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By: Deb Durkee, Reporter Member Since: 2008-06-05

FIOH-USA is teaching people to harambee

Future In Our Hands-USA was started to make a difference: and that's exactly what they have done and will continue to do. And now, they're asking for help to do so.

FIOH-USA was co-founded by Buffalo resident Linda Glaeser, SSJ and Depew native Michele Sprada. It all began when Sprada, a teacher at Lindbergh Elementary, went to Kenya and spent a summer teaching there.

"She always felt a calling to go to Africa," says Glaeser. "She didn't know what she wanted to do, but she wanted to help. And school is such a precious gift to the kids there."

Three years later, Glaeser joined her niece and went to Kenya to see for herself.

"I had seen the pictures and heard the stories, but I was just blown away. It was so unjust. It was truly a life-changing moment for me. I knew this was my life's work, and nothing has been the same for me since."



FIOH-USA's harambee will be an opportunity for the Western New York community to come together to make a difference in the lives of families halfway around the world. Pictured, l to r: Sue Schmitz, Barbara Diebold, Sharon Charleson, and Sr. Linda Glaeser, SSJ.

When they returned, they began taking donations to help the families they had visited and lived alongside. When donations began to skyrocket, they decided to form FIOH-USA as part of the worldwide FIOH organizations, begun in Norway in 1974.

The major goals of FIOH-USA can all be summed up under a single blanket ideal – justice, not charity. "They're strong people, they're hard working, and they're resilient," says Glaeser.

FIOH-USA provides funds for a number of different programs in Kenya, including building wells to provide families with safe, clean drinking water, supporting HIV/AIDS educational programs on prevention and treatment, helping students get their high school and college educations, and to assist women's groups and help them learn to support themselves.

All of FIOH-USA's work is built around the idea of helping people to help themselves. Loans to the women's groups provide the means for starting a business or learning a trade, and the money is paid back into the fund for the next person in need.

In Kenya, it's all about pulling together to lend a helping hand wherever you can.

That's the spirit of the fundraiser that's coming up for FIOH-USA. In Swahili, harambee means pulling together, and it's that feeling of community and selflessness that FIOH-USA is hoping to bring to Western New York.

The harambee will be held from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday, Sept. 11 at the Sonoma Grille, 5010 Main St. in Amherst. Entertainment will be provided by Cold Blues, and there will also be food, drinks, a cash bar, door prizes and a theme basket raffle.

Tickets are \$20 each, and proceeds will go to benefit the projects of FIOH-USA in Kenya.

For more information, contact Linda Glaeser, SSJ at lglaeserssj@gmail.com or 837-4898.

FIOH-USA also has a blog at www.fioh-usa.blogspot.com, and a Web site at futureinourhandsusa.org.