

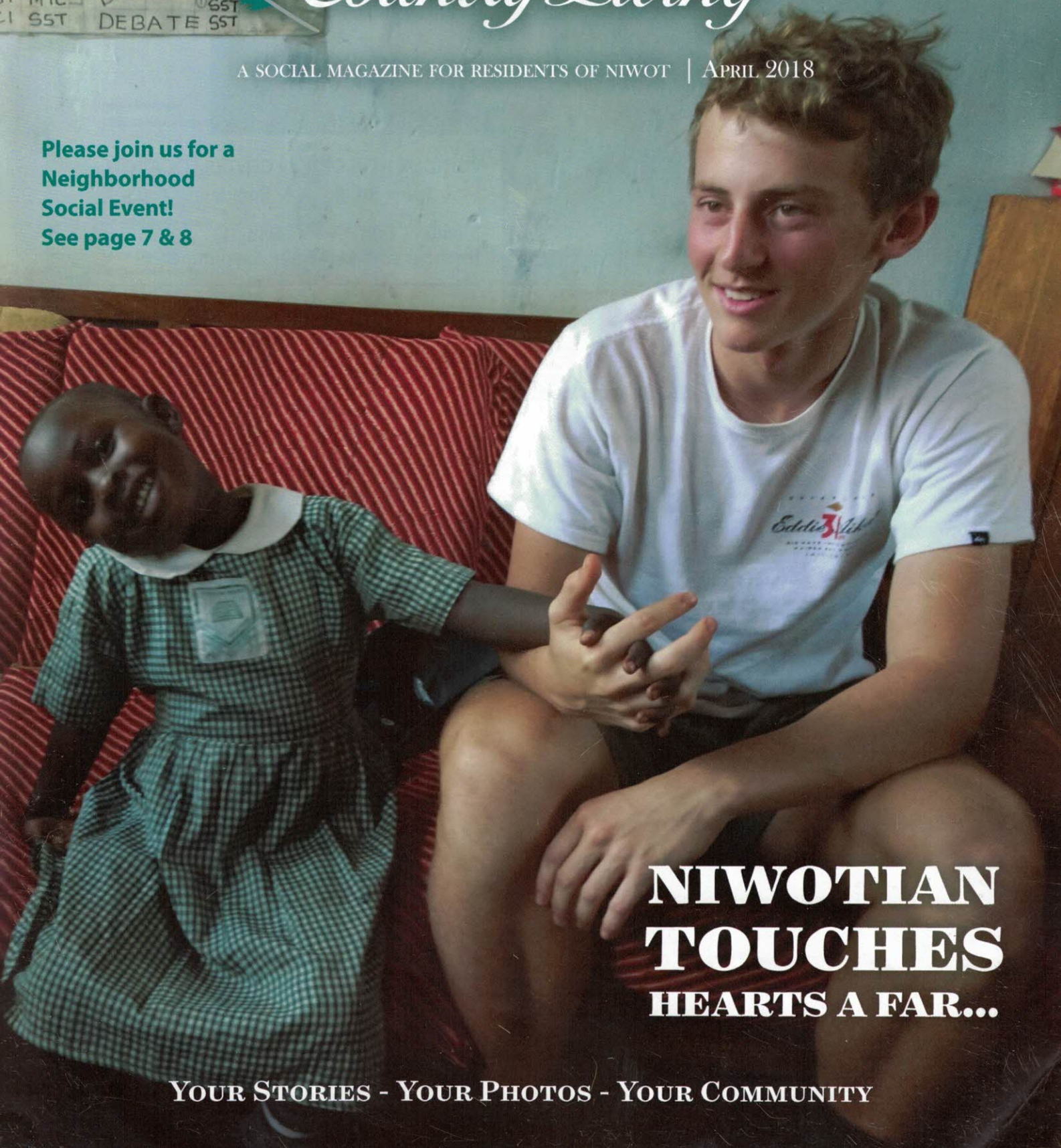
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# Niwot

## Country Living

A SOCIAL MAGAZINE FOR RESIDENTS OF NIWOT | APRIL 2018

Please join us for a  
Neighborhood  
Social Event!  
See page 7 & 8



**NIWOTIAN  
TOUCHES  
HEARTS A FAR...**

**YOUR STORIES - YOUR PHOTOS - YOUR COMMUNITY**



meet your neighbors

# DAVID AND MARCUS CHAKNOVA



*Niwotians touch hearts afar...*

Many Niwot residents will recognize the name Dale Peterson, a teacher at Niwot Elementary School, the founder of The Mwebaza Foundation, a cultural exchange project the motto for which is “Sharing Cultures, Building Communities, Enriching Lives.” This foundation grew out of Peterson’s 2006 first-grade pen-pal exchange with a Kenyan school. Given the development of political upheaval in Kenya, Peterson’s young writers were connected with a new group of students in Kyengera, Uganda, over 8500 air miles from Colorado. Despite the distance, the language and cultural differences, one particular Niwot father-son duo maintain their connection with the East African nation a decade after it began.



