

Mt. Airy benefactor aids 'Kids' in West Africa



Mamadou Sow, Ph. D. (left) and Mt. Airy's Luke Klein, co-founders of Kids of Kadiogne. (Photo by Richard S. Lee)

by MARY PRICE LEE
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Luke Klein of Mt. Airy has a mission. His goal is to help the young people of Kadiogne, a village in Senegal. In 1998, he felt himself drawn to this colorful country, although to this day, "I can't say exactly why," he told us during a recent interview at Chestnut Hill Coffee Co. Soon he was visiting Senegal, and then taking friends (including his future wife!) with him.

Senegal is the westernmost country on the African continent. It is culturally rich, with an artistic approach to daily living. There are oral traditions such as storytelling and a rich musical heritage that includes drumming and dance, an interest in traditional—and colorful—dress, and a focus on crafts. The country is, however, very poor economically. The citizens earn the equivalent of less than two U.S. dollars a day, mostly as farmers.

To see photos of Senegal and its people—and Luke has plenty of them to show—is to begin to understand his fascination. The people, from oldsters to kids, come across as proud, attractive and surprisingly happy.

Luke grew up in Chestnut Hill until the

age of 9, when his family moved to Mt. Airy. He attended Germantown Friends School all the way through, and received a degree in French from Temple University.

Luke, 33, and others in our area are involved in a two-year-old across-the-seas program to bring needed goods to the small village of Kadiogne (pronounced KA-jon-ya). They founded "Kids of Kadiogne," a nonprofit organization, one in which virtually every penny given is put right to work helping the townspeople.

A friend, equally interested in Luke's project, is Dr. Mamadou Sow. The two met at Temple University. Mamadou is from Senegal, and holds a Master's Degree in African-American literature from Dakar University. Arriving in America as a Fulbright Scholar, he earned a PhD. from Temple. He currently teaches *Wolof*, a local African language, at the University of Pennsylvania, and a course in intellectual heritage at Temple. It was in this milieu that the two joined forces to start Kids of Kadiogne in 2005.

Mamadou grew up on a farm in Senegal and expected to be a cattle herder, he told us. "But my uncle insisted I go to school!"—and so he did! He is vice-president of Kids of Kadiogne, and Luke Klein's partner in every phase of the

endeavor.

Luke meets regularly with the Senegalese community in Philadelphia. These are people who have come here to study and to teach, plus others: a doctor, a restaurateur, a lady who owns a hair-braiding salon. They live locally, mostly in West Philadelphia, and get together often, drawn by their common bonds of language and culture.

From December, 1999, Luke continued his interest in Senegal and brought groups of friends to visit the country. He was specifically interested in Kadiogne, Dr. Mamadou Sow's hometown. After launching their charity, Luke and Mamadou attracted the interest of Abington Friends School, so that today, Abington is the sister school of the grade school in Kadiogne. The Senegalese children, who learn French (still the West African language of commerce and government, though not the people's daily tongue), write in French to the school children at Abington. The upper school French students here translate their letters to English for the younger Abingtonians, and translate *their* return letters to their Senegalese pen pals into French. (This is a real if not totally painless way to learn French!)

Luke is the business manager of the Family & Play Therapy Center in Mt. Airy, which offers counseling and therapy for children and families, with eventual healing as its goal. Postgraduate training for therapists is also offered at the center. But clearly, it's "the kids" who are his passion—those in Senegal, and one soon to arrive at home! (His wife, Lynn, is pregnant.)

Kids of Kadiogne welcomes gifts small or large. Thirty dollars buys a year's school supplies for one student plus mosquito netting to guard against malaria—and helps ensure a good night's sleep, a rarity without such protection. One hundred dollars will provide one class with classroom materials for a year. The donor will receive a letter with photographs, discussing the project that the contributor has funded. As further help to the regional economy, the supplies and mosquito nets aren't imported, but are made and purchased in Senegal.

Gifts of \$300 and more go to fund a project dear to the hearts of the founders, and of everyone working to aid Kids of



A mother and child in the weekly market. (Photo by Malick Sow)

Kadiogne: a new community center that will allow for more projects, more special care. The center is now under construction but has a long way to go. When completed, the local children will study with a qualified tutor and play together in a caring environment. "Play" is essential, and these farmers' children will benefit from the opportunity to play together in the structured environment of the community center. The center will also allow the youngest children, now on a waiting list, to attend school.

Luke and Mamadou are pleased with the progress their efforts have made in just

a bit over two years. "We had a great turnout at our autumn Senegalese Dinner at Abington Friends," Luke said. Another of the charity's goals is to extend Kids of Kadiogne's help to other regions of northern Senegal. (So far, they have expanded the program to five additional villages.) There is a feeling of gratitude for both the givers and receivers of these programs and materials—volunteerism at its most direct, and unselfish.

For an online view, log onto www.kidsofkadiogne.org. You can also write to Box 18983, Philadelphia, PA 19119, or call 215-844-0426.