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[PERSON OF INFLUENCE : SCOTT FIFER]

Spring Forward



Scott Fifer, founder of the non-profit, Tunahaki Foundation

The art of acrobatics is changing kids' futures in Tanzania

By Elizabeth Khuri, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

WHO HE IS After watching "Hotel Rwanda," Scott Fifer's life turned upside down—literally. The former lawyer-turned-screenwriter was so inspired that he planned a trip to Africa and later founded the Santa Monica-based Tunahaki Foundation, a nonprofit that funds a gymnastics program for homeless children in Tanzania as a way to foster teamwork. Its partner organization, the Tunahaki Centre in the village of Moshi, houses 28 kids—including many orphaned by AIDS—and teaches gardening, carpentry and other self-sufficiency skills. "They use the arts as a lifesaving tool," Fifer says. "Through acrobatics and dance, they learn to form a family."

WHAT 'S SAID ABOUT HIM "When Scott raises money, he gives people assurance that it's not going to be wasted," says Stephan T. McGuire, president of Coalition for a Sustainable Africa. "He's sensible. He's African style—every resource is used. There is no room for waste."

WHAT'S NEW The organization will soon break ground on a new center, which will house 50 kids and include a theater where they can raise money by showcasing their talent for visitors.

WHY IT MATTERS "We respond well to tsunamis and earthquakes," Fifer says, "but there's an equivalent of a tsunami every day [in Africa]." Thanks to his group, however, some kids can now dream beyond having a roof over their heads; in 2006, he brought nine children stateside to train with Cirque du Soleil. "One of them wants to be an airline pilot," Fifer says. "I don't see why that can't come true."

WHAT YOU CAN DO Fifer suggests parents tell their children about the foundation (www.tunahaki.org), because many of the biggest contributions have come from kids. In Santa Monica, Crossroads students organized concerts to raise funds for the center's organic garden, and the Mirman School in Los Angeles held a read-a-thon to help pay for the Tunahaki kids' books.

SPHERE | Africa's children

INFLUENCE | Providing shelter and a sense of family
