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Olmoti Clinic brings needed care to remote African village

By **DIANE SMITH**

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Diane Raleigh has always felt a strong connection to Africa, formed during the several years she spent in Somalia and Nigeria in the 1960s while serving in the Peace Corps and the several East African safaris she and her husband have gone on since.

About 10 years ago, the Tiburon resident took a trip to Tanzania to satisfy a nagging feeling that had built up over time — that there was some way she could be of service to the people she had grown to love during her time in Africa.

“I went to Tanzania in search of that one thing, not knowing what it was,” says Raleigh, 80.



PHOTOS VIA DIANE RALEIGH

Tiburon's Diane Raleigh (second from right) and Maasai midwife Mama Yaya (third from right) met in 2009 when Raleigh visited Tanzania. Their conversation inspired Raleigh to found the Olmoti Clinic and Health Center to serve Mama Yaya's remote Masaai village of Olmoti, where access to medical care had previously been limited.

She visited the impoverished and remote Maasai village of Olmoti, located on the western slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. There, she met a Maasai midwife called Mama Yaya who explained that the villagers were living in primitive and unsanitary conditions, with little to no medical care.

The women and babies she served as a midwife were dying, Mama Yaya said. The government had promised to staff a clinic if the community could provide a basic structure, she said, but that task had proved difficult.

Raleigh immediately knew she had found her project. She has since helped establish the 10-room, 3,000-square-foot Olmoti Clinic and Health Center to serve the remote village. The clinic is currently served by three doctors and a medical staff of 10 and provides basic health care, HIV/AIDS testing and education, infectious-disease outreach, family planning and more.

Getting the clinic off the ground was a true community effort, Raleigh says.

“The foundation of the project lay with the village asking for help,” she says. “Successful projects can only be sustained if the idea and support come from the community. Projects based on superimposed ideas from foreigners are destined to fail.”

Early trip to Africa an eye-opening experience

Raleigh first traveled to



VIA DIANE RALEIGH

A doctor checks a patient's eyes at the Olmoti Clinic and Health Center. The center is served by three doctors and a medical staff of 10, providing basic health care, HIV/AIDS testing and education, infectious-disease outreach, family planning and more to those living in the remote Tanzanian village.

learn more

To learn more about the impact of the Olmoti Clinic or to donate to the health center, visit olmoticlinic.org.

Africa after joining the just-founded Peace Corps in 1961.

Then 21 years old, the newly married Raleigh and her husband were first stationed in Mogadishu, Somalia, for a year. They then were transferred to a small village in southeastern Nigeria with one tarmac road and a couple hundred tin shacks that was the center of



A doctor checks a baby at the clinic.



PHOTOS VIA DIANE RALEIGH

commerce for the local jungle villages. She taught English and helped in a well-baby clinic, which is where she had an eye-opening experience.

One day, she was approached by a father carrying his 3-month-old girl. The baby was severely malnourished, weighing just over 5 pounds, Raleigh says. The man said the girl's mother had died in childbirth, and he had no means to buy milk for her.

"He pleaded with me to take her to the nearest hospital to help her survive, but when we arrived at the hospital, we were turned away because they weren't equipped to handle long-term care for motherless children," Raleigh says.

Raleigh and her husband decided to take the baby in. Within a year, they returned the healthy baby girl to her father. Raleigh realized someone had to step up and improve the quality of maternal and neonatal care at the clinic that originally refused to take the baby.



She met with local leaders, government officials and nuns from a local church who all agreed to provide labor and materials to upgrade the clinic. The orphanage is still operating today, some 55 years later.

After Raleigh left the Peace Corps in 1964, she and her husband moved to New Jersey and then California, where Raleigh was a social worker in Newark and Silicon Valley, respectively. After her two children, Lauren and Scott, grew older, she attended Palo Alto University to obtain her master's and doctorate in psychology. She opened a private clinical psychology practice in 1983.

After stints in New York and Hawaii due to her

husband's work, the family settled back in Northern California in 2007. Raleigh and her husband bought their home in Tiburon in 2017.

