to chemistry, for blind learners. She has pioneered innovative laboratory approaches and tactile learning materials in making science education accessible for visually impaired or blind students.

The **Hopewell-Keroka Alliance** is a Pennington-based international charitable non-profit organization that has raised about \$170,000 over the past seven years for wide-ranging infrastructure improvements within the greater Keroka area of southwestern Kenya in East Africa. **Tax-deductible donations** in support of the "Level Playing Fields" or other HKA projects may be sent to: HKA, P. O. Box 67, Pennington, NJ 08534, or made via the HKA website, [www.hkalliance.org](http://www.hkalliance.org).

More details to follow separately on HKA’s planned Level Playing Field initiative . . . .

Once refurbished, this swimming pool at the high school for the blind could become a community resource and possible source of rental income, benefiting not only this high school, but also local families or community members and competing swim teams.

Following are three images of the currently unusable, handicapped-inaccessible pool at the Thika High School for the Blind in southwestern Kenya.

**Photo/s and caption/s:**



**Not feeling the love:** Above, the currently unusable, brackish, handicapped-inaccessible student pool sits idle at the Thika High School for the Blind outside Nairobi in southwestern Kenya. The Hopewell-Keroka Alliance, based in Pennington, NJ, hopes to seek local student-athlete support within the Hopewell Valley (NJ) Regional School District or greater Hopewell Township (NJ) recreational sports teams in raising funds for the pool's rehabilitation, among other separate sports-related improvements for fellow students in rural Kenya. An estimated \$17,000 US could restore this pool.



**Unused for years:** Above, the currently unusable, brackish, handicapped-inaccessible student pool sits idle at the Thika High School for the Blind outside Nairobi in southwestern Kenya. The Hopewell-Keroka Alliance, based in Pennington, NJ, hopes to seek local student-athlete support within the Hopewell Valley (NJ) Regional School District or greater Hopewell Township (NJ) recreational sports teams in raising funds for the pool's rehabilitation, among other separate sports-related improvements for fellow students in rural Kenya. An estimated \$17,000 US could restore this pool.



**Restoration within grasp:** In the foreground above, Hopewell-Keroka Alliance (HKA) board member **Mandy Lee**, a rising senior at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, surveys the currently unusable, brackish, handicapped-inaccessible state of the student pool at the Thika High School for the Blind outside Nairobi in southwestern Kenya. In the background are dormitory, classroom and other structures on the school grounds. Behind Lee, HKA co-founders and husband-wife team **Drs. Andrew Jackson and Lillian Rankel** tour the pool perimeter.

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