When then Niwot Elementary School fourth-grader Marcus Chaknova learned of the pen-pal program, he jumped in, even though he was not a student in Mr. Peterson’s class. And later on, when his bar mitzvah came around, Marcus’s mitzvah good deed was to collect non-useable eyeglasses for the Ugandan school children and their

families. Marcus not only collected the eyeglasses, he also arranged fundraisers to provide subscription glasses for anyone else who could not be fitted with the collected glasses. A Longmont optometrist, Dr. John Mees, then volunteered to travel to Uganda and fit the right eye ware to the right eyes. Marcus, with the assistance of his mother Jane Wells and grandmother Marlene Wells, helped send 250 pairs of glasses for the kids and community members to Uganda with Dr. Mees six years ago.



In 2017, Marcus and David visited Mwebaza School. That trip was, as David tells the story, life-changing for both of them. Marcus and David are still not done with Africa or the children in Uganda. Many of these kids are orphaned for a variety of reasons:



poverty, inadequate health care and alcoholism, he says. They have so little of what we in the USA take for granted. One story still brings David almost to tears: for Marcus's high-school graduation gift, David and his son visited Uganda. The grandfather of a child who attended the school and had received glasses through Marcus's mitzvah project, hearing that the Chaknovas were in the village, walked five miles to thank them for the eyeglasses that had made it possible for him to read. David says the tears flowed that day and not just his own.

David and Marcus will return to Uganda this summer and spend two weeks helping to prepare for the construction of a new school building. It will be hard work in meager surroundings, and David makes a face at the thought of merely adequate food. But they hope to tack on yet another photo safari to satisfy their hunger for the beauty of Africa.

Marcus, now a soft-spoken college student studying marine biology at the University of Oregon, Eugene, still has on-line contact

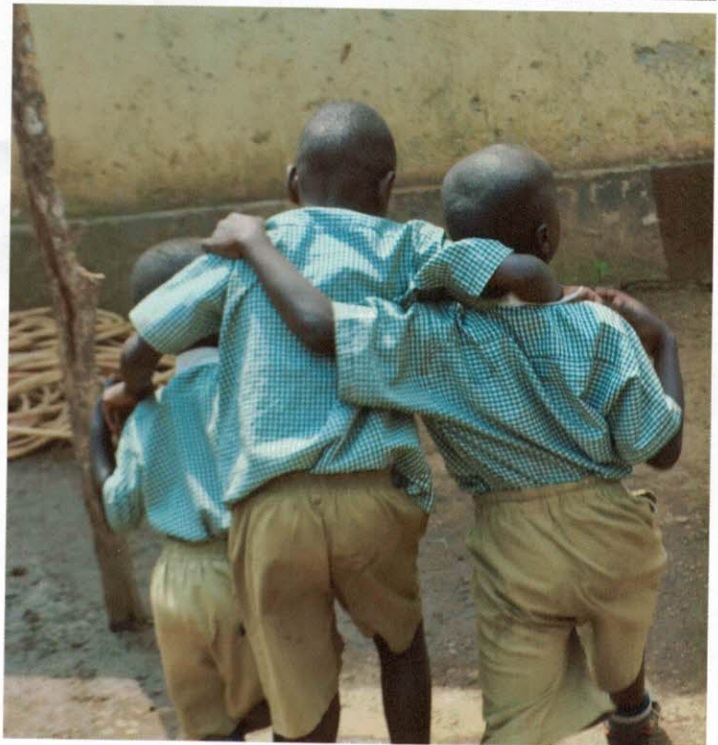
some of his fourth-grade pen pals, communicating in English. (Google shows that Uganda has forty living native languages.) He also says that the excitement and sense of adventure from his first trip to Africa have not faded. It has, in fact, grown into a need to travel, his belief being that we all benefit from "getting out of our comfort zone."



David is justifiably proud of his son and what has developed from the confluence of Dale Peterson's original plan to stretch his

students' line of sight from Colorado to Africa, and the good deed that Marcus chose a decade ago. David smiles and says, "I am so proud of him, and I do what I can do," adding that he benefits emotionally and spiritually from the time and energy he spends supporting and promoting the work of the Mwebaza Foundation. In fact, he is presently in the tumult of building a new house in Niwot, one big enough and welcoming enough, he says, to hold fundraisers. He recently did just that in his previous home, raising thousands of dollars to continue the good work. He hopes that people whose children may have moved on from the Niwot schools will again add their support to the cultural exchange and community building efforts of the Mwebaza Foundation.

The next big push to benefit the community in Uganda will ramp up in August 2018 when large shipping containers will appear on the grounds of Niwot High School. The plan is to convert the con-



tainers to classrooms, fill the containers with needed supplies, and transport them to Uganda. The expense of getting the filled containers is short still by about \$13,000. But it is important to get them there in order to serve the needs of more students.

David points out that when school officials in Kyengera open the enrollment process, a line forms "a mile long," and only a few of those in line can be accepted. These benefits are greatly appreciated, the teachers skilled and dedicated, the students eager and ambitious. These children quickly become fluent in English and soon develop skills that will help support their families as many are expected to earn money while still in their teens. And some of these young people may well be, David says, the future leaders of Uganda, a generational benefit that began, with the incredibly hard work and vision of an elementary school teacher who poured his time and heart, along with many volunteers in the Niwot community, and in part with the generous gift of vision, a young man's mitzvah.