

# John Paul Secondary School - Our School in Africa

Paul and Nancy Berrigan, full-time residents of Farmington Hills, MI for 26 years, are CL homeowners since 1995. Married 43 years, they have two daughters and three grandchildren. They are very active members of St. Fabian Parish in Farmington Hills and, when at their lake home, attend St. Michael's Church, Remus. Paul is retired from Chrysler Corporation, and Nancy is a retired RN. They now pursue their love of travel, exploring new lands and cultures, having traveled to all seven continents and nearly every state in the union. Paul's passion is bird watching, which he does worldwide. When at home, Nancy enjoys time with friends and family, especially the grandchildren! Someday, when they REALLY retire, they might be able to enjoy more time at Canadian Lakes!



John Paul Secondary School began in July of 2005 when a diocesan priest from Africa spoke at church during our annual Mission Appeal Sunday about the people of Uganda - their poverty, their

great need and particularly the plight of the children. He also discussed the oppression and atrocities they have been forced to endure and the devastation inflicted on the country by war and brutal dictators. At that moment we decided we wanted to do something special and broached the possibility of building a school for the children in Uganda.....and the rest is history.

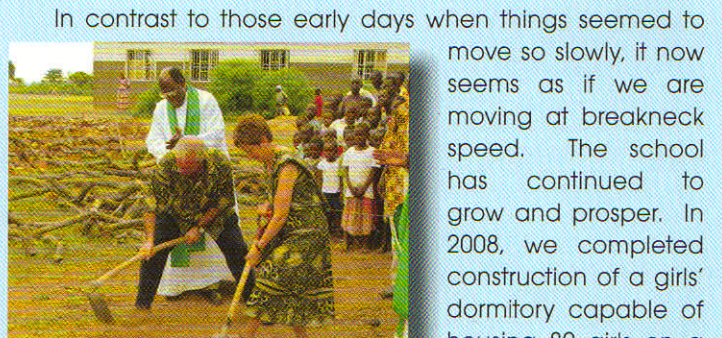
The next several months were very exciting and busy times, getting cost estimates and arranging for funding. We were humbled to learn that we would have the honor of naming the school and a bit in awe when we received the first set of blueprints and saw the scope of the project. John Paul Secondary School was named in honor of, and dedicated to, both of our fathers. It was only then we learned where it would be built - Chelekura, Uganda. Where??? We couldn't even Google it.

Chelekura is a very small village about 20 kilometers from Pallisa in a remote part of eastern Uganda, sitting on the equator where the heat can be oppressive. As in many parts of Africa, a school is a large tree. In this extreme environment, the shade of a large tree can lower the temperature significantly. Typically, children sit on the ground in the shade with a teacher and blackboard at one end. This was our first school. The first "school building" was a very simple open-air structure - a series of poles in the ground with a thatched roof, divided down the middle, with half the students facing in each direction and an instructor at each end.

Actual construction of the school began in March, 2006. We anxiously awaited emails and photos so we could follow the progress of the construction, reveling when the foundation was laid and again when the school began to take shape. We received pictures that showed windows and finally the beginnings of the roof.

There have been, of course, many obstacles and challenges. The first occurred when we drilled for water, an essential resource to support the school and the children. We drilled seven times, unsuccessfully, and eventually abandoned plans for a community well and, instead, provided a water collection system of gutters and cisterns to capture the rains during the monsoon season. Another disappointment was the lack of electricity or a generator. Two friends, early supporters and donors to the school, offered to provide the first computers to the Science Center. Unfortunately, their gift is still delayed. The government is now beginning to provide electricity to rural communities, but Chelekura is still "on the list".

The Africans have a saying, "Hurry Slowly", and it seemed we were moving very slowly as 2006 came to an end. Finally, after a year and a half of planning and building, John Paul Secondary School opened in February, 2007 with fourteen eager students. The following month, we travelled to Chelekura to attend the dedication and blessing of the school by Archbishop Odongo.



In contrast to those early days when things seemed to move so slowly, it now seems as if we are moving at breakneck speed. The school has continued to grow and prosper. In 2008, we completed construction of a girls' dormitory capable of housing 80 girls on a full-time basis. That necessitated a kitchen which is nearly complete. The school now has three solar panels which provide electricity to three classrooms and the Headmaster's office.

In November of 2010, we returned again to Chelekura for a ground-breaking ceremony for a stand-alone two-story building housing a Science Center and Library, fully outfitted with separate labs for biology, chemistry and physics, in addition to a separate computer lab, which we hope to have completed by June 2011. And, our friend's gift of computers will finally be available to the children of Chelekura. Oh, how their lives will change!

This has been one incredible, unplanned journey, one which has provided us with the most memorable moments of our lives and a life-altering experience for us. We have been so blessed! If you'd like more information on JPSS, go to the website at: [www.johnpaulschool.com](http://www.johnpaulschool.com) or Facebook: John Paul Secondary School Uganda East Africa.

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