

(Update 5 of 5) July 2011

Jambo tena na kwaheri (and goodbye) from Tanzania,

### **Eagle Scout's Gift**

Matt Berklan, an Eagle Scout candidate from Libertyville chose to help the children of Mailisita as his Eagle Scout project. He worked hard to understand what the children there would enjoy and then to collect donations of soccer gear and equipment for them to use. Matt packed the gear into half a dozen or so large donated suitcases which we divvied up amongst us and brought as luggage on our flights to Tanzania.

Matt had collected and sorted enough donated small size GLSA (Greater Libertyville Soccer Association) youth soccer jerseys in a variety of bright colors to outfit all ~80 of our 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders. Many of the kids have only a school shirt and a play shirt, so a new shirt was a 50% boost to their wardrobe – and these shirts looked brand new! Handing out the jerseys turned out to be a more interesting experience than anticipated. We decided to bring the kids into a separate class room two at a time for individual fittings because we knew it would otherwise turn into an excited chaos. We sized up and handed out a jersey to each of the children. Children are the same the world over in that many had definite opinions as to which color they wanted to wear – good thing we taught them the English words for colors so early in the curriculum! (side note: yellow was the most popular jersey color). They were so very joyful and grateful to receive the new shirts.

But the best part was what happened as each child left the room wearing his or her bright new soccer jersey. Those who had already received their shirts formed a receiving area and would welcome their new “teammate” by excitedly chanting their jersey number as they made their way through the group – bigger-than-Christmas smiles all around.



Two fellow boy scouts on this year's trip, Adam Noonan and Nick Taylor, assembled two of the donated soccer goals and demonstrated for the children how to play goalie. The children at Mailisita had never had a soccer goal to shoot at before -- they just kick the ball around wildly and chase each other. Before our first trip, they never even had a real soccer ball to play with and instead used a balled up bunch of discarded plastic bags typically used by children in the area as a makeshift soccer ball (“toys” are an unheard of luxury). Upon



seeing the soccer goals on their play area, the kids somehow new exactly what to do. Several of us were filming hoping to catch the excitement of the first gooooooal. However, just like in real soccer, the kids seem to kick the ball around endlessly with no scoring ;-). Finally (mercifully), a shot snuck by one of our goalie “demonstrators” and pandemonium ensued. It was like the world cup had just been won by Tanzania in the final seconds!

### **Pillow Case Dresses**

The girls of Mailisita got another wardrobe boost through the generosity of the Clatch family. The family grandmother cleverly made simple, yet beautiful dresses out of donated pillow cases. The Clatch girls on the trip (Laura, Lauren, Rachel & Ali) gave the dresses out to the girls. Each girl was able to pick a dress that they liked the best. The girls were so excited to receive a new dress. The best part was when we went to church the following Sunday we saw many of the girls wearing their new dresses!

### **A Fond Farewell**

After a bit of an exhausting week, it was sadly, and all too soon, time to say “kwaheri”. The emotional energy level of these children is amazing. They crave attention endlessly and will never let a hand that could be held go free. On our last day, the children sang us a farewell song (in English of course) that they had been practicing earlier in the week. It was truly beautiful to hear the children sing, but the real power of their performance was in their tears.

Several were dabbing their eyes with little handkerchiefs – they seemed to have planned ahead for being sad. The children cry so much and such heart-felt tears when we leave. Could we possibly mean that much to them?

For the final goodbye, we all piled into a pickup truck bed and drove away slowly as they stood and waved in four straight lines. After so many years and so many trips, by now they are at least comforted

by the knowledge that they will not be forgotten -- and we will return.

On behalf of the children of Mailisita, thank you for being a part of our collective experience in trying to make a meaningful and lasting difference for the most fragile of the world’s poor.

