

ARTICLE FROM THE L.A. WATTS TIMES

## ***L.A. Watts Times***

*December 11, 2008*

Education

### **Two Ghana Natives Help Bring Education Back Home**

By ERIKA MCCARDEN

With virtually relentless fundraising efforts by two college friends, children in Ghana who attended school in a shed have an opportunity to study and learn in a real classroom, and could soon have a community resource center.

It was in 2006 when Thaddeus Mensah and his wife took a trip to Ghana and decided to help a friend who had built a shed for local children of Sampa — which is in mid-western Ghana — to attend school.

They took pictures of the makeshift classroom and shared them with others while soliciting help to raise funds for a genuine school — called the Star of Sea — to be built. In 2007, their efforts sparked enough interest by community organizations and corporations to begin construction and have a foundation set in place.

“There were nearly 350 children who didn’t have a place to go to school,” Mensah said.

It was fate, along with endless conversations exchanged by a group of campus leaders who hosted roundtable discussions about worldwide and political issues that brought Mensah and Marvin Boateng together at California State University, Northridge. Boateng was president of the African Student Organization and Mensah was an adviser.

They shared a passion for strengthening inner-city communities, and both were natives from Ghana with a desire to provide aid and resources to their homeland. Their hope was to raise enough funds to have a school built in Sampa and operating by the end of 2008.

“People donated anywhere from \$500 to \$1,000. It was a miracle that we could capitalize on as there were other villages that needed the same help,” Mensah said. “I started thinking, ‘Why don’t we use this as a model to open a nonprofit?’ Sampa is a main town with 14 villages around it, and I am from there. I thought we could use Sampa as a central point.”



Thaddeus Mensah, formerly a student of California State University, Northridge, surrounded by children in the village of Sampa in Ghana, West Africa. Mensah, along with his colleague Marvin Boateng, created the Sampa Community Education Project to promote linkages between rural communities in Ghana and inner cities in Los Angeles county.

Mensah called Boateng and asked if he was willing to come on board.

Boateng said he always had discussion with Mensah about political issues and education in Africa and how they wanted to make an impact.

“We were both dreaming about the same thing,” Boateng said. “I was very excited and jumped on board.”

Boateng and Mensah started the Sampa Community Educational Project, a nonprofit organization that promotes the development of cross-cultural exchange through education and leadership to rural communities in Ghana, West Africa and inner cities in Los Angeles County.

Organizers of the SCEP initiative raised more than \$3,000, but last June the school project was slowed after a storm struck and destroyed its foundation.

“A rainstorm hit and flooded out the village,” Mensah said. “We had to use the \$3,000 to restore it.”

This proved to be only a small setback for Boateng and Mensah, who continued to solicit donations and maintained a goal to have the school finished by 2008. Within a few weeks after the storm hit, the school structure was restored and a roof was added.

“What’s most interesting is how little it cost to build a school,” Boateng said. “We came with a proposal that was very cheap and people were willing to contribute, knowing that the goal of building a classroom with only a few thousand dollars was attainable.”

This year SCEP helped raise enough funds to finish the school on schedule, complete with six classrooms that can house up to 350 students and bathroom facilities. Although the school has been in operation since October, the official inauguration and blessing will take place next June.

Next year Boateng and Mensah plan to develop a Sampa Community Learning and Resource Center by 2010 to promote computer literacy.

“The school is now full swinging in session. When I went back last year we got some computers and sent them over to Sampa,” Mensah said. “The elders were very happy to see what they’d done with the computers in the school. It was amazing.”

For more information on SCEP, call Boateng at 707-364-1266 or Mensah at 310-405-9163.

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