



Newsletter

May 2016



Our 2016 Annual Celebration at IRCO/Africa House Honoring Mr. Brando Akoto

Some 180 people came out for our second annual celebration, in honor of Mr. Brando Akoto, dear friend to hundreds if not thousands and the heart and soul of Yo Ghana! We are particularly grateful to Djimet Dogo of Africa House for his hospitality, Madam Victorine Todo and the Ladies of Portland International Church for their delicious food, the Obo Addy Legacy Project for their compelling music, Agbey Gedza for the wonderful photographs, and to the more than fifty people who donated before or during the event.

Special thanks to Wendy del Mar and Aaron Jones, our super supercharged volunteers who were everywhere at once. See you again next year!

“Yo Ghana! For Education” Kente Stoles Awarded to Our Teachers

We were thrilled that seven of our Pacific Northwest teachers could attend this year. It was our pleasure to present them with custom-woven Kente stoles that friends of Yo Ghana! Vice President Dr. Kofi Agorsah made in Ghana. They are, from left to right: TreNisha Shearer of



St. Andrew Nativity School accepting for Lizzie Petticrew and Mike Chambers; Jane Carlton of North Marion Middle School; Dative Uwajeneza of MLK School accepting for Kiera Asay; Ginny Hoke of Briggs Middle School; Tim Smith of Columbia River High School; Stephanie Goad and Linda Souvenir of Hockinson Elementary School; Paul Fowler of Neil Armstrong Middle School; Alexa Arnold of Vernon School.

Yo Ghana! Star Awardees for 2016



LeeAnn Bronson, our founding Treasurer, carried us to safety.

Ginny Hoke, of Briggs Middle School in Springfield, an extraordinarily dedicated teacher, spoke of how letters from Ghana brightened the outlook of pupils wrestling with issues such as abuse and separation from parents: “One student, a girl with her own tough past and only rare smiles, grinned widely as she scanned the three page letter from her Ghanaian partner. The colorful drawings that lined the margins were echoed in her letter back to her friend, but more importantly their shared life goal of becoming a journalist and persevering in single family homes provided her a tangible connection to this student in Ghana.”

Essan Kofi Weah has several times set aside entire days to visit schools for us. A former teacher and headmaster in Ghana, he is a warm ambassador. He said: “Two decades ago, a young middle school teenager in the far western part of Ghana wanted a pen pal so badly that he would look through every newspaper he found for someone’s address. This and other reasons fire him up to make him cease any opportunity to volunteer for this amazing organization—Yo Ghana! I am very honored and humbled with this amazing award and I dedicate it to my three children—Mavis, Reginald, and Lord—who inspire me to keep going when the going becomes tough. I am very grateful to my beautiful wife, Agartha, who joined me to volunteer our time to some Yo Ghana! students in Accra last September.”

Dr. E. Kofi Agorsah, our Vice President, is the recently retired Chair of Portland State Universities Black Studies Program. The author of many books and articles, he has taken many students to Ghana for study. He wrote from Ghana that Yo Ghana! has brought “interest in computer literacy, curiosity for cultural and educational exchanges, and appreciation of world educational issues to John Doeswijck School,” from which he graduated some years ago.



Kofi Anane is the Principal of Anani School, which his father founded. He serves the vulnerable children of Nima. “Yo Ghana! has made parents and the community understand the quality of education,” he writes.

Dominic Kofi Fordwour has extensive experience in the Ghana education system as a teacher, administrator, and faculty at a teachers’ training college. He has linked us with three fine schools in Ghana and even one in Salem! Dominic spoke of the importance of our students opening up to learn about each others’ lives and his hope that Yo Ghana! will be able to sponsor exchanges.

Pictures at a Celebration



Treasurer and Emcee Komi Kalevor introduced TreNisha Shearer of St. Andrew Nativity School to talk about what sharing letters has meant to her.



Zoe Hoke was proud of her Mom,



but wanted to add a few words.
(See the hand on the microphone.)



Co-Founder and Secretary Elizabeth Fosler-Jones: "I'm so grateful to be a part of the Yo Ghana! community and to be able to work with inspiring, passionate people. Having the opportunity to travel to Ghana further reinforced that feeling. It was amazing to be able to see the work we do there and then bring back stories to the schools here."



"Sister's-Still-Got It" Patience Sewor and the Obo Addy Legacy Project



Board member Harriet Vimegnon thanked our teachers before presenting them with their Kente stoles, with President David Peterson del Mar assisting.

Remembering Brando

Ibrahim Abubakar, a close friend of Brando's for many years, drove from Canada to tell some stories of our friend's legendary generosity, from working for weeks for free on development projects in Ghanaian villages to donating laptops to children as if they were candy.

Then Lilly Glass Akoto graced us with "Out of the shadows and in to the light..."

I met a man, dark as could be....but when he spoke or smiled, there was light shining on me...
It lit up the room, brighter than the sun...and when he agreed to marry, I knew I had won...
He did not know that this fair-skinned American, had traveled to Ghana with a blackened heart...
She was tough, she was angry, she was tired and confused and essentially, she was falling apart...
And although he quickly learned, he loved her still, as if she was the most precious gem he knew
He nurtured, he encouraged, and was proud of each step as she grew...
So when that fateful day, November 2014, delivered such excruciating news
I knew that with God's grace, we would surely make it through
And we did, with style, with love, and much grace...
For all that he taught me naturally fell right in to place...
I shined my light brighter as I knew I should
To give him brighter days as best I could
His passing was devastating and my heart still aches for the love of my life
But I am forever grateful for all he taught me, out of the shadow and in to the light!

I have not written poetry for nearly 15 years. And while it could use some revisions and the rhythm was off, it just seemed right to do. Brando would have encouraged me and said he loved it anyway. That was who he was. He saw the good in people. He saw the potential. And while he often provided feedback and ways for you to improve, he understood the value of shining the light on someone. So often in the background and behind the scenes, he was content to let others shine.

Yo Ghana! facilitates letter and other exchanges between schools in Ghana and the Pacific Northwest and offers modest grants to projects initiated by Ghana Schools.

Yo Ghana! is a 501(c)3 public charity recognized by the IRS.
Your contributions are tax deductible.

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