Community effort gets clinic up and running

Raleigh's 2009 trip to Tanzania was arranged with local tour company Kibo Guides and Lodges. Though Mama Yaya, Raleigh learned about the Maasai people, a semi-nomadic tribe who primarily rely on goats and cattle for both income and sustenance.

The tribe has roamed northern Tanzania for more than 500 years. However, new wildlife parks have encroached on Maasai grazing lands, and the tribes have been forced to settle down in

The 10-room, 3,000-square-foot Olmoti Clinic and Health Center opened its doors in 2010 in rural Tanzania. At left, Olmoti women carrying water jugs before the water pipe was installed.

remote bomas, a collection of huts surrounded by thorn fences for protection.

Those living in the Olmoti area are among the poorest in Tanzania, earning the equivalent of about \$1 per day. Because the bomas are in remote areas without transportation, women had to walk 12 miles or more to a hospital for maternal care, Mama Yaya explained to Raleigh, and pre-natal care was uncommon or nonexistent. The consequences of not being able to access medical care for expectant moms are dire: Tanzania has one of the world's highest rates of maternal mortality in childbirth, with 578 deaths per 100,000 live births; the U.S. rate as of 2016 was 16.9 deaths per 100,000 live births.

After Mama Yaya enlisted Raleigh's help, the local Maasai chiefs chose a plot of land for the building, and Willy

Chambulo, the owner of Kibo Guides and Lodges, agreed to oversee construction of the clinic.

Raleigh returned to the U.S. and started raising some \$52,000 to get the clinic off the ground. Fundraising was harder than Raleigh had anticipated. A family friend suggested organizing safaris in Tanzania where the tourists made contributions. Chambulo agreed to charge only the tour company's cost, with the rest of the fee going to the clinic. The first 11-day safari took off at the end of May 2010. The safaris now take place each year in June, with a cap of 14 travelers. In addition to game drives through three national wildlife sanctuaries and a trip to the 102-square-mile Ngorongoro Crater, the itinerary includes visiting Olmoti, engaging with the locals in their bomas and touring the clinic.

Ensuring the clinic's sustainability, Raleigh says, has required making connections in the local community and allies in tourism, government and nongovernment organizations.

Building the structure was just the first step. The International Medical Equipment Collaborative, an organization that collects and distributes medical equipment to hospitals in impoverished areas, donated more than \$130,000 worth of supplies and equipment.

Engineers Without Borders put in a 4-mile pipeline



VIA DIANE RALEIGH

Tiburon's Diane Raleigh (left) and Maasai midwife Mama Yaya worked together with the community to found the Olmoti Clinic and Health Center to bring medical care to the remote Olmoti village in Tanzania, which has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in the world.

from Mount Kilimanjaro to Olmoti that provides water to the clinic and the village. Each family pays a small amount for the water it uses, and the Tanzanian government maintains the water line.

The complex now includes a health center with an operating room and medical wards, living quarters for medical staff and teachers and a power line for electricity. Tesla's nonprofit, GivePower, recently installed solar panels to back up the electricity.

The district government is in charge of the buildings and supplying the staff and medications. The nonprofit clinic oversees its own operation and augments the sala-

ries of many staff. In 2014, a village advisory council was officially launched to assess and advocate for clinic needs.

Through the U.S.-based Our One Community and the Africa-based Olmoti Tanzanian Organization, both nonprofits Raleigh founded to support the clinic, Raleigh also helped open a school, the Olmoti Primary School, in the village in 2015. Today there are six classrooms with 400 children attending, plus a new playground. The school also offers adult education as well as scholarships for older children to attend secondary boarding schools.

"The entire community helped construct the pipeline and the primary school, and

they play an important role in operations, which ensures sustainability," Raleigh says.

Raleigh spends about 15 hours a week on Olmoti business while also working as a clinical psychologist. She makes at least two trips back to Africa every year.

The clinic is well worth the investment of her time, Raleigh says.

"I've gotten so much more satisfaction from doing this than any amount of effort I've put in," she says. "I believe when you see something that needs to be done, just do it."

Diane Smith has been contributing to The Ark since 1980, writing and taking photos on everything from personalities to events.