

# A Pioneer Press Publication

## Couple fills library shelves in schools in Tanzania

Posted Thursday July 13, 2006

By: *Mike Neumann / Staff Writer*

Before Paulie and Steve Kutschat visited Tanzania in February 2004, they never could have guessed how much the trip would change their lives.

Since April 2004, the Lake Zurich couple has been hard at work collecting textbooks and resource books to send to underfunded secondary schools in Tanzania. They named their non-profit organization Bookfriends, International, and have recently started renting a warehouse in Wauconda to store books.

“We were shocked and amazed to see what precious few books were in (a Tanzanian secondary school) library,” Steve said. “We told them we’d get them books. That was a promise we followed up on.”

Paulie had volunteered to teach a weeklong class about journal-writing at an all-girls’ school in Tanzania when the couple learned about the lack of books. The Kutschats had to do many things before they were able to make their promise a reality.

“We had many challenges,” Steve said. “We had to figure out how to find books and ship them. Also we had to find out how to develop relations with schools and libraries.”

The Kutschats got a lot of support from area schools, libraries and individuals agreeing to donate used books. Since Bookfriends began, donations have been made by school and library districts in Wauconda, Barrington, Palatine, Libertyville, Round Lake, Grayslake, Huntley, Harvard, McHenry, Algonquin, Mundelein, Highland Park and Buffalo Grove. Local organizations, such as the Boy Scouts, and individuals have also volunteered many hours to help sort the books, Paulie said.

Collecting money to pay for shipping has been the most difficult challenge, Steve said. The organization has been able to make two shipments so far, and another is being sent at the end of this month.

“The next shipment will be about 12 to 14 pallets of books that will go to eight schools (in Tanzania) which will be used by about 4,500 students total,” Steve said. “There’s about 22,000 to 23,000 pounds of books. (Shipping) is a pretty big financial burden. It will cost about \$8,000.”

To cover future shipping expenses, the Kutschats said the organization will probably need to expand fund raising beyond the northern Illinois area.

Although Bookfriends is focused on stocking Tanzanian secondary school libraries now, Paulie said she hopes to ship books to underfunded secondary schools in other African countries in the future.

“We look at this project as a way to assist and enhance educational opportunities,” she said. “These are very happy, content and bright kids. We don’t want anybody to think our project is to change (the students) or to make them more American. This is just to give them a boost to set goals.”

Although English is not the first language in Tanzania, Paulie said students are expected to have a pretty strong grasp of the language before entering secondary school.

To learn more about Bookfriends volunteer opportunities or how to make a donation, visit [www.bookfriends.org](http://www.bookfriends.org) or how to make a donation, visit [www.bookfriends.org](http://www.bookfriends.org).