

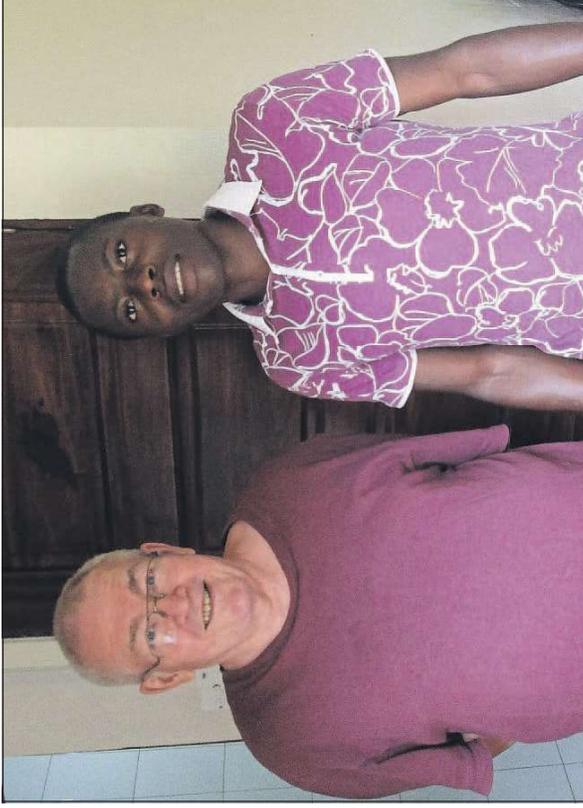
Marquis Project tackles poverty in Uganda

BY DAVID GAMEY

I'm a former staff person and now board member of Brandon's international development organization, the Marquis Project, and have been in Uganda since mid-January. Originally planning to return to Canada April 6 after a few months of work with our partner groups here, I became stranded as of early March with the onset of the COVID-19 crisis and the shutdown of all passenger flights by the government of Uganda. Marquis has a long-standing relationship with Uganda through support to various development projects since the early '90s, and I continue to spend a few months per year here supporting these initiatives. My permanent home is in Strathclair.

Some weeks ago, an acquaintance of mine from Manitoba who follows my adventures via periodic email updates asked me to consider giving modest assistance, on her behalf, to some of the families of Bunga in Kampala, my current neighbourhood in the capital. These are families who have been particularly hard hit by COVID-19 and the "lockdown." Previously, my work in Uganda has always been about long-term development, and I've had virtually no experience with relief aid, but decided the situation warranted giving it a try.

Now before going further, it is important to understand why some people here find themselves in extremely desperate circumstances. In Uganda, the economy is characterized by a lot of "day earners" who are locally known as "leja-leja." This is a Kiswahili corruption of Ledger and refers to the old manual systems of accounting with separate income and expense ledgers. Thus,



Images from David Gamey's time in Uganda. (Submitted)



lost his contract with no severance as schools closed two months ago and may not get another contract when schools resume. He also had to dismiss his workers with no money and no promise;

A laundry worker at a lodge who has been sent home with not a shilling in severance. She is a grandmother (laja) who is, for various reasons, caring for five young children;

A quote from a restaurant chef, (sent home with no wages or support) and among the literate Ugandans able to write in English: "Send my gratitude to all the Canadian well-wishers for all the support they gave through you to everyone that received it. All that was got was a lifesaver. Me and my family of four are doing fine. The little ones, seven, five and a toddler nine months old are doing just fine. I was able to buy supplies, mainly the solid food items, the usual, posho and beans, charcoal and obviously the milk to feed the baby. Fair to say, the food supply is abundant, but now the cash to pay for it is not there but we shall push on. Waiting to see if they will let us start very soon, but I doubt if they will let those in the tourism business get on with it. Fear is the bars, hotels and restaurants will come in last."

Since I received the first donation, a number of Marquis members and the general public have stepped up to help out, and I have been able to offer small payments of support to even more families.

Anyone wishing to donate to this effort of supporting desperate but deserving Ugandans can do so via marquisproject.com and a tax deductible receipt will be issued. I can also be contacted at davidgamey.takata@gmail.com.

food supplies consisting of beans and maize meal for about a week. A little bit of money goes a very long way! People were surprised, shocked and some were quite overcome with gratitude illustrated by the following snippets and feedback:

A hotel worker was sent home in the middle of the month — the owner stopped him working as the hotel had no guests. His employer never paid him, even for the part-month he did work, his house flooded due to high waters of Lake Victoria, no work available, hungry children and no place for the family to live;

The boba-boba (motorcycle taxi man) who has spent two months without working as all transport services are locked down and with a wife, two toddlers and a new baby;

The school kitchen cook who has

bit of money from day to day, with little prospect of secure employment. During the COVID pandemic and shutdown, this has hit people hard all across Africa, Latin America and Southern Asia.

Anyway, after establishing basic criteria, and with some local assistance, I set out identifying a few families that were truly desperate, with no food for children or, in many cases seniors, all dependent on one leja-leja daily earner. What later became known as Phase I provided between 30,000 and 50,000 Uganda Shillings (UGX) to selected family units. Before getting too excited by all the zeros, consider that 40,000 Uganda Shillings (UGX) is just under C\$15. The first Manitoba donation was C\$200, which exchanged to 540,000 UGX. This provided approximately 15 families with basic