

# BURKINA CONNECTION



NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF BURKINA FASO

2013 - No. 1



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## MII NEDA SAO MII TENGA

I am delighted to write to you about three topics that exemplify the above piece of Mossi wisdom, which means:

***"It is better to know a person than a town."***

1. On April 4, 2013, there was a panel discussion at Cranbrook Schools in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, on "What Works in African Development: Women, Health, and Education." The panelists included Burkina Faso Ambassador Seydou Bouda; Ambassador Jimmy Kolker, who served in Burkina Faso 1999–2002 and is currently Principal Deputy Director Office of Global Affairs, US Department of Health and Human Services; Simeon Baguian, Project Coordinator for Namtenga Projects; and Noelie Sandouidi, President, Namtenga Soundo Babisi, a weaving studio for women. The panel was moderated by Justice Maura Corrigan, former Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court, currently Director

by Michael J. Lavoie '75-'77, President

of the Michigan Department of Human Services. I helped coordinate the event.

The panel discussion focused on the three prongs of Cranbrook's grassroots efforts in the village of Namtenga, Burkina Faso, in the form of launching new businesses through weaving; funding clean water sources and malaria prevention; and supporting an active scholarship program and school supplies for Namtenga's students, along with a pen pal program. What emerged from the discussion was recognition and appreciation of not only the very tangible benefits of such projects but the growth of international friendship, mutual understanding and respect.

During the same visit, Ambassador Bouda had the opportunity to meet with representatives at Lawrence Tech University in Southfield, Michigan, as well as a local civil engineering firm and

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# PRESIDENT'S YIRI

by Mike Lavoie, '75-'77

**“Mii neda sao mii tenga”  
“It is better to know a person than a town”**

a local hospital. Following these activities, Ambassador Bouda shared the above Mossi adage, acknowledging how good it was to get to know the people here. The Cranbrook community expressed the same feelings. Great thanks to Ambassador Bouda, Ambassador Kolker, Mr. Baguian, Mrs. Sandouido Baguian and Justice Corrigan for their invaluable contributions.

2. Over the past several years, I have also gotten to know FBF's Project Chair very well. Those who regularly follow our newsletters are also very familiar with him. Tom Vollrath, '67-'70, has been an FBF leader and project chair for more years than I know. He tirelessly and passionately works on one project after another, year after year. You will read about his latest achievements in this newsletter: the Computer Project at Lycée Provincial à Koudougou, the Literacy Through the Arts Project in Lanfiera, and the Yelbougua Pharmacy Construction Project. He works with a stellar committee of people to get the job done. And he does all of it with no reward other than the satisfaction of having advanced the Peace Corps Three Goals that are woven into every project. Tom lives in the Washington, DC, area. It is definitely better to know Tom than it is Washington.



 FBF President Mike Lavoie, '75 - '77

3. As I write this letter, we are in the midst of nominating and electing our next FBF Board of Directors. By the time you read this, it will be too late to be nominated and perhaps too late to vote. Regardless, please look to see the coming announcement of the new Board of Directors. I'm confident that we will have a strong leadership team that will make FBF better, stronger and more active than ever. Please participate whenever and however you may. And please get to know the new Board to the extent you do not already know them. I believe you'll also find it better to know them than all of the towns where they live.



 African Development Panel Discussion



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To contact a member of the leadership team, please visit <http://fbf.tamu.edu>.





**Koudougou’s Provincial High School Puts Its New Computers to Work**

*“In this information age, improving educational outcomes for more young people is now the most important lever for increasing economic growth and narrowing income inequality.”*  
 —Thomas Friedman

Remember the 24 boxes of computer equipment mailed to Burkina Faso in the previous Burkina Connection? Well, they arrived in several installments last summer and fall at the Provincial High School in Koudougou (Lycée Provincial à Koudougou or simply LPK)). On November 11, LPK computer science instructor, PCV Ethan Heppener, wrote about the collective response: “As we opened the boxes to set up the new posts [workstations] this weekend, we couldn’t help but truly appreciate all of the work and planning that Friends of Burkina Faso put into our shipment. Really, thank you so much. We are looking forward to making the most of these new computers.”

LPK has, indeed, made good use of the new computers. Four classes, containing 30 students each, were created immediately following installation of the new equipment. Many students, and even some faculty members, have been exposed to the Internet

for the first time. Everyone is thrilled to have such a state-of-the-art resource.

