

Local Inspiration Sparks Global Transformation

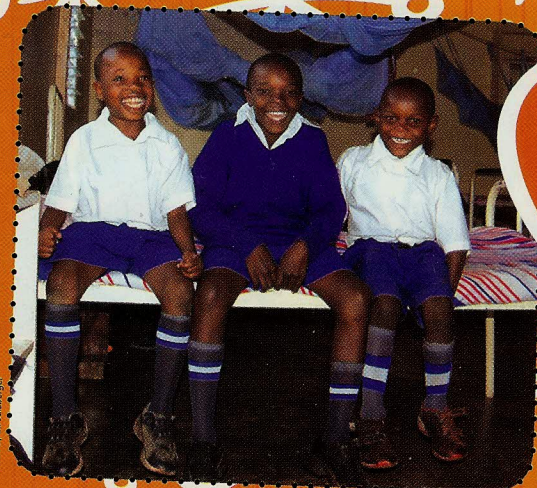
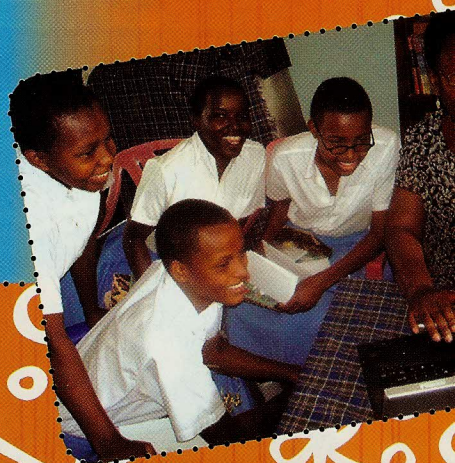
Love and determination in Galveston gift children in Africa

