

A Place to Call Home

SUMMER 2020 NEWSLETTER

THANK YOU!

Children will finally have a place to call Home! What began as a dream, has become a reality because YOU cared enough to support. We have raised the \$400,000 needed to acquire the 1075-acre mountain farm called INTSABA. Here children will discover hope, health, purpose, opportunity, and the God who loves them. The future will be changed for many of them because of you. May God bless you! –The SOHO Team



ONE FAMILY'S STORY

An empty old cistern with gaping holes over a makeshift covering where rain pours in, is the home of Ncobile Shongwe and her two children. The baby nurses on empty breasts and the child, seven-year old Mpendulo Masinga, shows signs of malnutrition. Both mother and children were abandoned with no prospect of future support.

Ncobile cannot read or write well and she lives on a pile of rags, preparing whatever she could scrounge for food, on a twisted old pot over a stick fire. Living at the edge of the Squatter Camp, she has been victim of theft,

with vandals stealing the blankets in which she wrapped herself and her children at night. Her stay in the rusted old cistern cost her R150 per month (\$15). For \$7 more, she could afford one of the huts in the community.

SOHO has begun assisting with part of her rental fees, so she has been able to move to a safer place. Mpendulo has been registered at Hope Discovery Learning Center and will begin attending when school re-opens. He needs school uniforms. This will be the first opportunity for Ncobile's child to

begin to get an education and she is desperate for him to make use of it.

As a person living with HIV, nutrition for Ncobile is very important. The monthly food parcels provided by SOHO allows her to get more balanced meals thus avoiding aggravation of the ulcers that trouble her. Spiritual nurturing, prayer and counseling support are made available to encourage the family and the difference is seen in the smile of Ncobile's once sad and desperate face.



INTSABA – A PLACE OF MIRACLES

Intsaba, the beautiful mountain farm in the Shisleweni region of eSwatini is a place of miracles. Begin with the story of its acquisition and the saga of its fundraising and one can undoubtedly see God’s hands at work. Its rich history began with the acquisition of the farm by Wynand and Ilse Van Staden with a vision to develop their ‘piece of heaven’ to serve their children but also to make a difference in the community where the farm is located. To this end, they built their farmhouse, set up solar systems for energy conservation and put some basic infrastructure in place. Sheep farming and some agriculture occupied their time. With children grown and now residing in South Africa, the family relocated and their dream farm has become the means by which SOHO will realize the dream of a safe, residential community for orphaned and vulnerable children.

This walk down memory lane is strewn with gems of faith. How do you explain any of the following? How do you find, let alone purchase one of the most stunningly beautiful and desirable farms in eSwatini, beginning

with just what I call the gift of one humble woman? A woman who thirteen years earlier had seen Cynthia Prime interviewed on 3ABN, and felt compelled to help orphans through SOHO . A woman who tearfully donated \$100,000 two years ago to build a beautiful place for orphaned children to grow up loved and safe. That gift was the deposit for acquisition of INTSABA farm.

Then there was the challenge of finding title deed land in a country where most of the land is reserved for the Swazi nation under the headship of the king. Most farms are owned by European immigrants, and transactions are often made by word of mouth. First there was the ‘chance’ meeting of my staffer with a woman who sat by her side on an airport shuttle that neither was supposed to be on. That woman identified herself as a Real Estate Consultant. Then, there was the failed attempt to purchase another farm when a family member asked that the sale be cancelled, and the promise of the farm owner to help us find exactly what we needed. Ironically, the ‘lost’ sale was a

smaller mountain farm which opened up possibilities never before explored. There is now INTSABA farm with opportunity to blaze a trail in sustainable agriculture and utilize renewable energy sources. It will provide a high nutrient diet for children that is lacto-ovo vegetarian, with farm to table freshness. Most orphans rarely are able to obtain or afford meat in their diets and malnutrition is often evident. Amazingly, just when the discussion opened about getting a Master Plan of some kind to help with fundraising, Andrews University School of Architecture and Interior Design offered to create one and produced a plan that has lifted the SOHO vision to new heights. The stories go on and on. The need is great and the opportunity God-sized. It is our prayer that many hearts will be touched to join us on the journey to provide safe shelter, schooling, health care and a new life for children who have lost their childhoods.

