

INTERVIEW

with Jane Kinney Meyers

Lubuto Library Project: A Global Connection

In his opening keynote address at SLA, former Vice President Al Gore quoted an African proverb: "If you want to go quickly, go alone. But if you want to go far, go together." And Jane Kinney Meyers, winner of the 2007 Dow Jones Leadership Award, knows the strength of collective wisdom firsthand. When she took her first steps in helping the street children in Zambia, people followed.

Meyers was the inspiration and founder of the Lubuto Library Project (LLP; www.lubuto.org). This project is helping children who have been orphaned by the HIV/AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa and are now living on the streets. Today, more than 43 million orphans live in the region, and 11 million of them have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS. About 14 million children under the age of 15 have lost at least one of their parents to AIDS.

The word "Lubuto" means "enlightenment, knowledge, and light" in the language spoken by the Bemba people of Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The recognition of Meyers' work generated a standing ovation from her SLA peers when she accepted the leadership award on Sunday, June 3.

Since receiving the award in June, Meyers has fielded several generous donations, including \$10,000 from a member of the information industry who chooses to remain anonymous. Clare Hart, executive vice president of Dow Jones & Co. and president of Dow Jones Enterprise Media Group, presented the SLA award to Meyers. "Dow Jones is proud to recognize the ambitious efforts of Jane Kinney Meyers

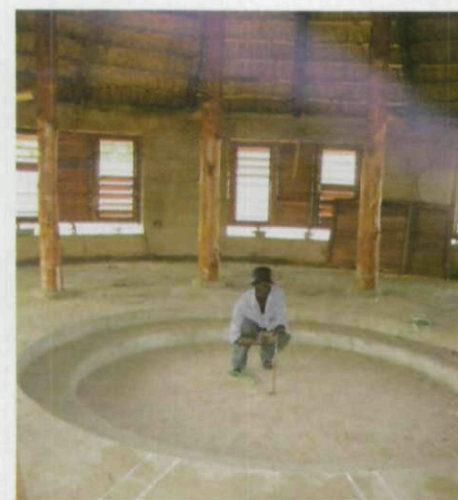
and her clear demonstration of leadership with the Lubuto Library Project," she said. "Her efforts toward empowering children with knowledge and promoting the value of good information should be applauded."

Hart also introduced her to Nicholas Negroponte, who is trying to get a few \$100 laptops for the libraries too. Meyers, who has also received inquiries from SLA members about ways to help, sees help coming from four main avenues: fundraising (building a funding base), communication (publicizing LLP), volunteering (donating time and

read and to learn. The children came and kept coming, and a community was born. Organizations, embassies, businesses, and the Zambia Library Association offered their help to keep the project afloat.

her library expertise into high gear. "As a librarian, I looked at these street children and I asked the basic questions: Who is our audience and what do they need?"

In the late 1990s, she started reading to the street children, providing a ray of hope to those children without a family who have fallen through the cracks of educational and service institutions. In 2001, she set up a makeshift library in a 20-foot shipping container to provide a safe haven for the children to



The sunken reading area inside the library building

headquarters are based in Washington, D.C.—a 501 (c) 3 public charity—with a regional office in Lusaka, Zambia, which is registered as a nongovernmental organization (NGO). LLP's regional field director Eleni Coromvli, a practicing architect, designed the library prototype based on a traditional Zambian homestead: three round thatched structures (a reading room with the books, an activities room, and a transition/entrance). The compact facility can store 10,000 books and accommodate 50 children at a time, according to Meyers.

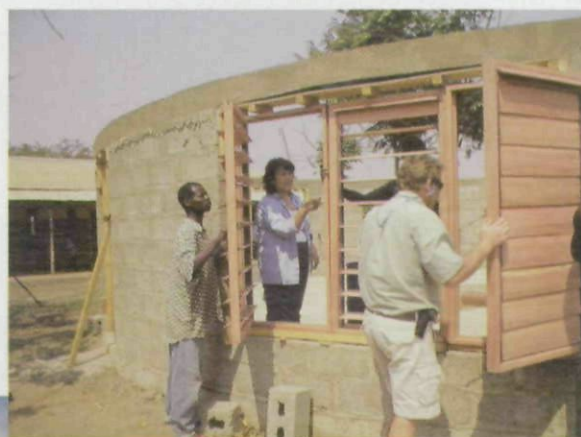
Two consultant librarians also keep the regional office running: Matilda Sakala, the director of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library and Information Resource Center of the U.S. in Zambia since 1994, and Maurice Lundu, who worked as a university librarian at the Copperbelt University and taught at the department of library and information studies at the University of Zambia before he retired from his posts and now spends his time helping his country and people. "We've even received support from friends at the National Geographic Society," said Meyers. "They've collected books from publishers and helped with shipping the books to Zambia."

Construction on the first real library is now nearly completed; it will open its doors to the children this summer. This will be the first of 100 libraries, which are expected to be built in the region during the next few years. Storytelling, poetry, reading, and singing are just a part of the programs being offered, along with an arts center.

The regional field office in Zambia is what Meyers calls "completely transparent ... 100 percent of the funds that are donated to the Lubuto Library Project go directly to what you see," said Meyers. When she returns to Zambia, the street children will spot her walking along the street and run after her, shouting, "Jane Meyers, Jane Meyers." The kids even remember what book she reads to them, she said. When some skeptics questioned how Meyers would get the street kids into the new libraries, Meyers simply answered: "How are we going to keep them out?"

—Barbara Brynko

Photos courtesy of Joanne Miller Photography © 2006.



The louvered windows are installed and working; the thatching is finished on two of the buildings.



energy to the LLP children), and research (finding out what the community needs).

Meyers had lived and worked in Zambia and Malawi for 7 years and spent 25 years as an international development librarian working with The World Bank and the U.S. Agency for International Development. For Meyers, the years of planning and organizing this project put

For the African street children who have been orphaned by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, formal education is usually barred for a variety of reasons, whether it's financial or the social stigma

of HIV/AIDS. The LLP's libraries, according to Meyers, provide three key factors for the healthy development of these children: as an information gateway, as a space for social interaction and entertainment, and as a beneficial physical environment. These critical roles are based on the research findings of Denise E. Agosto, a global expert in multicultural issues for young adult literature and library resources. Any books destined for shelves in the LLP collection are well-balanced, age- and culture-appropriate, and excellent literature for these vulnerable children, according to Meyers.

Meyers relies on support from her key staffers in the U.S. and in Zambia. Volunteers are critical to the mission, she said. The LLP



Jane Kinney Meyers and Zambian Ambassador Mbikusita-Lewanika



The children of Bwafwano

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