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EVENT UPDATE

Annual Celebration Dinner will be postponed until June 2021

Dear Friends,

The Building Minds in South Sudan Board hopes that you are well and safe during this pandemic, which has changed our lives in unimaginable ways. South Sudan responded quickly to the virus with strict measures, including closing all its schools.

After much consideration, we decided to postpone our Celebration Dinner until June 2021. This was a sad decision, but one that we had to make. There was simply no way to plan. We value the health and safety of all of you — our donors and supporters — far too much to put you in harm’s way. And so we look forward to 2021 to celebrate. While it is essential, PAUSE NY caused hardship for BMISS and many other organizations. For instance, all of Sebastian’s presentations were cancelled! Still, we continue to plan for the future of Mayen Abun—in a different but no less enthusiastic way.

Let us hope that scientists will find a vaccine, those who are ill will recover successfully, and we will stave off a second wave.

Take care, be well, and stay safe.
Judy Schwartz
BMISS Board, Chair

In this Issue...

Women Farmers and the Water

Learn more about new boot pumps and thriving gardens on page 2 >

Highlights of Sebastian’s Annual Visit

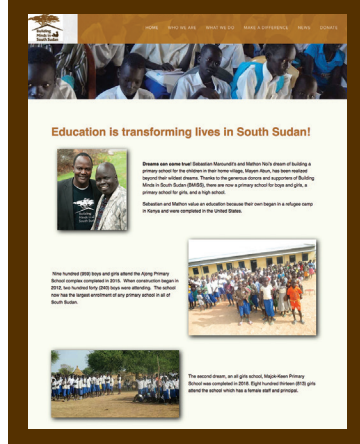
Updates from Sebastian’s trip on page 3 >

Events Update

Message from the Board regarding the current pandemic and plans moving forward on page 4 >

Visit us online!

See our new BMISS brochure and new additions to our website at www.bmiss.org



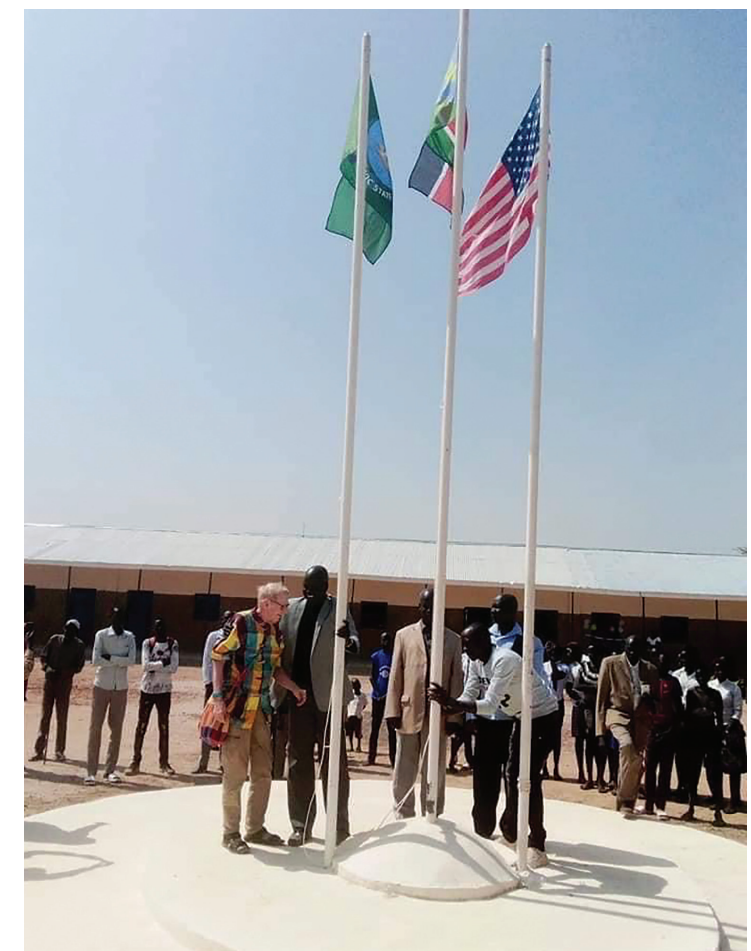
BILL COOK HIGH SCHOOL OPENS!

High school education comes to Mayen Abun! Until this year, an 8th grade education was the limit for most students. Only a very few were able to attend boarding high schools, and these were many miles away.

