

## HE TRAVELED THE WORLD, BUT NEVER FORGOT ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY

HAROLD S. ALEXANDER | 1938-2008

Roosevelt University is pleased to announce that it has received an \$87,000 gift from the estate of alumnus Harold S. Alexander.

Alexander began his career as a supervisor for the Internal Revenue Service in Chicago after receiving two business degrees from Roosevelt, a bachelor's in 1960 and a master's in 1964. However, he never felt challenged or fulfilled in that job.

In what would become a fortunate career change, Alexander transferred to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) as a senior systems analyst, where he thrived. His fascinating career would last 33 years and enable him to travel the globe. The FAA sent him to installations in the United States, Europe and South America. He even spent one Thanksgiving Day in Russia.

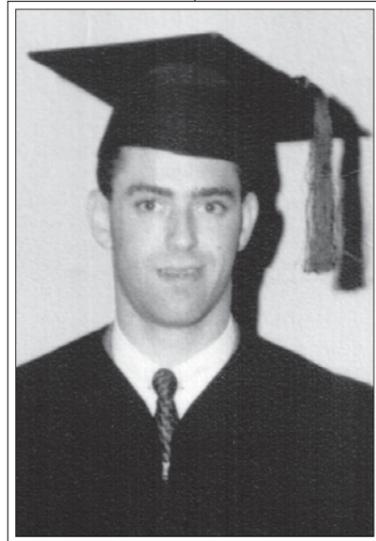
Although he loved his home in Arlington, Va., Alexander retired to Siesta Key, Fla., where he was an active retiree, volunteering for the Community AIDS Network. He spent hours counseling patients and assisted in the daily administrative tasks of the office. He also supported the Arthritis Foundation, the Eye Clinic and, because of his love for the elephants of Thailand, he contributed to many humane societies throughout the world.

Jerry Rustler, his life partner of many years, said, "He was a fighter, an honorable and respectable gentleman who made a difference to all who knew him."

Alexander's estate gift will support Roosevelt's new building on Wabash Avenue. After this transformative building opens in 2012, you will see his name listed among the honorees on our donor wall.

For more information on how you can support Roosevelt University through estate and planned giving, contact:

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Associate Professor Jeri Morris explains her innovative new test for soldiers with brain injuries.

COVER: GREGOR SCHUSTER  
BACK COVER: CHARLES CHERNEY

**▲ 6 DISTANCE LEARNING**  
Roosevelt University student takes learning to a new level in the African nation of Ghana.

**12 EXECUTIVE DECISION**  
Alumnus Robert Johnson overcame prejudice to become the first African-American vice president at Sears.



# distance **learning**

A study-abroad experience in Ghana becomes an opportunity for Roosevelt student Renee Farwell to help kids get an education. BY LAURA JANOTA

MANA KOFI JACQUA



Renee Farwell is a 21-year-old undergraduate sociology major from a small town in rural Iowa who has found her calling in the West African nation of Ghana.

Farwell, who joined Roosevelt University in 2007 because she liked the University's social justice mission, took advantage of an amazing opportunity to not only live the University's mission but also to help some of the world's poorest children get ahead during her study-abroad experience in 2009-10 in Ghana.

Today, the Roosevelt Scholar and winner of the Matthew Freeman Social Justice Award from Roosevelt's Mansfield Institute for Social Justice and Transformation is spearheading an initiative of a lifetime by building a school for poor children in a small village outside Ghana's capital city of Accra. This project is not a pipedream.

Because of her work, Farwell has been selected to take part in former President Bill Clinton's Clinton Global Initiative University. She will be among approximately 1,000 college students, non-profit leaders and celebrities who will meet in San Diego in April to look for tangible solutions to pressing global issues. Farwell's work also is the featured story in the International Student Exchange Programs (ISEP) annual report for 2010.

"I've seen a lot of students make transformational changes through the study-abroad experience," notes Rubee Li Fuller, director of International Programs at Roosevelt University. "But I've never seen someone make these kinds of strides."

Much has already been accomplished toward making the project a reality by Farwell, who will graduate this spring, and move to Ghana in September. In an interview with *Roosevelt Review* Associate Editor Laura Janota, the senior honors student talks about her experience and future plans.

**Q** College students often study abroad but few opt for a place like Ghana. Why did you choose to go there?

In 2005, I went to Mexico City through my church and worked and lived with poor people in one of the neighborhoods there. It was a different culture and lifestyle and I thought about going back, but with the drug wars going on, I didn't think it was safe. I figured Africa could give me a different kind of experience. My choices were South Africa and Ghana, and I chose the University of Ghana.