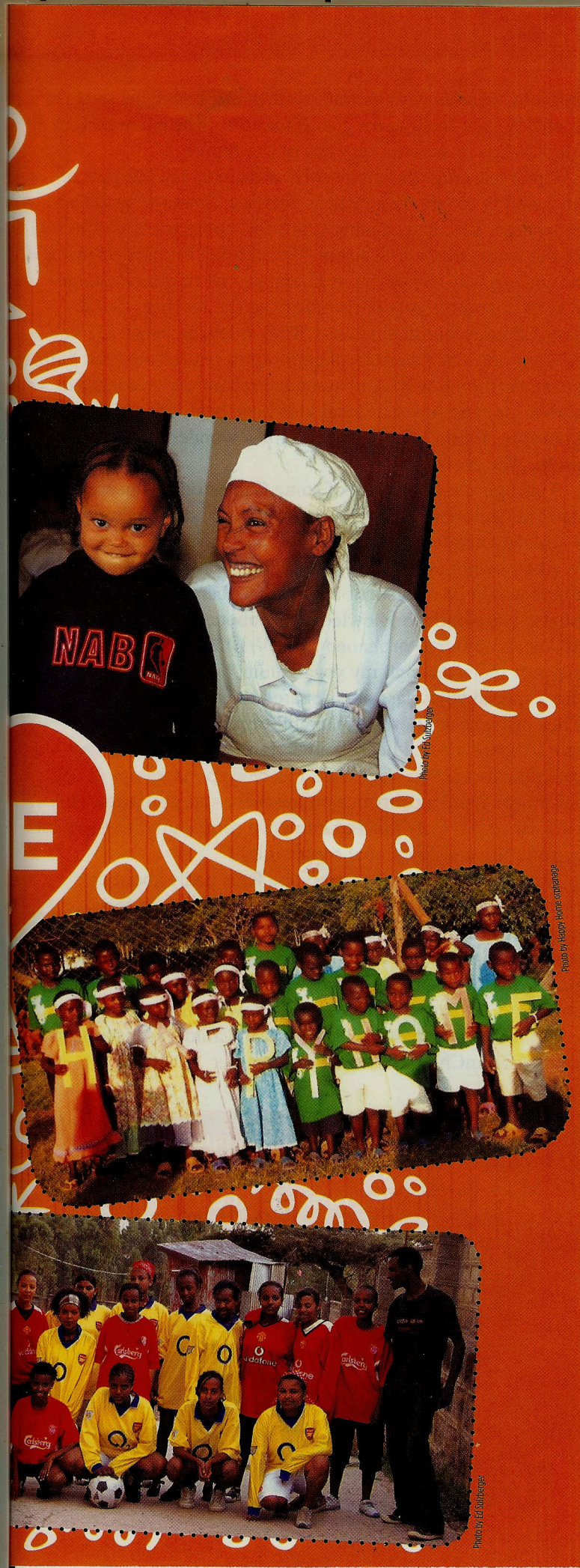
By Katherine Adams

In the middle of a December night in 2006, Galveston artist Linda Ercole-Musso woke up and could not get back to sleep. She turned on the TV and happened to catch CNN reporter Christiane Amanpour hosting a documentary on the devastating effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on Kenyan children. Her sleepless night turned into a call to action. Ercole-Musso instantly decided that she would put her experience in the developing world to good use. She also had friends and colleagues living in Africa who shared her concern for these children, and she resolved to call on them to help create an organization to feed, shelter, and educate African children orphaned in the midst of the AIDS/HIV crisis.

"My husband, Ed Sulzberger, was working as a fundraising consultant to the World Agroforestry Centre in Nairobi and we knew how much help was needed all over Kenya," she says. "That day he got an email from a scientist he knew

Clockwise from top left: Four young Tanzanian recipients of the Carol Cole Science Scholarship are mentored by Dr. Aichi Kitanyi, one of Tanzania's foremost agricultural scientists. The computer was donated by Galveston Computer Solutions; ACH supports the Mercy Center in Ethiopia, which gives vocational training in cooking to women and older girls who will eventually find employment in the kitchens of new hotels in Ethiopia's capital city, Addis Ababa; A group of orphaned children gets ready for another day of school and activity at the Happy Home orphanage in Kenya; The girls at the Mercy Center participate in an after school sports and recreation programs funded by ACH. The program provides safe, supervised recreation for girls at risk of falling victim to sexual predators; The Mercy Center gives lunches to children who come there from their schools, then provides recreational activities and extra classes to help students continue their education and find employment; These three boys, who reside at the Happy Home orphanage, come from an area of Kenya with the highest rate of HIV/AIDS infection in the world. Prior to arriving at the orphanage, none of the boys had ever been in a dwelling with a concrete floor, nor had they ever slept in a bed. The blue netting above the beds provides protection against mosquitoes carrying malaria.





there. She was asking for money to start an orphanage. It was perfect, so we jumped right in." African Childrens Haven was born.

Drawing upon a large circle of friends in Galveston, both Sulzberger and Ercole-Musso were amazed at how many people jumped on board to help fund the orphanage. "We intended to raise \$3,000 for the Happy Home orphanage, but we raised nearly \$20,000 that first year," says Sulzberger. "People astounded us with their generosity."

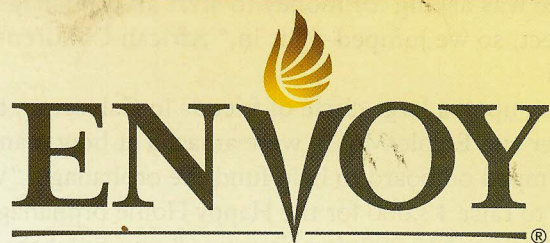
Sulzberger, now Executive Director of African Childrens Haven, says that there were many similar struggling grassroots organizations supported by friends and colleagues living in Africa. "These organizations struggle to survive with a miniscule amount of money, and that's where African Childrens Haven comes in to help," he explains. "We saw the Happy Home orphanage as a model. We had a network of friends in Africa doing the same things, so we decided we could help to link those efforts." Sulzberger adds that when he and Linda realized how successful they'd been at their initial funding efforts for Happy Home orphanage, they sought non-profit status for African Childrens Haven in 2007. "We became a link for the people we knew who were also trying to help children in Africa—grassroots organizations struggling with practically no funds. That's where our fundraising efforts came in. We offer a very high return for a small investment."

