Used Computers From Area Schools Find New Life--in Africa

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By Mike Macijeski

For the second time, Northfield Middle High School is spearheading a shipment of computer equipment to Tanzania. In 2016, they sent about 40 used computers to Pommerin Secondary School. This time, with donated equipment from Norwich University, U32 Middle and High School, and the Green Mountain Technology and Career Center as well as NMHS, they are sending four times that many, as well as 68 Chrome books, the basic student laptops favored by many U.S. schools.

It all started in 2015, when Nicole DiDomenico of Norwich University’s Center for Civic Engagement invited the high school to send some students and teachers on their summer service trip. After earlier trips to Pommerin, Tanzania, DiDomenico helped found an international non-profit, Upendo Mmoja, to continue service work there. Since then, with much help from both Tanzanian and U.S. volunteers, Upendo Mmoja has built and runs an orphanage and community center in Pommerin, which serves about 20 local children.

While on that 2015 trip, Northfield history teacher Mike Macijeski made a connection with Pommerin Secondary headmaster Shadrack Nyaulingo. When Mike learned his school was about to replace and recycle some computers, Mike asked Shad if Pommerin Secondary would like them. After traveling halfway around the world, those former NMHS computers are now in a lab at Pommerin Secondary called the Covered Bridge Room, where students can build the computer skills so important to success in today’s world.

Tanzanian member of Parliament Justinn Nyamoga heard about the computer donation and inquired whether another such shipment might be made to help other schools—this time in his nearby district of Kilolo. Pommerin Upendo Mmoja director Maria Mgova reached out to Mike, who over the 2021-22 school year worked his connections to collect 160 computers. The Norwich University IT department contributed 100 laptops which were otherwise bound for the recycling station.

“The collection of computer and other electronic donations that Michael and others have coordinated for the benefit of children in the Kilolo District is such a testament to the impact our partnership has had over the last 10 years in Tanzania—not only on the community we traveled several times to serve, but on us here in Vermont,” said Upendo Mmoja co-founder Nicole DiDomenico. “This partnership has developed into a true friendship and that is all we could’ve asked for…especially given Upendo’s motto: ‘Working together is our success.’ Truer words could never be spoken!”

Tanzanian Upendo leaders Maria Mgova and Vince Mwaja will help make sure all the equipment gets to students who need it in Kilolo. Special thanks to Brian Schwartz of the Green Mountain Technology and Career Center in Hyde Park and to Amy Uring of U32, both veterans of Tanzania trips themselves, who helped line up donations from their schools. NMHS maintenance director Ermin Milak and his crew earned kudos as well for all their help storing and preparing the equipment. NMHS principal Lee Ann Monroe also supplied steadfast support, including for this spring’s scrap metal drive which raised much of the money needed to ship everything to Tanzania. “Northfield Middle High School is committed to
engaging in community service,” said Monroe, “and increasing our understanding of how we are part of a larger, global community.” Hundreds of students and teachers in Tanzania should soon agree.

Above: NMHS Technology Support Specialist Nathaniel Bailey (left) and social studies teacher Tristan Whitehouse after helping prepare the computer equipment for shipment

Below: Upendo Mmoja leaders Maria Mgova and Vince Mwaja with students at NMHS, 2018.