Desiré Bansé, FBF’s coordination manager for the LPK Computer Expansion project, wrote me on March 13, 2013, saying that in his view, “it is time to give full ownership of the project to the LPK team and to let them know that FBF will be available to provide additional technical guidance and assistance as long as we see fit.” Desi’s view stems from findings by FBF member Bony Porrogho, who was able to visit the school in February; extensive e-mail correspondence with the department chair, Mahamadou Ziba, and Ethan Heppener; and much enthusiasm expressed by virtually everyone associated with the project—students, parents, LPK faculty members, and U.S. and Burkinabé coordinators.

Bony Porrogho’s visit to LPK has proved to be pivotal. Its principal objectives were twofold. One was to make good use of two

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## KOUDOUGOU COMPUTERS (CONT)

desktop computers that FBF had recently sent the school. Bony was able to configure one of these computers as the school's primary server and the other as a local repository of public documents students collected from the Internet that could be used by others in the school. The other principal objective was to become acquainted with LPK's computer management team, gain a better understanding of the challenges confronting the project, and discuss ways the computer program could be improved. As a result of the discussions Bony spearheaded with students, faculty, and community leaders, LPK developed a plan to further upgrade its computer science curriculum and committed in-house resources to bolster the program.

The LPK faculty and administration are now even more strongly supportive of the project. The new principal, M. Zongo Raogo, has instructed his staff to make sure that next year's budget will absorb 30–40% of the costs for Internet connectivity. The LPK Parents Association has agreed to cover the remaining costs. The principal has also formed a LPK Management Committee to establish procedures and policies for using the school's computers and computer lab. One high-priority topic the Committee is charged to address is how to induce girls to take computer classes. Another is to upgrade the status of the computer science curriculum (see box).

After visiting LPK, Bony reported: "Overall, I was very impressed with the commitment of LPK's team and its principal

for this project. I left LPK with a true belief that money and time spent on this project was a great investment for FBF. Kids, teachers, management and parents are very enthusiastic and I believe everyone is doing and will continue to do his best to make this experience a grand success."

*FBF wishes to thank Lawrence Tech University for their donation of computers and Ambassador Seydou Bouda for his assistance with the delivery of this equipment. We also express appreciation to many others who have contributed to the success of the LPK/ FBF computer initiative. Paul Andreovich of LTU continues to share his technical skills and advice. Mead Over donated a desktop computer to LPK and joined FBF's talented Projects Committee. Maimounata Compaoré Ouattara, a former teacher and now First Counselor at the Burkinabé Embassy in Washington, D.C., has given the FBF's computer*



*subcommittee useful advice how to work with government officials in Burkina Faso. And we thank Kristie McComb and Molly Glenn for their assistance with our recent shipment of two desktop computers donated by two FBF members to Burkina Faso.*



## MOVEMENT AFOOT TO RESCHEDULE COMPUTER CLASSES



LPK computer classes begin at 7:00pm and are classified as elective courses. Members of the LPK Parents Association have complained that while it might be all right for boys to attend classes at this hour, it was not acceptable for girls to do so because families need the girls to be home during the evening to help out with household duties.

To elevate the status of computer classes and to make them more available to all, the principal, in consultation with the local representative of the Ministry of Education, has urged LPK's Management Committee to restructure the timing of computer classes so that next year they will take place during the day.



## COMPUTER CLASS CHALLENGES

Observations by Ethan Heppner, PCV

The Peace Corps selected Ethan Heppner to replace Emma Hunter as a teaching instructor at the Lycée Provincial à Koudougou just prior to the arrival of the computer equipment that FBF sent to the school. Ethan joined the computer science department and has been collaborated with Allain Gnabahous who launched the school's computer expansion program, and Mahamadou

Ziba who replaced Allain after the latter accepted a teaching position at the local university. He was assigned to the task of helping select and teach students computer skills.

Below are excerpts extracted from Ethan's blog that provide an inside look at some of the challenges of selecting students who expressed an interest in enrolling in the computer classes and imparting computer skills.