**How did you get involved with teaching kids in Ghana?**

**RF** I was copying a book at the University of Ghana when a man working at the machine named Kwame Agoe started talking to me. He told me about where he lived — a place called Kissema Village, which is just outside the capital city of Accra. I learned that the kids in his village couldn't afford to go to school because they had to pay for books, uniforms and the paper for their exams. Kwame would go around when he had time and pick up these kids, taking them to this porch in the village where he taught English, ABCs and counting. He invited me to visit. At that time, I'd only been in Ghana three weeks so I was leery, but everyone I asked said it should be fine. So I went.

**What was your first impression of Kissema Village?**

**RF** Going there made me nervous. I took the trotro — it's the form of transportation they use. It seats 25 people and I was by myself. I remember being dropped off.

The village's roads were narrow dirt paths. The houses were tiny and made from scraps of wood and metal. There was no running water or electricity. But what overwhelmed me was the kids. When we went to their houses they came running out, screaming and hugging us because they knew we were taking them to learn.

**What was it like teaching all of the kids?**

**RF** First we focused on teaching English, and it was frustrating. There were days when the kids didn't seem to get anything. Then, there were other days when breakthroughs came. Later, we started teaching the older kids basic science, math and how to read English. I remember having a map of the world and showing them where they lived and where I was going when I went home. They didn't get it at all and I knew they needed to know more about the world.

**Why did you decide to build a school?**

**RF** One day in November, Kwame and I were talking. At the time, we had 40 or 50 kids of all ages, from 3 years old to 18 years old, on that porch. It was too many, and we had to turn some of them away. I was supposed to be going home the next month. Kwame told me, "If you go back now, it's going to fall apart. Can you live with that?" I couldn't imagine going home and telling people that I'd been teaching kids in Ghana and then I just left. I said, "Let's see how difficult it would be to extend my stay." I knew I couldn't just abandon them. I had to start somewhere.

**STUDYING ABROAD IN AFRICA** Above: Roosevelt senior Renee Farwell teaches English to a student from Kissema Village in Ghana, Africa. Above right: Construction is underway for the school Farwell is building. There will be three classrooms on the left and right of the main corridor shown above.

## Africa becoming popular with study-abroad students

When President Barack Obama first visited Africa in 2009, he chose to go to the nation of Ghana.

There are many reasons why this West African nation of approximately 24 million people was selected by Obama as the site for his first foreign-policy address on U.S. relations with Africa.

A constitutional democracy since 1957, the republic of Ghana has been one of the continent's most stable countries. Well endowed with natural resources, including gold, timber and cocoa, Ghana is considered by many to be one of the African continent's solid economic producers. Still, this nation isn't the kind of place most U.S. study abroad students are choosing to go.

Roosevelt's Office of International Programs made nearly 100 study-abroad placements for Roosevelt students in 2009-10, yet only one, senior sociology major Renee Farwell, chose to study in Africa. "You have to be altruistic and a little bit adventurous to choose Africa," said Rubee Li Fuller, program director.

In fact, only 5 percent of all U.S. study-abroad students choose destinations in Africa. The lion's share, about 56 percent, continue to select Europe, followed by 15 percent who choose Latin America, and 11 percent who select destinations in Asia, according to the Institute of International Education's 2009 *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*.

"I advise students to think carefully before they choose any destination in Africa," Fuller added. "It's safe enough, but it can be a little scary. Students have to be careful about things like AIDS, malaria and the food they are eating."

Still, a recent *Open Doors Report* suggest that more interest is growing among U.S. students in going to Africa than to Asia, Latin America and Europe.

In fact, U.S. students opting to study abroad in Ghana nearly tripled in the last decade. In its most recent report from 2009, the Institute of International Education found that 1,856 U.S. students chose to study in Ghana, which, as a study-abroad host, was second only to the continent's South Africa, selected by 3,700 U.S. study-abroad students.

Did you ever imagine you'd be teaching poor kids of all ages in Africa?

**RF** It never crossed my mind that I'd be a teacher, either in the United States or in Ghana. What really appealed to me is that the kids over there are so eager to learn and I never realized how seriously happy I would be seeing kids learning. Before I went to Ghana, I had been a volunteer with Roosevelt's Jumpstart program tutoring preschool kids in the inner city, and the experience was really beneficial. It helped me figure out how kids learn, which was really important to know when I started teaching in Ghana.

