



KAGENO

A PLACE OF HOPE 



Dear Kageno Friends,

Our 20th Anniversary has been a cause for celebration and reflection on who, what, when, where, how, and why we've been able to achieve all that we have done over the years. First, who were instrumental in making a change. Who were the major players who made a difference?

While we carefully considered all the people who have worked with us, the list below barely scratches the surface of all the supporters who have helped Kageno achieve the progress we have made the past 20 years. In truth, every donor and every volunteer make a difference and we are grateful to all our supporters.

Twenty people of note are spotlighted below.

1. Lillian Vernon & Paolo Martino

The iconic Lillian Vernon and her husband Paolo Martino have generously supported Kageno by building a clinic, community center, pharmacy, and our first bungalow at our Banda Village project site in Rwanda. Lillian and Paolo were fixtures at our annual Harambees and, after Lillian's death, Paolo continues to sit on our Board, to support and introduce their friends to our mission.

2. Meryl Streep

Meryl has been with Kageno from our very first Harambee in 2005 with Dr. Paul Farmer. Even when film commitments don't allow her to attend in person, Meryl usually sends a heartfelt video message to the audience about our work and the event theme. Her warmth and sense of humor project no matter what size screen she's on.

3. Danielle Levine

As an early supporter of Kageno, Danielle was an influential fundraiser for our projects. In honor of her father, she was able to raise the money needed to build a new nursery school with four large classrooms to serve 300 of the neediest children in Banda Village Rwanda. With these vulnerable toddlers now in a safe environment during the day, their mothers and older siblings are free to work and attend school. The impact on the community has been powerful.

4. Eric Gartner & SPG Architects

Eric heads the award-winning team at SPG Architects. Thanks to Eric and his dedicated crew, we have a brilliantly planned project site in Banda and a brand-new nursery school on Rusinga Island that, despite being open less than a year, has already become an island show stopper. They have given their time and expertise without question and eagerly respond to every new project proposal that arises.

5. Dr. Paul Farmer

Paul was a brilliant humanitarian who never stopped caring, curing, building, and contributing to the health and well-being of communities in need throughout the world. He provided invaluable advice and guidance to our organization from very early days until his untimely passing in early 2022. His legacy continues.

6. Drs. Amy Vedder & Bill Weber


Amy and Bill began their careers in Africa and were instrumental conservationists in developing the gorilla tourism that saved Mountain Gorilla population in Rwanda. It was Bill's insightful suggestion that steered us toward selecting Banda Village in Nyungwe Forest as the ideal location for our Rwandan project. Their ongoing guidance has been an invaluable asset since the project's inception. Yearly, they bring a cohort of accomplished Yale students to Banda, imparting their knowledge and providing strategic counsel to enhance our conservation practices. Bill is also a valued Board Member who advises on our conservation and environmental initiatives.

7. Masa Kogure, Daniel Goldstein & Table for Two

We would not be able to feed almost 6,000 children hot, nutritious meals every day without our partners at Table for Two. TFT worked with us to develop our incredibly successful feeding program at our own nursery schools that did so well, it was expanded to feed more children in the neighboring schools. These meals are sometimes the only meal the children receive in a day. Their health, energy and attention spans are increased, and they enjoy learning. They have a better chance at a successful future with this positive educational beginning.

8. Carlyla Dawson

Lyla was our first volunteer to go to Banda to get the project on the ground moving. Given the "rustic" quarters she had to live in and the incredibly impoverished environment she lived in, it's amazing that she stayed and later accepted a position as our only full-time paid employee. Lyla knows everything about our work and our history. Although she moved on to another project years ago, she is always there for us to help, advise and answer endless questions about Kageno.



9. Maggie Q

Our famous femme has been an ardent conservationist and Kageno supporter for many years. She has a long history of supporting endangered animal rights and environmental causes. The Sue Fok Health Clinic in Banda Village was funded by Maggie in memory of her best friend. Maggie attends as many events as her film schedule allows and happily records video to present when she cannot attend in person.

10. Drena and Robert De Niro

Drena and her father have been incredibly generous and supportive of Kageno from the start. While Bob has donated incredible experiences, like guest spots on film sets, to donors and more, Drena is the founder of our Child Sponsorship Program. Every year she speaks on behalf of the project that has successfully sponsored almost a thousand children over the last 20 years. Sadly, Drena recently lost her beloved son. Words cannot express our sorrow.