Ethan Heppner (PCV), Bony Porrogbo (FBF), Raogo Zongo (LPK Principal), Simon Souly (Treasurer of Parents Assoc), Mahamadou Ziba (LPK project leader), Zephirin Yogo (LPK steward)

Ethan began by asking students to write short essays answering three questions:

1. *IT class is optional. Instead of a grade, you will receive a certificate. What are your motivations for pursuing it?*
2. *What are your expectations? What would you like to learn?*
3. *Imagine that you have the opportunity to research anything. What would be your first topic of choice?*

I received exactly 201 responses (applications, really) for 120 spots. I read every one of them, and had to make tough decisions for every class. In fact, I'm still in that process for the fourth and final class, which meets on Friday. I have 34 excellent papers, but only 30 spots. A lot of tough decisions are made with the third question, which I think is the most interesting one. I've gotten responses ranging from 'Michael Jackson videos' to 'finding practical science experiments, and then sharing them with women in my village to see if they can make new products for the market'. By far, the most common response is some variation on 'the history of Africa/Burkina Faso', including 'Why do Europeans think that we don't have a history?'

In a subsequent postings he writes:  
A couple of days later, I wound up with this

After a rocky start last week-- between rushing to finish getting everything physically ready, figuring  
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## CHALLENGES LAUNCHING COMPUTER CLASSES (CONT)


out lesson plans, and figuring out how to manage a class of 30 kids in front of computers (many for the very first time), I think I'm on the right track. But boy, every class is a different animal. I suggested a post about lesson planning last week-- but any ounce of lesson planning ought to be amended by a few pounds of flexibility. Here are some things that are prone to happen:

**Brownouts** Sometimes, the electricity just gives. The number of computers that we have running at once can be a strain on our own circuit, but often times, the brownouts are citywide. This was a real challenge today. It's nice to have a 50 : 50 desktop-laptop ratio in the room. If the cut is just for a few minutes, the kids can pair up and share the laptops running on battery power. Or crowd around someone who is doing something interesting.

**Clic gauche!** Most of my students have never used a computer before. So, it's fascinating to watch them play around with one for the first time. They can discover new ways of doing things that many of us experienced users might otherwise overlook. That said, they can often get stuck. A common confusion is

mixing up right and left clicking.

**Monsieur, monsieur!** I get this a lot when someone gets stuck. The question is when to respond. Sometimes, it's a really easy problem that their groupmates might help them with. But between 30 used computers and new users, it can get more complicated. My troubleshooting skills have already improved a ton.

Hmmm, after mentioning 'groupmates', I should explain a little how the class is organized. We have 6 tables by design. In a class of 30, there are about 20-25 who are true beginners, and the rest have gone to an internet café at some point. I mentioned doing a bit of a test the first week-- this allowed me to split up the kids who already know a little bit, and have at least one at every table. The idea is that they'll be able to help out their classmates with the basics, which is all that we are focusing on for the moment. So far, that seems to be going really well. Burkinabé students really look out for each other-- it might have something to do with the fact that three to four of them share a bench made for two all through elementary and middle school (this balloons a normal class size to 60 or more!) 

## LET'S STAY CONNECTED!

### 'LIKE' US ON FACEBOOK

Check out our new Facebook page for updates on FBF activities, projects, and events. "Like" us and join in on conversation, information and photo sharing, and keep up-to-date on Burkina news.

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Friends-of-Burkina-Faso/244815659456>

### EMAIL LISTSERV

Receive the latest news and RPCV updates, and take part in conversation on the FBF email listserv. This forum is a great place to look for travel partners and information for planning return trips to Burkina, sharing interesting articles about Burkina, and engaging in discussion with other FBF members.

<http://fbf.tamu.edu/listserv.php>



# NEEED: LAMBS SUPPORT GIRLS' EDUCATION

by Suzanne Plopper, '67-'69



 *Alimata with her grandparents*


from the village of Danaoua, who is being raised by her grandparents. Her grandparents understand the importance of education for girls and appreciate NEEED's offer of school materials and a lamb to help their granddaughter enter primary school, after which they will help her raise her lambs and sell them each year to support future years of schooling. The grandparents are adamant that they do not want their granddaughter "to be like us". They want her to get an education and become a teacher or a doctor.

