

International Friends Committee of Bebor Model Nursery/Primary School

2002 Annual Report

January 16, 2003

In reflecting upon how many things happened this past year, I realized that I needed to put them all together in one place for everyone to see. As such, this is the first of what will hopefully be an annual series of year-end reports on the progress made by the International Friends Committee of Bebor Model Nursery/Primary School in Bodo City, Ogoni, Nigeria. While our primary focus remains raising funds to construct school buildings, our efforts in 2002 also branched out in a number of different directions.

So many good things happened for the school in 2002 that it is hard to remember them all. Unfortunately, we also suffered one major loss and I will start this report there. My uncle Gerry Neils who was an active and keen supporter of the school fell into a coma on Christmas Eve and died on December 26, 2002. With a great sense of loss but a much greater sense of love, I dedicate all of the many other wonderful things in this report to Gerry's memory.

Early in 2002, we established a long-term partnership with the Indianapolis-based children's charity The Timmy Foundation. The Timmy Foundation now provides us with valuable logistical support. They also serve as our financial agent which means that donations can now be made payable to The Timmy Foundation which, for American donors, means they are eligible for a 501(c)3 tax deduction. The support we continue to receive from The Timmy Foundation is vital to our efforts and we extend our sincere thanks to Dr. Chuck Dietzen, Scott Keller and everyone there for all their valuable help.

In June 2002, Tijen and I were able to return to Bodo City for another visit to the school. A number of fantastic things came out of this trip. First, thanks to the generous support of Ed and Nancy Guthrie, we were able to bring a laptop computer to the school. It is hard to put the excitement that the arrival of this computer generated into words. Second, with help from Mitch Vogel and Claudia Grossman, we were able to bring a lot of children's books and educational material to the school. Third, Tijen and I were able to fund the tuition fees for 29 of the poorest children, a program we hope to expand to include more donors and more children in 2003.

During our trip, we also delivered US\$4,400 worth of funding to the school, bringing the total amount of funding delivered to them by the International Friends Committee to US\$11,500. Our first round of funding finished work on a 5-classroom primary school building started with Canadian embassy funding. Our second round of funding started construction on a new 6-classroom nursery school building. The \$4,400 of funding delivered to the school in 2002 enabled a roof to be put on this building and more or less finished it. Although the building still lacks a cement floor (something we hope to rectify early in 2003), students moved into it at the start of the school's new academic year in September 2003.

The Bodo City Council of Chiefs was also kind enough to honor Tijen and I with the presentation of an honorary chieftaincy title in the village. My official title is now Mene Edee I of Bodo City which translates as “chief of light.” This was a tremendous honor for which we really cannot express sufficient appreciation.

Whether it was foreseen by the Bodo City Council of Chiefs or not, one positive consequence of the chieftaincy award was that it generated some media coverage both in Nigeria and here in Indiana. Thanks primarily to the efforts of our friend Bode Oluwafemi, articles on the school and our visit appeared in a number of national newspapers and magazines in Nigeria including *Daily Independent*, *Insider Weekly*, *The News* and *Punch*. Let me take this opportunity specifically to acknowledge our courageous friends at *The Beacon* newspaper in Port Harcourt who wrote about the school in June 2002 and whose offices were raided in December 2002 by Nigeria’s brutal “Operation Fire For Fire” special police taskforce for publishing articles critical of Rivers State Governor Peter Odili. Our thoughts and prayers are with all those arrested, beaten and harassed during this raid.

Domestically, we received some great media coverage in Indiana for which we thank Diane Brown, Paul F.P. Pogue and Michael Pipher. If you have not already seen this coverage, two good examples can be found at www.nuvo.net/news/archive/001192.htm and www.iupui.edu/news/insider071202.htm. For those of you with access to RealMedia software, please see the nice feature done as part of Indiana University’s halftime program during the IU-Ohio State men’s basketball game which is available at <http://video.indiana.edu:8080/ramgen/ip/iucast/updates/2003/ohiost.rm>.