What are some of the details on your building project?

**RF** We are putting up a building that will have two dormitories for 40 boys and 40 girls and six classrooms for as many as 200 kids. It will be, first and foremost, for orphans. These are kids who float around. They don't have a bed and they don't have a home. They can't afford public school so our program will be free. It will have volunteer teachers helping kids of all ages with English, basic math, geography, art and science.

What is the project's name?

**RF** It is a non-governmental organization called Mawuvio's Outreach Programme. "Mawuvio" is from the region's Ewe language. It means God's children. The decision was made to call it an outreach program instead of a school or orphanage, because the ultimate goal is to reach out to the community as a whole and to offer services to all kinds of people in need of help.

What steps have you taken to make Mawuvio's Outreach Programme a reality?

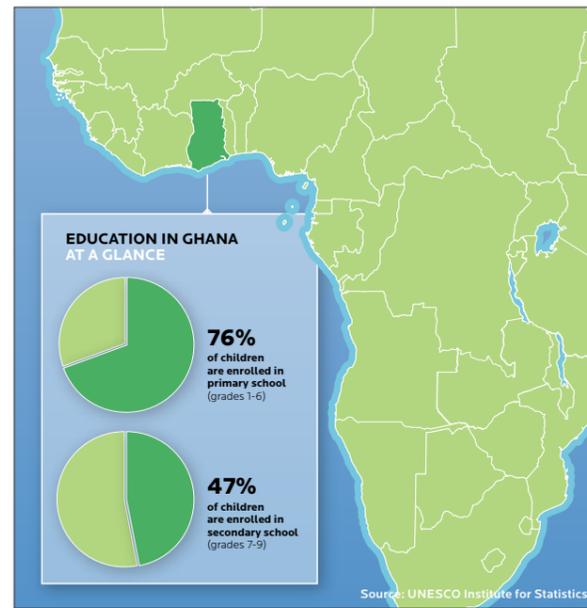
**RF** When I went home to Iowa for the break in December 2009, I was able to raise \$8,000. When I went back to Ghana, I bought some land — about two acres outside the village in a fertile area where we can do subsistent farming, growing corn, yams, pineapples, bananas and potatoes. The foundation for the building is finished and we're trying to raise \$5,000 for pipes and running water. A social welfare certificate has been obtained from local authorities there that will allow us to house and care for these kids. A relationship also has been established with the Student Youth Travel Organization (SYTO) and the University of Ghana, which are providing volunteers.

What still needs to be done?

**RF** The main thing is to get funding. With \$40,000, the project could be finished in a month. There is also a need to look for grants, and in order to do that, the project needs not-for-profit status, which I have been working on. Jewelry made by the kids is being sold to try and raise money. I'm also looking at the possibility of asking people to sponsor a child with a monthly donation.

How successful have your fundraising efforts been?

**RF** We had a benefit concert in Iowa and we had an event at Roosevelt. Both were held last semester. But I don't want the focus to be on fund-raising. I believe it's more about aware-



ness. People need to know there are places in the world, like Kissemah Village, where kids get no education at all.

How do you keep up with your classes and stay connected with the project?

**RF** I'm taking five classes. My GPA is about 3.8, and I'm lucky. I'm one of those people who doesn't have to try hard to do okay. And it hasn't been difficult to keep up. Ghana is six hours ahead, so I usually call in the morning. I also email several times a day. When I talk with the kids on the phone, they say "You need to come soon. You've been gone too long." It's painful for me to hear.

Do you have any misgivings about moving to Ghana?

**RF** I'm not nervous about doing it at all. I'm going to buy a one-way ticket and I plan to stay there for about five years. I have a little sister who is 13 years of age, so that will be a little difficult. But I've talked so much about this with my family. They know that this is what I want to do and where I need to be.

What is your long-range plan?

**RF** I want to bring some of these kids to the United States. I probably won't have a school, but we could have a cultural center or a boys' and girls' club. There's a large Ghanaian population in the Bronx. It might be a good place to start. Really, I'd like to bring them to Chicago, but I haven't explored the possibilities yet.

What advice would you give to those who want to do something meaningful?

**RF** None of this would have happened if I didn't take the opportunity. I had qualms about going to Ghana, but I took the opportunity. I also took the chance to visit Kissemah Village. I say take an opportunity if you get it. Sometimes, things just fall into place. 📌



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