11. Pamela Fiori

Pamela is a world-renowned travel expert, writer, editor of travel magazines, and former UNICEF Board Member. As another early Kageno supporter, Pamela is a shining light at every Harambee and a generous donor. This year Pamela graciously agreed to host our event. To learn more about our work firsthand, Pamela eagerly embraced the arduous trek to Banda Village, endured every travel hiccup with a smile, and came away with even more enthusiasm for our mission than before.

12. Damian Weyand

The value that Damian brings to Kageno is beyond quantifying. With Frank from the start, he has been a guiding force of reason, humanity, and generosity. Damian is an incredibly highly rated and talented video production expert. He is an invaluable second in charge leader of our Board, has made numerous trips to our sites in Rwanda and Keyna, is a true force in supporting our mission.

13. Robin Renzi and Me & Ro

Robin, the founder of Me & Ro, used her passion for jewelry design to start an incredibly successful business 32 years ago. She turned her talents toward helping Kageno by designing the Unity Bracelet, a portion of whose sales is donated to Kageno every month. Robin also worked with us to train women in the communities we serve in the craft skills needed to make bracelets that would appeal to an international consumer market.

14. Nick DeFabrizio

Never underestimate the force of a New Jersey lawyer. Nick has been one of our most enthusiastic Board Members for well over a decade. While his financial contributions are significant, his consistent introduction of family, coworkers, friends, and anyone else he can coral at a dinner party have brought many new supporters to Kageno. Nick visited our Rwanda project and noted the need for a proper maternity center where new mothers could give birth close to their family rather than must travel hours away to the nearest hospital to give birth. He decided to make a change and drove the effort to construct our new maternity center in Banda Village in memory of his late mother.

15. Kate Spade

Tragically left us too soon, Kate was a very devoted Kageno supporter. She was an early supporter of Kageno's work in Kenya and created the Kate Spade Computer Center at our very first site on Rusinga Island to train the youth and women in the local community. She was always a brilliant light at all our events.

16. Michel Masozera

Michel has been an impactful Board Member. He is a native Rwandan who returned to the country to help reconstruct and create a successful society in the aftermath of the genocide. He is the country director for the Wildlife Conservation Society's Rwanda Program. Michel is an influential advisor and our most valued consultant in Rwanda.

17. Salvatore Ferragamo & Il Borro

In addition to continuing the founder's legacy of creating high quality elegant fashion, the Ferragamo family are ardent environmentalists. Their Green Team experiments with the use of natural materials in their designs – even trying feathers and fish skin. Their facilities in Italy ensure a more efficient and sustainable use of energy. For every Harambee Salvatore donates a week at their lush and luxe Tuscan Resort Il Borro. Delivering an authentic Italian experience, the estate unfolds across 2,700 acres of organic gardens, olive trees and vineyards. Enjoy their own home-made cheeses, honey, eggs, fresh vegetables, and house made pasta from their own wheat, perhaps with a of glass of their Sangiovese wine. That's when not walking, biking or horseback riding through the expansive grounds, or relaxing in one of three art filled main houses. A posh and unique experience.

18. Michael Hoeg & Jeffrey Smith & CGC

When our graphic designer Michael Hoeg passed away, his friend and co-worker Jeffrey stepped in immediately in his memory and carried on his work as an important part of his legacy. We are consistently in their debt for their collective contributions to our logo, website, event, and annual report design.

19. Candice Miller

Candice was already in love with Africa when she met Frank. Once she read the Kageno Annual Report randomly lying on his office reception table, she knew she had found a way to channel her passion into a productive effort to make a change. She has made a significant contribution to our mission as a Board Member for over a decade. The grief over the recent loss of her daughter Dana to an aggressive form of breast cancer, drove her to raise funds for the construction of a new and much needed nursery school at our Rusinga Island project site in Dana's memory. We happily dedicated the site earlier this year with the enthusiastic support of the entire community.

20. Samira Nasr

Samira is the current Editor in Chief of Harper's Bazaar and the first woman of color to hold the position. Samira was introduced to Kageno in 2008 when she spent several weeks at our Kenya and Rwanda projects. On her return, she funded the construction of a kitchen for our Mfangano Nursery School and supported the feeding program there until TFT became the corporate sponsor of Kageno's Feeding Program. Samira's motto of "work hard" was never more evident than the tireless volunteer work she's done for Kageno over the years while managing a demanding career and raising her son Lex.