



# KAWTAL SEHILAABE

**DENVER-SENEGAL HUMANITARIAN FOUNDATION NEWS**  
**Fall 2010 ----- Volume 1, No.1**

## **DSHF – Our First Six Years**

**by Kevin Miller, Outgoing President**

In November, 1997 Oumar Dia, an ex-pat from Diorbivol, Senegal who was working as a bellhop at the Hyatt Regency in Denver, was shot and killed while waiting for a bus after work. The murder was an unprovoked hate crime perpetrated by two skinheads. The outcry from Denver's citizens was tremendous, including arrangements to return Oumar's body to his village and the start of a project to establish a bridge of solidarity and respect with the people of Diorbivol. In 2003, as part of the outreach to Diorbivol, a team of youth and adults made a humanitarian trip to the village, delivering teaching supplies and short term educational activities to the region. The team also helped build an additional classroom as part of the village school and paired up with a dental mission, the first of its kind to ever visit the village. Nonetheless, the team returned with absolute confidence that through the



graciousness of their hosts, the Denverites had received much more than they gave. Upon returning home, the members of the team searched for ways to respond to their incredible experience in Senegal. After considerable reflection, the 501(c) (3) non-profit Denver-Senegal Humanitarian Foundation (DSHF) was established, with a primary focus on improving educational opportunities and economic conditions for the youth of Senegal. The goals of DSHF are to: provide school supplies and teaching aids for Senegalese students, provide scholarships and support for higher education, provide humanitarian aid for the village and surrounding area,

educate others about Diorbivol and the needs of developing countries, and provide opportunities for others to support this mission, all on a sustainable basis.

Life in Senegal is challenging - unemployment and illiteracy are rampant, and the poverty level is exceptionally high, especially in rural areas. The correlation between abject poverty and social unrest in developing countries is well documented. However, as USAID points out, Senegal is "...a model of religious and ethnic tolerance, it plays a key role in conflict resolution in West Africa and beyond, and is committed to fighting terrorism. Senegal is an important partner of the United States because it has found a way to ensure social stability and religious tolerance without violence and repression." DSHF is focused on collaborating with Senegalese citizenry to develop educational opportunities, with **Continued on page 3**

## **PRESIDENT'S CORNER**

Welcome to the first Denver-Senegal Humanitarian Foundation newsletter! I am excited about this new avenue for providing insight into our organization. As with most small organizations we have a dedicated group of volunteers who participate because they recognize the need for education and humanitarian assistance in the expanding global environment. We focus on education because it offers children greater opportunities in life, even when they live in developing countries.

My experiences and involvement with DSHF have offered me the occasion to see what education can achieve. I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Senegal and lived with a family in the southern region of the country. There were several children in the family, two who were nearly teenagers. Returning to Senegal with DSHF after a decade, I took time to visit my family and discovered that one of those former teenagers, Sifadio, is now a teacher. It was such a thrill to see him interact with the students and the other teachers, but in talking to him I realized that his job was harder and the students' learning was especially challenging because few students own school supplies. In Senegal, \$20 supplies a student with all the materials he/she will need for an academic year. The academic books we purchase belong to the school so they can be passed to several students over consecutive years. As an organization we would like to support as many classrooms as your generosity will allow. Diacounda, where Sifadio teaches, is a remote village where the families have to raise a good rice crop to even consider purchasing school supplies. In 2011 our goal is to supply Diacounda and Diorbivol with school supplies for fifteen classrooms. We are also planning a trip to the southern part of the country to develop our relationship with Diacounda and possibly another village.

The school supply donations made by DSHF to Diorbivol have proven valuable. The principal was proud to explain that test scores and retention increased. The more we are able to assist the children's education, the more self-sufficient they will become and thereby productive contributors to Senegalese society. Since my service in Senegal in the mid-nineties, the number of schools has increased but per capita income has not changed dramatically. Therefore, the ability of parents to provide school supplies is still low. DSHF is working to aid this invisible need.

As the new school year approaches please consider how much \$20 can contribute to a child's education in Senegal and how often we spend that much without a second thought. Thank you for reading our newsletter and the support you have shown DSHF in the past. If "Kawtal Sehilaabe" is your introduction to DSHF, we welcome you and encourage any inquiries.