SOHO PEOPLE at INTSABA

Dr Tom Chittick , retired Dean of Agriculture from Andrews University in Michigan, is a mission minded man who spent several years in different parts of Africa, teaching Agriculture and introducing his own family to the mission field where people needed the help he was capable of giving. Tom is now committed to spending a significant amount of time in eSwatini to oversee the agriculture program. Upon arrival, he purchased a spacious SUV as a donation, in the name of the Organization for use on the farm. Already he is setting up an irrigation system for the macadamia nut plantation, securing fruit trees and putting up a small green house to grow vegetables.

The General Manager, Pamela Cominetti, is a native of Malawi who spent some of her early years in Eswatini. The only child of missionary parents, she has lived in South Africa as well, giving her a well-rounded knowledge of diverse African cultures and of Swazi life in particular. Her background includes banking and the hospitality industry, having developed and managed conferencing facilities and accommodations in Malawi. Her husband, Amilcare has a background in farming. He currently serves as an assistant to Tom Chittick. ” This is a walk of faith for all of us,” she said. “ I have no doubt that God intends to do something wonderful

with this incredible property and I am delighted to be part of this journey.”



WHAT’S HAPPENING ON THE FARM

At INTSABA, June, July and August are winter months with temperatures that can be as low as 40 degrees at night and in the high sixties or low seventies during the day time at the higher altitudes. Because the farm has both low and highveld temperatures, in the lower valleys, the temperature remains tropical, making it possible to grow a variety of fruits and vegetables year round. Currently, beets, cabbage,

carrots, spinach and kale have been planted just in time to supplement the food supply for orphans and vulnerable children who are unable to get meals at schools due to COVID-19 lockdown.

A great deal of work has been done on the macadamia nut plantation, replacing

dead trees, pruning damaged plants, and clearing the waist high weeds that

were taking away valuable nutrients from the trees. According to Dr Tom Chittick, Agriculture Director at the farm, some of the more mature trees could produce a crop in just two years. When all the trees are fully grown, macadamia nuts will contribute substantially to sustain the Children’s Village and its programs.

IRRIGATION SYSTEM CONTRIBUTED

Macadamia nuts need proper irrigation to thrive. While summer rains provide adequate moisture for growth, the dry winter months sometimes prove challenging. Dr Chittick has developed a reservoir with

irrigation pipes that will stretch over the entire orchard to ensure that row after row of trees will remain healthy all year round.

Macadamia nuts are high in nutrition and they will provide crops that will

not only improve the children’s diet, but also bring in revenue to help support the programs at the Children’s Village. Thanks to Dr Chittick, this need at the farm has been addressed.

A NEW ROAD NEEDED

The road to the main agriculture area was challenging from the start. With increased traffic , it is now downright hazardous. As Dr Chittick tells it, the hillside drops steeply down from the road most of the way, leaving little opportunity but to follow the track. Going down is just as hazardous as

going up, with the tires bouncing sometimes as they try to gain traction. A heavy load could push the tractor off the road when descending. There are sections of the road where the slope exceeds 45 degrees and one has a hairpin turn going downhill. With constant use and a future projection

for higher traffic volume, it has become a priority to establish a new road to the fertile valley, where not only crops will be located, but the block making machinery as well. A new road is estimated at \$45,000. Your help is deeply appreciated.

HOPE SEEKERS ALLIANCE (HOSA)

Whenever Hope Seekers Alliance is mentioned, it is usually in conjunction with SOHO. That is because HOSA is the subsidiary of SOHO, established especially to develop INTSABA. Because of the large scope of the work, SOHO founded HOSA as an NGO comprised

of Swazi and US professionals who would be responsible for the leadership and development of the farm.

This arrangement allows for focused attention to development of the

children’s Village and the social enterprises that would support the village. All organizations are tax exempt.

A LITTLE DOES A LOT

The Marekamp where Bongie lives, looks and smells hopeless. And it is littered with young children who often lack adequate supervision. But Andrew Von Maur, a faculty member of Andrews University saw promise in Bongie when his team visited the Marekamp with students from Andrews University’s Architecture and Interior Design Department .

