

## **Stanford law student to take up family cause**

Oakland Tribune, Oct 22, 2006 by Katherine Corcoran

For Afam Onyema, his father's dream is now his own.

The third-year Stanford law student started out hoping he would be a lawyer for the National Football League. But when he graduates in the spring, he will become executive director of the GEANCO Foundation, an organization his family started to build a world-class hospital in the Nigerian village his father left more than 30 years ago.

"Even though working for the NFL is a great job, it would be a job," said Onyema, who grew up in Chicago, where his father, Godwin Onyema, still practices medicine. "This isn't a job. This is a joy."

Afam Onyema is raising funds for the GEANCO Foundation -- named from a compilation of family initials -- for the planned 200-bed Augustine Memorial Hospital -- named after his late grandfather. The foundation has raised \$60,000 at various fund-raising events in this country, and one is planned in Nigeria itself.

The foundation hopes to raise \$500,000 by the end of the year. Several Stanford law students are helping with the effort.

"The power of what he's doing has really encouraged a lot of us to get behind it," Stanford law student Patrick Heller said.

The area needs a hospital because so many diseases that devastate the area, such as malaria, dysentery and pneumonia, are easily treatable, Heller added. But there are no medical facilities close by.

"There's a national hospital in Abuja," Nigeria's capital, Onyema said, "but this will far surpass that,"

Godwin Onyema emigrated from Nigeria in 1974 for a medical residency in Chicago. He intended to return to Africa, his son says, but didn't once he saw the educational opportunities in America for his four children. Most of the extended family remains in Anambra, a state in south-central Nigeria.

The elder Onyema always wanted to give something back to his village and tried once before to start a hospital there with other Nigerian doctors who live in the United States. But it proved to be too large an undertaking at the time, Afam Onyema said.

Godwin Onyema started talking about the idea with his children when they were old enough to help. Afam Onyema said he just started doing research for his father and got hooked on the project.

"I found myself getting up in morning and thinking about it. I started looking up (information) about HIV, AIDS, malaria. I got really excited about it," said Onyema, 27.

The \$500,000 the foundation hopes to raise will pay for a hospital feasibility study and design. Onyema estimates the whole project will cost \$22 million. The Nigerian government already has donated the land. The family plans to raise money from Nigeria's oil barons and the leaders of multi-national companies. The project will be built in phases, starting with 100 beds, Onyema said. "It will be the best hospital in sub-Saharan Africa," he said. "It will be open to everyone, regardless of what you can pay."

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