Jam Tan (peace only),

Theresa Neuroth



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### **DSHF OFFICERS**

**President**  
**Theresa Neuroth**

**Vice President**  
**Tony LaChance**

**Treasurer**  
**Julie LaChance**

**Secretary**  
**Mike Burke**

### **MISSION**

**DSHF, a non-profit foundation, is organized exclusively for charitable and educational purposes. DSHF's purpose is to specialize in the enhancement of the education of Senegalese students and the distribution of humanitarian aid in Senegal.**

**The Denver-Senegal Humanitarian Foundation is a non-profit, tax-exempt charitable organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Donations are tax-deductible.**

**"KAWTAL SEHILAABE" means group of friends in Pulaar, a language spoken in Senegal. This newsletter is published annually by DSHF.**

**Editor – Janet Shin**

## **DSHF – Our First Six Years**

**continued from page 1**

the intent of improving literacy rates, and consequently employment opportunities. In so doing, DSHF envisions a means of “helping Senegal help itself,” and in the process, fostering stability in an unstable region. We believe the efforts of DSHF can extend well beyond the students we support.

Since its establishment, in collaboration with villagers and other non-profits like African Heritage Celebration, DSHF has provided students in Diorbivol and five other villages in the isolated region with books and school supplies. DSHF has purchased school books for approximately 795 students and made additional school supplies available for another 265 at a cost of \$5,300. The organization has awarded \$1,300 in scholarships for students to continue their education past the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. In addition to delivering educational supplies, including textbooks, teaching materials and more, approximately two dozen youth and adults from the Denver area have developed personal

relationships with villagers during follow-up visits in 2007 and 2009.

In the past two years, DSHF worked with the village to realize its highest priority, building and outfitting a middle school. DSHF donated \$3,000 to help kick-start the building of the school, an additional \$4,000 to purchase windows and doors, and then a final \$2,000 to complete the school. In the Fall of 2009, school commenced in the new facility for about sixty 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, most of whom would not have had an opportunity to go to middle school at all, due to the isolation of the village. This was a testimony to the vision and courage of the villagers. In addition, during the past year, DSHF has begun to work with other villages in Senegal to improve educational resources. Based on improving test results and retention rates, DSHF’s strategy and actions are already changing lives.

### **Mohamadou Cisse, DSHF’s Emissary**

**by Theresa Neuroth**

I would like to introduce you to Mohamadou Cisse, whose vital collaboration with DSHF has enhanced its educational activities in Senegal. Mohamadou was born and raised near Dakar in Bargny, Senegal, and came to the United States in October 1990. He has been in Colorado since February 1992, living here with his wife, Fatou, and his children, Abdoulaye, Ibrahima, Khadidiatou and Sekhou. Mohamadou earned a B.A. in Communications from Regis University in 2004. He also received an honorary doctorate degree in Humane Letters from the Denver Institute of Urban Studies in 2010. He is dedicated to the education of children through his own organization, African Heritage Celebration, as well as through his support of DSHF.

Mohamadou became involved with the village of Diorbivol after accompanying the body of Oumar Dia home after his murder in Denver in 1997. His later participation in the 2003 International Medical Relief trip to Diorbivol introduced him to the core group that would ultimately become the Denver-Senegal Humanitarian Foundation. During DSHF’s humanitarian visits to Senegal, Mohamadou provides tremendous assistance by arranging transportation,

lodging in Dakar and acquiring various incidentals like bottled water. While in Dakar, the DSHF delegation is treated to a fabulous meal at his sister’s home and, if time allows, his brother’s home. Senegalese “teranga” (hospitality) has no end, and the Cisse family is an exceptional example.



In years when there is no DSHF delegation traveling to Senegal, Mohamadou makes the trip there on DSHF’s behalf to purchase school supplies and transport them to the village. This in-country support makes our travels and educational assistance both more effective and economical. We owe Mohamadou many thanks for his assistance and “teranga.” “Jerejef!” (Thank you in the Senegalese language of Wolof.)

# A Trip to Diorbivol

by Hannah LaChance

When most people first think about Africa, safaris and exotic animals come to mind. Yet for me, I can't help but think about unbearably stuffy 13 hour bus rides and incredibly friendly people. And despite the fact that my trip to Senegal, Africa had a couple of downs, the ups outweighed those downs by more than just a few pounds.

