

Couple fundraising to build school in Kenya

By Dominik Kurek
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

Building a school is not free, even if you plan to do it yourself.

That's why Oakville's Heather Coates and Steve Nightingale are hosting a four-course fundraising dinner to help them build a school in Nairobi, Kenya when they travel there in March.

The married couple is hosting An Evening for Kenya, at Ristorante Beccofino (263 Lakeshore Rd. E.) this Sunday, Dec. 11.

"It will be a nice opportunity for people to connect over the holidays," said Coates.

The pair will be among a group of 20 people who will travel to the slums of Nairobi with the Africa Yoga Project (AYP). Each participant is expected to raise \$5,000 for the initiative. The money pays for program costs, the costs of its services and to support ongoing work where

AYP is active.

So, what does yoga have to do with building schools?

It started as a grassroots program to teach people about yoga, Coates said, "(and) from there, it snowballed into this huge effort to build up schools in addition to teaching people yoga."

The organization trains yoga teachers in places such as Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa. Through the fundraising efforts of people such as Coates and Nightingale, AYP pays the salaries of these teachers who provide approximately 200 yoga classes per week, free of charge, to more than 5,000 disadvantaged individuals.

Beyond that, the organization has built and renovated elementary schools and provides classes to women who receive treatments in HIV/AIDS centres, prisons, youth groups, schools and more.

The money fundraised by this group of 20 will boost the local Nairobi economy by paying

for a local construction force to begin the school building process. Once the foundation has been laid, the group of 20 will arrive at the site and will build the remainder of the school along with the construction workers.

"This injects the economy with some money," Coates said.

An average day will consist of yoga in the morning, heading to the construction site for about six to seven hours, returning to their accommodations, dinner and more yoga.

Coates is a trainer at Power Yoga Canada and Nightingale is a regular yoga participant who plans to get teacher training soon. He was hesitant at first, but was coaxed into it by his wife.

"He plays hockey socially in a men's league and his game has totally changed since starting yoga," Coates said. "He's a goalie. It's been really positive for him and his game."

The pair learned of this African project through Power Yoga Canada, which contributes

financially to AYP. The pair wanted more than just to be aware of the project; they wanted to get involved.

"This is an opportunity for us to get bigger than we are and to join the global community of people who are trying to do good for other people," Coates said. She's also looking forward to seeing what a small group of people can accomplish.

The group will also have an opportunity to stay with Maasai tribes at a nearby national park in Kenya.

"Two of the Maasai tribe members are yoga trainers and we're all trained by the same teacher," Coates noted, adding the fundraiser is made possible by the generosity of the restaurant.

The event begins at 5:30 p.m., while the \$120 ticket price includes the four-course meal and a drink. To reserve a spot, contact sevasafari2012@gmail.com or 416-524-9871.



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