Abibata and Alimata are two of the 300 girls we supported last year, thanks to your support. Nearly 90% of "our girls" passed national exams last year to go on to middle school compared with 63% of their peers in the region. This is a testament to the structure of this self-help program, the manner in which NEEED engages the commitment of village parents and young girls, and what NEEED provides each girl in her first year (including a lamp to study by at night and a lamb which enables parents to assume responsibility for the remainder of their daughter's 12 years of primary, middle and

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**M**et Abibata and Alimata, two of the girls whose educations you have helped launch. Abibata, from the village of Koeneba, is doing very well in primary school. When asked what she likes most she replied: "I like reading and arithmetic. The teacher and my parents say that if I work hard at school, I will go to middle school. I want to become a nurse so I can treat people who are sick". Abibata's parents are very grateful to Friends of Burkina Faso for giving their daughter the opportunity to enter school. The father explained that NEEED (our partner organization that runs the project) told him that " 'all children must go to school regardless of their sex'. This is why we have sent our daughter to school so that she learns to read and write. She works hard". Abibata's mother added "I hope my daughter will have a job one day and be able to help us with a little money and food". Another high-achieving student is Alimata,



 *Abibata with her parents*

NEEED UPDATE



## NEEED: LAMBS SUPPORT GIRLS' EDUCATION (CONT)

secondary school) – all for \$80.

**Important: Wednesday, June 12, is GlobalGiving's biggest Bonus Day this year. GlobalGiving will match all donations to this project by 50% up to a maximum of \$1000 per donor. So mark your calendars.** We'll

post a reminder on the FBF listserve and on the FBF Facebook page in early June.

**Noon Meal at the Lycee Modern de l'Amitie.**

Next year will be the final year for FBF support to noon meals at the *Lycee Modern de l'Amitie*. Other partners along with parents will continue support for school lunches for the students.

**Post Secondary Education for Girls.** In November, FBF posted the Post Secondary Education for Girls Project on GlobalGiving (GG). In addition, GG allowed FBF to post the five individual education/training programs as microprojects for a limited time period. Happily, we received funding to support at least one girl in each of four of the five programs next year (teacher training, 2-year nursing training, 3-year nursing training and midwifery

training). Although we have not yet received sufficient funds to enroll a university student next year, donations received through GG will enable us to support 2-3 more girls in one or more of the above training programs next year. This is a very welcomed windfall of donations, in addition to the generous support this project receives from the Milton and Beatrice Wind Foundation and the Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas.

**Village Primary School Construction.**

Construction of an initial primary school classroom in the villages of Koeneba and Dougouri Ouidi (see photo) is nearing completion. FBF's support of this construction has enabled NEEED to receive financial support from another partner, enabling them to add two more classrooms plus equipment, a well, latrines, and an office/storage room, completing the first phase of construction. Construction of the final three classrooms will come later.

**Our most sincere thanks for your continuing support for girls' education in Burkina Faso!**



NEEED UPDATE



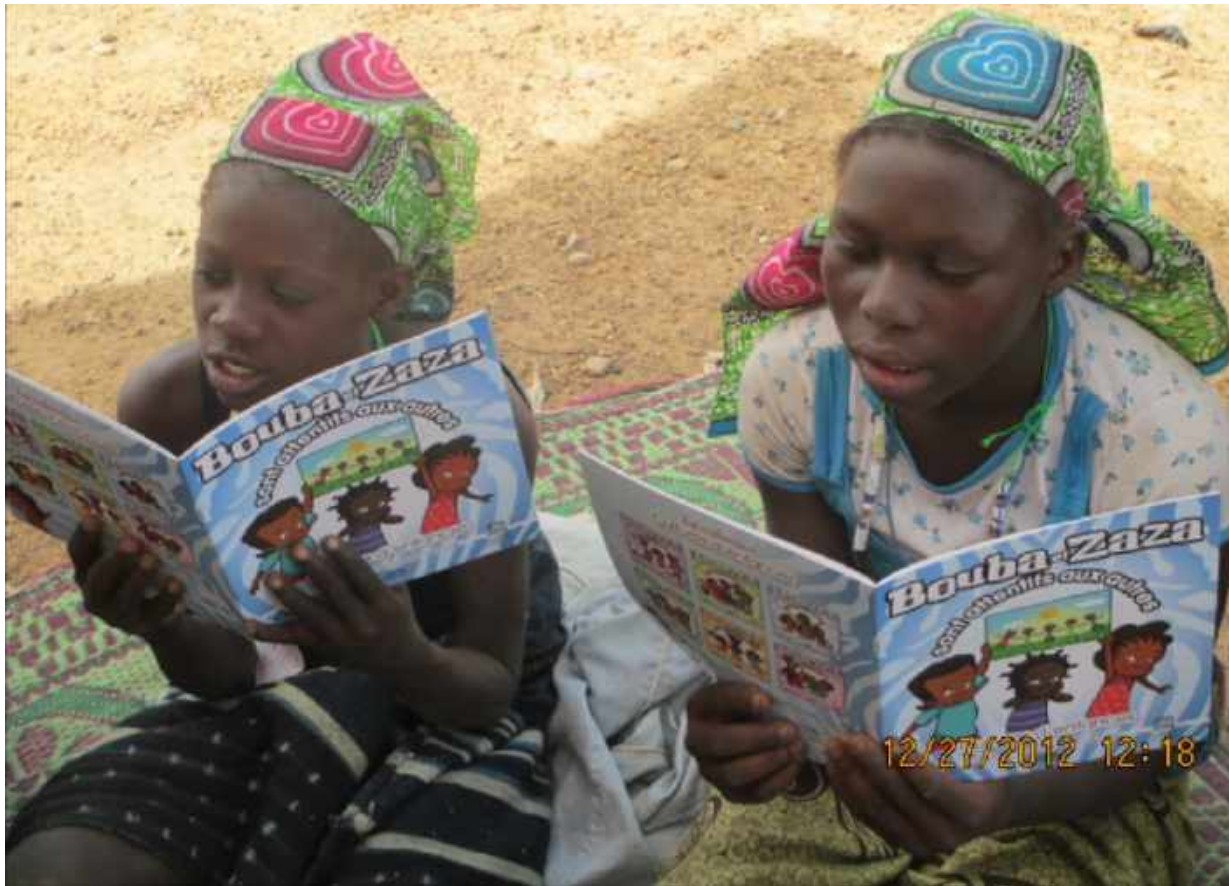
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 Primary school classroom in Dougouri Ouidi