Over the last five years, the couple has seen the needs of AIDS orphans in Africa continue to grow, especially among girls. "The effects of poverty are harrowing. We learn more about it as we stay in it," says Ercole-Musso. "We are helping fund a program in rural Kenya called Mission with a Vision. It's a safehouse for girls fleeing from genital mutilation or from being sold into marriage to pay for family debts. They provide a safe haven for up to 25 girls at any given time. African Childrens Haven helps find the girls a sponsor, then sends them to school far away from their village so they remain safe. The circumstances of these girls' lives have spawned a sex education initiative that is now in its beginning stages."

It's particularly difficult to keep a young African girl in school. Even if she escapes the tragic fate of an arranged marriage or the sex trade, she cannot escape her own growing body. Ercole-Musso says that because most girls do not have

access to sanitary products, they must stay home when they're menstruating. "Girls make their own sanitary products with whatever materials they have, but it's shaming to be without any kind of protection, so they don't go to school," she explains. "It's our goal to find a way to manufacture sanitary products with local materials using local workers. We're always looking for sustainable ways to achieve these kinds of goals, whether it's a way to figure out how to partner with friends in Ethiopia who employ nearly 100 women making textiles to produce these products, or perhaps to establish →

**It feels good
to know we
contributed to the
local community
as well as the
global community.**



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microbusinesses with women so they can be taught to make them. We are looking for a solution to this problem so that all girls can go to school every day of the month."

Upon learning that many African schools fail because of an inability to pay the teachers' salaries, Ercole-Musso and Sulzberger set about raising funds for a primary school in one of the worst slums in Nairobi. "St. Philip's Primary School did not have a way to pay the teachers, so one of our challenges was to guarantee part of the salary so the teachers could stay," Ercole-Musso explains. "They make between \$35 and \$75 a month. We want local children to realize they can help, so we partnered with Ambassador Preparatory Academy in Galveston, and now our local kids have been pen pals with the kids at St. Philip's for two years. It's a wonderful intercultural project for everyone."

Through the generosity of some Galveston businesses, African Childrens Haven has been able to continue its work. Kathleen DiNatale, owner of The Yoga Haven, and Courtney Walker, owner of The Body Space, both say they knew their funds would be well spent because Sulzberger and Ercole-Musso were both so knowledgeable about the specific needs of African children orphaned by HIV/AIDS. "I wanted to support them through my yoga studio," says DiNatale. "We did a special yoga class and donated the proceeds to ACH. They bring back photos of the children who received the aid, so there's a real heart connection there." Walker says that students in her yoga class received sponsorships in the community and a contribution for every sun salutation they performed. "It feels good to know we contributed to the local community and the global community."

Ercole-Musso says that everyone feels badly about the poverty in Africa, but they think the problems are too numerous to solve. "Everyone can make a difference, it's just a matter of following your passion," she says. It's not about having a lot of money. Everyone has passion in their heart, and that's what they need to do. Follow their heart."

For more information about African Childrens Haven, visit www.AfricanChildrensHaven.org.

African Childrens Haven has numerous projects in Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia as well as smaller projects in Uganda and Malawi. Here's how you can help:

- A little goes a long way. A donation of \$35 helps pay for a primary teacher's salary for a month.
- Share your particular skill. If you enjoy making videos, contact ACH. By posting videos online, your video-making skills can prove valuable in helping ACH raise public awareness.
- Involve your children. Organize a fundraiser and designate ACH the beneficiary.