He saw the hopelessness in Bongie’s eyes and decided to do something about it. He provided a small amount of start-up capital for Bongie to begin to do what he loved, develop a garden. Malvin Moyo, SOHO Outreach Coordinator helped him rally the children of Marekamp to join him in this project, and in time, with some additional funds from Professor Von Maur, there was a thriving garden.

This was reason to celebrate. A meal was planned, produce was reaped and the community gathered together to experience the joy of Bongie’s feast. His eyes are eager with plans for expansion. The pride is unmistakable when he takes you through his garden. Bongie has truly found purpose in his life and he is now a role model for youth in his community.

CLEAN UP CAMPAIGN

Marekamp is better known in town as the Squatter’s Camp. These are residual residents of a once thriving Railway community. The town died with the loss of the steam traction industry and settlers with no place to go find themselves at Marekamp. Children often do not attend school, making them vulnerable to abuse at home.

The residents lived amidst rubbish knee high, with girls giving birth to babies while still in Primary School . Two years ago, SOHO Outreach Coordinator, Malvin Moyo began rallying the community together. He

launched a clean up campaign with the youth of the community, where the children helped and were rewarded for the size of their rubbish heaps. He began visiting the homes where the children lived, listening to their heartbreaking stories and offering them what aid was available and encouragement . As a Chaplain, he was able to provide counseling and mentoring for the youth. He became a familiar sight in the community and the children created a song to sing for him when the SOHO vehicle shows up.

He would provide snacks and gather the children together periodically to

tell them Bible stories, encourage them, and to play games like ‘Fire On The Mountain’ outdoors. There is always singing and laughter when he is around. As part of a youth empowerment initiative, he has started soccer teams where practice includes life skills and health science. Most recently, a US family teamed together to sponsor the education of 30 children, with encouragement from Dr Victor Wallen, SOHO Education liaison. For many of the children, this will be a first opportunity to begin their education.

HOPE DISCOVERY LEARNING CENTER NEEDS YOU!

No one could have predicted the devastating impact of COVID-19 on Hope Discovery Learning Center (HDLC), located in Nhlambeni. This is SOHO’s inclusive school that caters to children with disabilities. Attending this school provides opportunity for children who have a late start to catch up with their peers , as well as children with disabilities. With the country in lockdown and the expenses of staffing the school still on-going, HDLC faces a financial crisis.

These challenges come at a critical time. With the school just having an influx of new students from Marekamp, HDLC faced a transportation challenge. The children registered but could not have access or were unable to afford bus fare to get to the school. A small SDA church in Spokane, Washington donated \$15,000 US to purchase a school bus to transport the children to school. At this crucial time, the children cannot attend school where they usually receive meals, and the bus being purchased in South Africa, cannot cross

the border to eSwatini. By law, the administrative costs of teachers have to continue, putting a strain on an already tight budget.

SOHO’s Outreach Coordinator has been delivering food parcels, but beyond that, he is unable to reach out to children and visit their homes as before. There is a shortfall of \$6,500 monthly to keep the program going while plans are being made for the recovery. Your help would be deeply appreciated.

WE HAVE A NEW WEBSITE!

Check out the link: saving-orphans.org and you will see that SOHO has a brand new website. It has a crisp, clean look, more relevant, up-to-date information and more opportunities for you to get engaged. We are grateful to designer, Andrew Carroll, and the team of volunteers who have given time and effort to help improve SOHO’s presence and impact on the web. Thanks to Leo Neto, Craig Martindale, Maureen Meyer. Give us your feedback and your suggestions, and don’t forget to share the link with friends.

In eSwatini, one in three girls has a history of sexual abuse.

“Swazi girls, particularly orphans, are trafficked internally for commercial sexual exploitation and domestic servitude in the cities of Mbabane and Manzini, as well as South Africa and Mozambique”. (Embassy of the United States, 2010)

Help us change the future for these children

Safe Homes. Education. Nutrition. Skills.

Covid-19 has resulted in greater need and fewer resources. Your support is deeply appreciated.

SOHO is a 501(c)(3) non profit organization registered in the States of Indiana and Washington.

Send your tax deductible contribution today.