The trip began with a painfully long amount of time spent on planes and progressed to a few boiling hot days spent in downtown Dakar, Senegal. We then took a thirteen hour bus ride out to quite literally, the middle of nowhere. The village, Diorbivol, where we were staying was ten miles away from the nearest hint of civilization. I was terrified. We couldn't drink - or for that matter even touch - the water; bugs were everywhere; the buses left so we had no mode of transportation other than walking; and air conditioning could only be found in the form of a fan which we had to wave.....ourselves. It was like a camping trip gone wrong. At least that's how it felt at first. Yet, after I recovered from the shock, I remembered I was in Africa. And I was seeing the real deal. Not the fake safari - animals everywhere - tourist Africa, but instead, the genuine -

people so nice it makes you feel bad - terrifying dirty water Africa. It was the scariest and most exciting moment of my life.



While in Diorbivol we helped build a school and became more acquainted with the villagers. We slept on rooftops, saw an amazing display of lightning on the fourth of July, ate so much bread and nutella it almost made us sick, went shopping in an overly crowded market and saw and did so many more things that are impossible to describe. Yet the people are what I remember most. The people had hardly anything in comparison to the average American. They wore old clothes from goodwill, lived in houses they constructed themselves, and

had never heard of toilet paper in their lives. However, despite their lack of wealth, these people were happy in a way that cannot be explained. Maybe it was the excitement of having visitors in the village, or maybe they were like that all the time. Whatever the case be, these people were genuine.

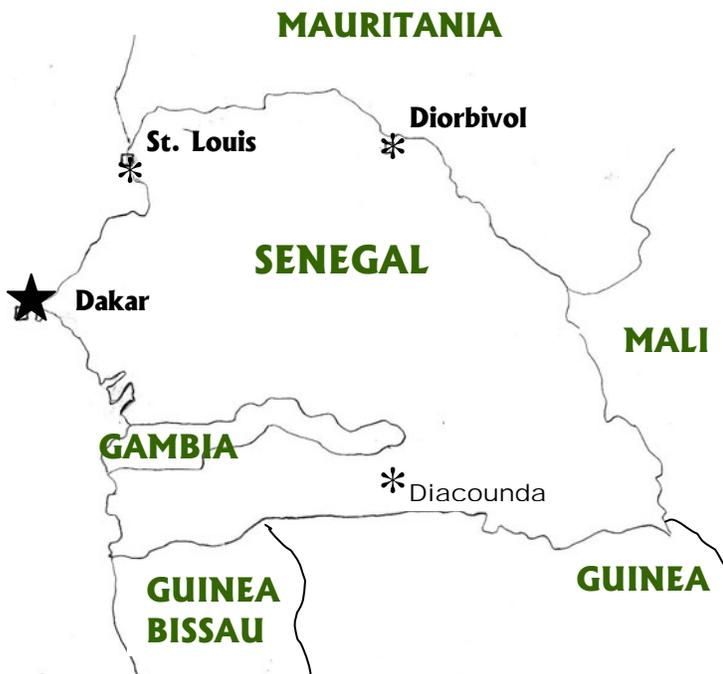
I remember feeling nervous when I woke up at three in the morning for the fourteen hour plane flight to Senegal, and I remember how I was terrified of being so far away from home. Yet upon reaching the village and witnessing the unbelievable welcome which I had heard about so many times I knew that Diorbivol, Senegal would become something of a second home in my heart. I knew that I wanted to help these people who were less privileged than I was more than anything else. Yet, I never imagined that they would help me more than I could ever have thought possible. They encouraged me to grow more as a person not only spiritually but morally as well, and they proved to me that even if you don't always get what you want, with a good amount of love you always get what you need.

# Diorbivol Area a Product of Its Complex History

By Tony LaChance

Senegal has a storied and trying past and plays a major role in current African politics. Historically the native people were primarily nomadic and converted to Islam during the 11th century. Portugal was the first European country to establish minor trading stations along the region's major waterways during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The French established the city of Saint-Louis in 1659 and soon claimed Gorée Island as an outpost for slave trade. Saint-Louis sits on the mouth of the Senegal River, and is an 8 to 10 hour bumpy bus ride away from Diorbivol. In the mid-1800's the French consolidated power in the region. French colonialism curtailed the nomadic life style, and many native residents turned to ranching and peanut farming. Today, peanuts remain a primary export crop for the country. Senegal gained independence from France in 1960.

