



| Happy Valley Uganda Looks To Disrupt Poverty Through Education

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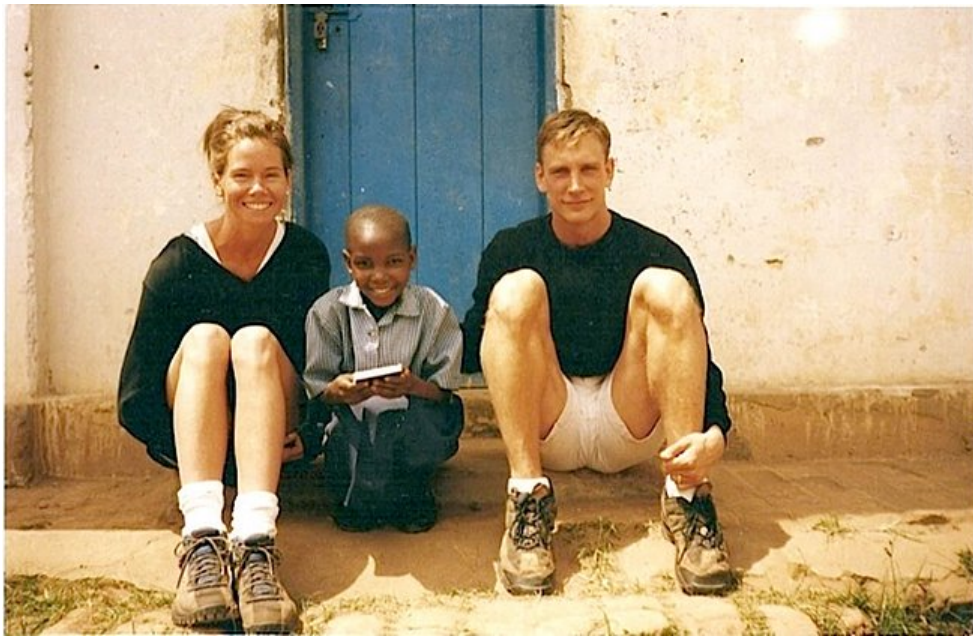
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“Give a man a fish, feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, feed him for the rest of his life.”

This age-old proverb describes Bill and Elke Spoor’s philosophy toward their philanthropy project, Happy Valley, Uganda. The organization’s goal is to disrupt poverty through education, and the organization’s roots can be found right here at Penn State.

A Penn Stater first and foremost, Spoor played football under Coach Joe Paterno in the early 1990s. Spoor accredits much of his desire to give back to his former coach and to the town that he called home for his four years of college. His volunteer work while a student athlete at Penn State inspired him to seek out other opportunities that would allow him to give back.

As a graduate student at Northwestern, Spoor began to mentor a young Ugandan girl named Doreen through independent study. After years of sponsorship and dedication to making Doreen’s life better, primarily through education, Spoor and his wife decided to further their efforts.



Bill and Elke in Uganda.

In 2008, the Spoor family officially created Happy Valley Uganda, Inc., an organization based in Eastern Africa designed to give primary-age students the academic skills they need to succeed in secondary school.

“State College is just a wonderful place” Spoor mentioned when asked about the name, “the community that the students foster there is second to none.”

The organization has two long term goals. First is the enrichment program, which helps tutor primary age students. The school hosts nearly 90 students every year and provides food and testing to all students. Spoor likens the program to a Princeton Review course, preparing students for future education while catching them up in the process. Ninety-eight percent of students in the program pass their final exams and move on to another form of secondary education, an outstanding accomplishment compared to the national average of 24 percent.

Spoor hopes to move into the second phase of the project in the near future. The Happy Valley Academy is situated on a 60 acre plot in Pakwach, Uganda. The school will serve as a non-profit, Christian, secondary school for both boys and girls while also providing room and board for students. The project is well underway, and will be finalized soon thanks to the help of outside sponsorship.

At Penn State, Spoor primarily studied finance, and minored in environmental resource management, which he is dearly passionate about. The Happy Valley Academy will feature a farm to teach sustainability in the environment and will offer farming and fishing education to supplement the standard business, computer skills, math, history, science, and English curriculum.

Both Spoor and his primary associate, Caitlin McKoy, have found unbelievable satisfaction in the project. With the utmost praise for McKoy, Spoor referenced her humble beginnings in Western Pennsylvania as part of the reason behind her humble nature and generosity. When asked about Happy Valley Uganda, both mentioned the initial disheartening nature of charity in Africa, because there is so much to do. McKoy loves being able to give people the tools to be who they truly are.

Spoor wants to level the playing field, saying that “95 percent of what happens to someone is out of their control...genetics, birthplace, gender, family, etc.” His desire to give back is founded in this, as he wants to give those less fortunate not only an opportunity to be educated, but an opportunity to value that education and make the most of their lives.

Spoor is one of the best representatives the Penn State community could have. He grew under the tutelage of Joe Paterno (and was even mentioned by his son, Jay, in his eulogy), moved on to work for Goldman Sachs, a prestigious Wall Street bank, and still returns to help students professionally. Despite these accomplishments, Spoor represents his alma mater through selfless deeds to the community. He and his wife take on 100 percent of the organization's overhead costs, making it possible for all money donated to go straight to the children of Happy Valley, Uganda. A finance major at heart, Spoor mentioned the incredible return on investment of his organization, as the Happy Valley Uganda team manages a modest budget expertly and efficiently.

The Spoors ask for little in their efforts to give children an education, although they do hope to involve Penn State students and professors in the future. If you have any interest in helping their cause, contact information can be found **on their website**.

Photo By: Happy Valley Uganda

ABOUT AUTHOR



CADE REED



is a sophomore Finance major from Lebanon, Pennsylvania. Cade is our resident Penn State football optimist and he will defend Christian Hackenberg relentlessly in any forum. He is passionate about all things Penn State as he comes from a long line of Penn Staters before him. You can reach him at cade@onwardstate.com or follow him on Twitter [@TheRealCadeReed](https://twitter.com/TheRealCadeReed).