The school’s internet presence also expanded significantly in 2002. David Serrins who designed the school’s original website registered the domain name www.bebor.org which is now the school’s permanent internet home. David also massively upgraded and improved the school’s website this summer. Subsequently, two IUPUI students, Eric Romack and Kyle Mallison, took on the task of further upgrading the school’s website as part of their semester project for a technical writing class. While this work is not yet finished, major progress has been made behind the scenes and the school will shortly have an even better internet website than it already does.

Responding to requests from a number of locals, Tijen contacted a variety of agencies in search of educational material on HIV/AIDS for the school and the larger Bodo City community. The South African Ministry of Health responded positively to her request and sent the school 5 or 6 boxes of brochures, pamphlets and other educational material on HIV/AIDS, for which we thank them very much.

We had three firsts in terms of donations in 2002. Almost simultaneously, Margie and Mark Ferguson and Pat and Gerry Neils pioneered the concept of making donations to the school as a gift in someone else’s name or in honor of another person. We also received our first corporate matching donation from Xcel Energy where my late uncle Gerry used to work. Finally, we also received our first corporate in-kind donation when

Karen Janowiecki and the George F. Cram company donated approximately 20 beautiful wall maps to the school. Gerry Gelley donated the shipping costs to get the maps to Nigeria and they are now hanging in the classrooms of both Bebor school buildings and also some other nearby local schools.

Beyond the Timmy Foundation, we also laid the groundwork for three important partnerships in the future. First, my friend Owens Wiwa, the younger brother of the hanged Ogoni writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and the man who first got me interested in what was happening in the Niger Delta has already started working with us in the hopes of replicating our success with Bebor Model Nursery and Primary School in Bodo City with another nursery and primary school in his home village of Bane (about 30 minutes drive from Bodo). Reverend Moses Nyimale Lezor, the Bebor school director, and Patrick Naagbantou, a member of its Board of Governors, are also actively working with us in support of this project. Tijen, Patrick and I visited the Bane school in June and we hope that we can work with Owens to bring similar benefits to them in the near future. Second, Kathleen Sobiech, the executive director of Pathways International has begun working with the International Friends Committee on providing latrine facilities for the schools in Bodo and Bane. Last but not least, our June visit helped spark the Tijen Pegg Mother's Committee into action as well. The women on the mother's committee are a vital and integral part of the school's governance and they have now taken the initiative to raise funds locally to go toward the purchase of a generator to provide power for the school's computer. After consulting with a number of members of the International Friends Committee, we have pledged to match their local fundraising efforts at the rate of 4:1 to enable them to purchase a generator. The fact that the women initiated this project on their own and took the lead here is a source of great pride for us. We hope that all of these promising partnerships will blossom further in 2003.

Tijen and I started this project in October 2000 and we both knew from the beginning that the school would ultimately succeed or fail at the local village level. The fact that we have been able to make so much progress here is largely due to the quality, vision and integrity of our local partners. For their great leadership and hard work throughout 2002, we owe a special debt of gratitude to Reverend Moses Nyimale Lezor, the school's director, and Patrick Naagbantou, a member of its Board of Governors. We also thank the other members of the school's Board of Governors, the teachers and staff of the school and the members of the Tijen Pegg Mother's Committee. The strong support we have received from King Felix Sunday Bebor Berebon and the entire Bodo City Council of Chiefs has also been invaluable.

Finally, looking to the future, we plan to deliver additional funding to put the floor in and finish other work on the nursery school building in the first quarter of 2003. We will also launch our third "official" round of fundraising for the school in early 2003 with the hopes of raising enough money to build a third school building in Bodo City and to build a second desperately-needed building in Bane as well. We also hope to extend our efforts to provide scholarships to cover the tuition fees for more of the poorest students at both schools in 2003. We thank each and every one of you for your past, present and future support of this project.

Sincerely,

Scott Pegg,

Chairman, International Friends Committee of Bebor Model Nursery and Primary School