*"When I open a book, I own a world of possibilities. Then when I begin writing, I create my own possibilities. But when you can't comprehend what's inside a book, most possibilities vanish."*

—David Baldacci



LITERACY IN BURKINA FASO

Elizabeth (Beth) Hauth joined the Peace Corps after receiving college degrees in both music and mathematics and heading up a literacy program for an elementary school in the United States. She was assigned to teach mathematics in the village of Lanfiera, near the Mali border. Beth became acutely aware of the difficulty of teaching young Burkinabé students how to read. She heard complaints from other teachers about the dearth of available reading material. And she knew that “best practices” were not being used in the classroom.

Beth developed a proposal that holds much promise to improve the learning environment in Lanfiera. The specific goal of the project is to impart sustainable skills to both students and teachers in the three primary schools in Lanfiera. The plan envisions acquiring 50 to 100 age- and culturally-appropriate books for each school. It also calls for staging a workshop where local teachers can exchange ideas about

becoming more effective in the classroom. The directors and teachers in Lanfiera have agreed to assume leadership roles in the workshop.

In January, FBF elected to lend support to this initiative and wired \$2,356 to the Peace Corps Partnership Program. Books were bought, and planning for the workshop began.

On April 10, I wrote Beth asking her if she would like to write an article for *The Burkina Connection* about Lanfiera’s literacy project. Beth immediately wrote back informing me that a week earlier she had been in a bush taxi accident that fractured her vertebrae and sprained her neck. The workshop has had to be delayed. The good news is that Beth is “on the mend,” recuperating in Ouagadougou. She is anxious about returning to her site as soon as possible so that she can get the workshop rolling! But she has not yet received medical clearance from Peace Corps to return to her village.

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# LITERACY THROUGH THE ARTS (CONT)

In Beth's absence, fellow PCV teacher Molly Morrison was able to distribute the newly purchased books to the three schools in Lanfiera. Molly was also able to provide FBF with some photographs of the student reading their new books. And Zephirin Gouabe, one of

the primary school teachers, helped us out with a written update. Below, he shares his views about the challenges of teaching kids how to read in Burkina and the importance of the Lanfiera literacy project.




 Zephirin Gouabe with his first grade class, presenting their drawings.

*We try to teach students how to read during primary school. But many don't learn. To master a new skill you must practice every day. Can students practice reading? No, they have no books. There is nothing to read except what I write on the chalkboard, and that is boring. I don't have good stories to write; I am not an artist, I cannot draw pictures on the chalkboard. Books are pretty and colorful, the pictures help the children to understand the words. And the stories are very important for their lives, teaching the children the*

*importance of protecting the environment, eating nutritious foods, and washing their hands before meals. The children want to learn how to read but they need to practice, and we [the teachers] need books for them to practice with and also new lesson ideas for how to use the books. It is not good to simply give the children books and tell them to read. They don't know how. Many other teachers don't know that drawing and singing helps the students to learn new words and increases their comprehension.*



 Reading Bouba and Zaza, a series of books that teach students a number of different, valuable, lessons.