The Senegal River is 488 miles long and forms the northern border of Senegal with Mauritania. The Portuguese, as previously mentioned, established trading stations along the Senegal River during the 1400's. The French maintained a warehouse/trading station at Diorbivol Station as late as the mid-1970's. Diorbivol Station is approximately 3.5 miles downstream from the village of Diorbivol and the top of the trading post can still be seen while standing on the roof of the village chief's family compound. The exact age of Diorbivol is unknown but the whole northern border experienced a population explosion during the 1980's. During that time the Arabic government of Mauritania "perpetrated a campaign of ethnic cleansing against its black African residents." Many of these black Mauritians were forced to flee south into Senegal and have remained in the villages along the Senegal River. This influx of people has put a strain on the resources of the area.



The United Nations describes desertification as the "persistent degradation of dry land ecosystems by human activities and climatic variations." There is speculation that current farming and herding techniques in the northern region of Senegal has contributed to the desertification of this area. In the few years that DSHF has been visiting Diorbivol, both the family vegetable gardens and the town's rice growing areas have been relocated due to exhaustion of the soil. Because of the failing soil, many of the village men are pressed to leave and find work in other countries in order to support their families. In some respects the local people have become nomadic on a global level; thus returning to methods of survival known before the European colonization.

# **Involvement and Support Important to DSHF's Mission**

by Mike Burke

I became aware of DSHF approximately three years ago when Channel 4 News aired a story highlighting the Foundation's humanitarian efforts. I knew then that I wanted to be involved with this organization and have been a member ever since. As an active member I was able to become part of the team that traveled to Diorbivol in 2009. This trip opened my eyes to a very different culture, but I realized that the hopes and dreams of the Senegalese people were much the same as our own. They very much want a better education and a better life for their children. The little we contribute makes a big difference in the classroom. Changing lives in Africa continues to be a life-changing experience for me.

We are a fairly small group that relies on generous contributions from people like you in addition to other fundraising activities. We have very low operating costs as all of our members are volunteers. You can be assured that your donation will be applied towards the humanitarian needs of the children of Senegal.

## **What You Can Do To Help**

- **Purchase books and school supplies for Senegalese students. (See page 7.)**
- **Use a reloadable King Soopers/City Market card assigned to DSHF to purchase gas and groceries. Reload it with any monetary amount using cash, check, debit or credit cards. DSHF receives 5% of your expenditures, and you can accrue points on your own charge card! E-mail Julie ([julielachance@comcast.net](mailto:julielachance@comcast.net)) or see a member to get a card.**
- **Use GoodSearch, ([www.goodsearch.com](http://www.goodsearch.com)), as your search engine. Enter DSHF as your charity of choice at the GoodSearch site, and a small amount will be allocated to the Foundation each time you conduct a search.**
- **Buy Breakfast Burritos. Members prepare and sell breakfast burritos four times a year. Burritos are sold in three varieties, (regular, spicy, and meatless), for \$2.50 each or 9 for \$20. To place an order, email Julie ([julielachance@comcast.net](mailto:julielachance@comcast.net)).**
- **Visit our website ([www.dshf.org](http://www.dshf.org)) to keep posted on our efforts throughout the year.**
- **Spread the word about DSHF by sharing "Kawtal Sehilaabe" with anyone you think might be interested in the Foundation's efforts to help the people of Senegal.**
- **Schedule a DSHF Presentation about Senegal and the Foundation's efforts there.\***
- **Get involved and become an active member. Volunteering to help make breakfast burritos is a wonderful way to support DSHF. By attending monthly meetings and becoming involved you can become part of a team that travels to Senegal to assist in projects and distribute school supplies.\***

**\* Email Theresa Neuroth, President, for information ([dshfco@yahoo.com](mailto:dshfco@yahoo.com)).**

**Become a **SUPPORTER** of  
Denver-Senegal Humanitarian Foundation at one of the  
following levels**

(Check one of the following.)

\_\_\_\_\_ **\$20 provides one student with books and supplies for an  
academic year. I will provide books and supplies for  
\_\_\_\_\_ students.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **\$65 provides paint for a classroom.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **\$100 provides a two-person desk for a classroom.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **\$150 provides a classroom chalkboard.**

Send this form with your check payable to DSHF to: **P.O. 271043  
Littleton, CO 80127**

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