The Bill Cook High School officially opened in February with a flag raising ceremony. It featured the flags of South Sudan, Twic state, and the United States of America flying together, symbolizing the collaboration that led to this momentous occasion. Acting Principal Paulino Agei Atem Jok, Bill Cook (whose Bill Cook Foundation was a major contributor), and Sebastian Maroundit raised the flags and spoke to the enthusiastic crowd.

Currently there are 140 students in 9th and 10th grade; nine teachers teach these students. Next year the school will add 11th grade, 12th grade the year after that. Unlike most American schools, the teachers move from class to class, and students stay in place. In the future Building Minds in South Sudan (BMISS) hopes to build a dormitory which would make it possible for students living further away to attend.

All schools in South Sudan are currently closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and probably will not reopen during the 2020 school year which ends in November. BMISS is grateful that the high school was able to open and classes began before this happened. And fortunately, Sebastian was able to leave South Sudan before restrictions were put in place.



BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME!

2012

240 students attend the “under tree” school in Mayen Abun.

2020

- 959** boys and girls attend Ajong Primary School.
- 813** girls attend Majok-Keen Girls Primary School.
- 140** boys and girls attend Bill Cook High School.

Now, a total of **1,912 STUDENTS** attend school in Mayen Abun.

Women Farmers and the Water

Village chiefs are the only people who have the authority to grant land for projects in their villages. A few years ago, Sebastian requested land for the women in Mayen Abun for a community garden. These women watered their garden by carrying a jarkcan or jug, on their heads filled with five gallons of water. A year later, Linda Werts and Presbyterian Women dedicated boot pumps to ease this burden. The women filled their jarkcans by operating these pumps with their feet much like an elliptical machine works.



A work in progress and close up of the underground brick tank and pipe connection to the well



Watering the "western way" with a hose in preparation of planting

In 2020, 19 women each received their own garden plot to grow crops for sale and to provide fresh food for their family. Thanks to the ingenuity and generosity of Kingsley Beck, the women now have a water tank and pump at the garden site so they can water their thriving gardens the way we do in the Western world — with a hose. Their crops are growing and selling well. What was once a dry, barren area, is now filled with bountiful gardens that benefit these women in a very profound way.



The villagers, especially the women, look happily at the finished rim of the water tank and the drilled well to the right.



Starting the planting of the gardens, December 2019



The same garden at the end of February 2020!

HIGHLIGHTS OF SEBASTIAN'S ANNUAL VISIT

The Bill Cook High School

San Marcus University in California donated 10 laptops and Cisco Systems IT donated the software. The laptops are for the teachers at the Bill Cook High School. Sebastian delivered them to Paulino Agai Atem, the acting principal of the Bill Cook High School.

Solar panels, funded by the Bill Cook Foundation and installed on the rooftop of the high school, will recharge the laptops. Michelle Chiantera and her family in conjunction with the Naples NY Rotary, jointly funded benches for all high school students and chairs for the teachers. Sebastian distributed 300 solar lamps to the high school boys so they can study in their dark tukals (mud huts).



Laima Micro-Finance Grant

Sebastian visited several businesses that the Laima Micro-Finance Grants made possible. He and Bill Cook enjoyed their lunch at the newest woman owned restaurant in Wunrok market. The beer markets continue to thrive. The Laima Micro-Finance Grant project offers women the opportunity to become entrepreneurs, enabling them to support their families and improve their lives.

Backpacks and Totes

A mere three years ago, 30 girls received a backpack— an item they had never seen before, much less knew how to open. What is a zipper? Magically, they pulled the tab, it opened and in went their paper and pencils. This past December on his yearly visit, Sebastian took 40 totes for other girls as well as hundreds of pencils. The caring and generosity of Michelle Chiantera and Cisco Systems IT made these donations possible. These western ways make life easier for female students.



What's in the Future?

The village chief has granted a site for the King and Laima Beck High School for girls, which is our next major goal. The groundbreaking ceremony will take place in December 2020 or January 2021.

You Can Help Building Minds in South Sudan

We understand that current uncertainties and unforeseen situations are so far limiting giving this year. But did you know that the CARES Act provides a reduction of income on your 2020 tax return for \$300 per taxpayer for charitable contributions when you take the standard deduction? Please consult your tax adviser, and consider utilizing this tax benefit to assist Building Minds in South Sudan (BMISS).

Other ways to provide support to BMISS also exist. When using Amazon, for instance, you can choose to support BMISS simply by shopping through Smile.Amazon.com. Amazon will donate .5% of eligible purchases to BMISS.

If you wish to donate, you may do so through our website www.bmiss.org. Or send a check made payable to BMISS and mail to: 175 Willowcrest Drive, Rochester, N.Y. 14618.

Thank you for caring about Building Minds in South Sudan.