# TREASURER'S REPORT

by Suzanne Plopper '67-'69

## Project Contributions and Disbursements in 2012

### Contributions

• Unrestricted	\$ 12,513.82
• NEEED Lambs Support Village Girls' Education Project	\$ 30,362.70
• NEEED Girls' Lycee Lunch Project	\$ 8,702.55
• NEEED Post Secondary Training Project	\$ 31,152.32
• NEEED Village Primary School Construction Project	\$ 23,475.82
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$106,207.21</b>

### Disbursements

• Koudougou Lycee Computer Project	\$ 4,905.36
• Ashoka Fellow Nursery/Forestry Project	\$ 4,100.00
• NEEED Lambs Support Village Girls' Education Project	\$ 24,447.00
• NEEED Girls' Lycee Lunch Project	\$ 24,997.00
• NEEED Post Secondary Training Project	\$ 23,224.00
• NEEED Village Primary School Construction Project	\$ 23,424.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$105,097.36</b>

### Project expenses

• Wire/Western Union charges	\$ 207.00
• Photocopying & postage	\$ 404.61
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 616.61</b>

### Year-end balance

**\$ 498.24**

## Organizational Income and Expenses in 2012

### Income

• FBF memberships	\$3,365.19
• NPCA memberships	\$2,065.00
• T-shirt sales	\$ 137.30
• Organizational overhead (donation)	\$ 35.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,602.49</b>

### Expenses

• Membership letter	\$ 210.78
• NPCA affiliation	\$ 90.00
• NPCA rebates	\$ 790.00
• District of Columbia incorporation fees	\$ 140.00
• T-shirt order	\$ 114.80
• Postage	\$ 30.46
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 1,376.04</b>

### Year-end balance

**\$ 4,226.45**

Note: Incoming memberships to NPCA and membership rebates to NPCA are received, and rebated, at different times.


TREASURER'S REPORT





 Yelbougou Health Clinic, pharmacy will be built next door.



 Yelbougou's pharmacist

Health volunteer, Amy Hart submitted a proposal to FBF on behalf of prominent leaders in Yelbougou to finance the construction of a pharmacy adjacent to the local CSPS health clinic. The community leaders requesting such assistance included the administrator of the clinic, the village chief, the elected counselor, and hospital board members. The Association des Jeunes du Département de Biéha (AJDB), a community organization led by village leaders, will be responsible for motivating the local population to construct the pharmacy. AJDB has a good track record. It recently galvanized human resources within the community to build the junior high school adjacent to the local primary school. The junior high school will be accepting students in the fall of 2013.

The pharmacy will relieve congestion, improve efficiency, and, most importantly, increase the availability of medication (e.g., ibuprofen, penicillin, malaria prophylaxis, birth control pills) to as many as 27,000

inhabitants of the Commune de Biéha—6,000 of which reside in Yelbougou. It will also provide clean storage place for indispensable material needed to run a well-functioning clinic, such as disinfectants, needles, gloves, IV equipment, cotton balls. Medication and basic health items are to be picked up monthly in Leo, the regional capital, and will be provided at state-subsidized prices to the local population via the pharmacy.

In early April, FBF decided to lend support to the Yelbougou pharmacy. We wired \$6,100 to Nebie Abdou's (the president of the Comité Villageois de Développement (CVD) bank account. (The CVD is the local group in charge of planning community events and supervising local organizations). The head of AJDB, the administrator of the CSPS, and Amy Hart will cooperate to ensure proper use of these funds by monitoring "every purchase" from this CVD account. And Bony Porrogho has graciously agreed to serve as FBF's point of contact with the folks in Yelbougou.



## SHARE YOUR STORY



The *Burkina Connection* is a biannual newsletter and a great way for members to share information and stay up to date on all things Faso. One way you can contribute is to write an article about your experience as a Volunteer in Upper Volta/Burkina Faso for an upcoming issue of the *Burkina Connection*. If you are interested in sharing a story, a memory, or some photos, please contact [fbnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:fbnewsletter@gmail.com).