

Perspective and excitement for Kenyan teens on volunteer trip home



Geoffrey Soyiantet, Sally Gacheru and Gracemary Nganga compare their Kenyan beed bracelets. Gacheru and Nganga, both 17 year olds from Florissant, will return to Kenya on a service trip through Soyiantet's Vitendo4Africa organization. Sally Gacheru is wearing a black t-shirt with the Kenyan flag embroidered on it: red, black and green, with a shield in the middle. "My pride being a Kenyan is so high," she said, "so I try to wear a lot of clothes and represent myself." She also wears two bracelets: one with the colors of her native country; the other red, white and blue from her adopted home in the U.S. Gacheru, 17, moved to north St. Louis County four years ago. This month, she'll join a group of six fellow Kenyan immigrants [on a two-week trip home focused on community service. It's part of the youth-leadership program of Vitendo4Africa, an organization founded by a Kenyan immigrant that helps African newcomers adjust and connect after moving to St. Louis. Vitendo is Swahili for "action."](#)

["The idea of them going to Kenya came from them," said Geoffrey Soyiantet, founder of Vitendo4Africa. "I'm so proud of them."](#) Sally Gacheru moved to north St. Louis County from Kenya with her family four years ago. ["My pride being a Kenyan is so high," she said.](#)

Sally Gacheru moved to north St. Louis County from Kenya with her family four years ago. "My pride being a Kenyan is so high," she said. The teens have been [fundraising](#) and collecting supplies for months. Each will use half their luggage allotment to carry pens, notebooks and sanitary pads. They'll spend two days of the trip helping to build a classroom addition to a school in western Kenya. For Gacheru, who will be a senior at Hazelwood West High School this fall, it's her first time returning to Kenya since emigrating. "We'll feel like we'll leave a mark," she said. "The school supplies, if we provide them, they'll run out. But if we build a classroom, that will be a big impact that will still be there for times to come." The group will also visit an orphanage in Nairobi for which they've previously raised funds. Gracemary Nganga [moved to St. Louis when she was nine. Now 17, she's been back twice since. Nganga knows Kenyans see her differently when she returns. "People always have this mentality of you that you're from America so you have all the money in the world, and you're so well off and things like that," said Nganga, who is involved in numerous clubs and student groups at Hazelwood West, where she'll be a senior.](#)

Gracemary Nganga is involved in several sports and student clubs in the Hazelwood School District. She said she doesn't want to have a savior mentality when she returns to Kenya to volunteer. "I just want to go and help," she said. Nganga said they don't have the "savior mentality" some foreigners can have on mission trips, where they think they're solving every ill. "They think they're a hero. And I don't want to have that, I just want to go and help," she said. Having grown up in Kenya, Nganga knows what may look like a hard life to outsiders is not always the case. "Since I've lived that, I understand that," she said. "There, you see the people, their motivation they have every single day. Every single day, they try to change their lives," added Gacheru. "So from there, we'll also learn, we'll get some lessons there, we'll get their motivation, the resilience to keep on going." The teens will fit in two day trips to national parks, and Nganga and Gacheru said they'll also see relatives. "You can't go to Kenya without visiting your family," said Gacheru with a laugh.

DESE Names 2018-19 Missouri Regional Teachers of the Year

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) announced the 2018-19 Regional Teachers of the Year as part of the Missouri Teacher of the Year program. Committees comprised of peers and key stakeholders for each Regional Professional Development Center (RPDC) area selected the 32 teachers, who are each now eligible for the 2019 Missouri teacher of the year award

Agency for Teaching, Leading, and Learning

- Jean Lawson, Springfield R-XII – special education, Truman Elementary
- Sarah Miesner, Nixa Public Schools – second grade, John Thomas School of Discovery
- Jacque Rice, Dallas Co. R-I – instructional technology, Buffalo Middle School

Central RPDC

- Caroline Askew, Chilhowee R-IV – library media, Chilhowee Elementary, Chilhowee High School
- Aimee Bredehoeft, Concordia R-II – art, Concordia Elementary, Concordia High School

Heart of Missouri

- Christina Cosgrove, Warren Co. R-III – fourth grade, Daniel Boone Elementary
- Julie Ellis, Montgomery Co. R-II – English language arts, Montgomery Co. High School
- Robyn Frame, Fulton 58 – kindergarten, Bartley Elementary

Kansas City RPDC

- Anne Braun, Lee's Summit R-VII – fifth/sixth grade, Woodland Elementary
- Debra Fremouw, Fort Osage R-I – English language arts, Osage Trail Middle School
- Elizabeth Hart, Belton 124 – special education, Kentucky Trail Elementary
- Arjun Ravindran, Kansas City 33 – mathematics, Central Middle School
- Kate Rettig, Liberty 53 – third grade, Lillian Schumacher Elementary
- Lori Williams, Independence 30 – kindergarten/first grade, Three Trails Elementary

Northeast RPDC

- Robyn Howell, Macon Co. R-I – library media, Macon High School

Northwest RPDC

- Kirsten Applegate, Stanberry R-II – seventh/eighth grade, Stanberry Elementary, Stanberry High School

South Central RPDC

- Amber Galiher, West Plains R-VII – kindergarten, West Plains Elementary
- Sarah Grodie, Meramec Valley R-III – kindergarten, Zitzman Elementary

Southeast RPDC

- Christie Kenedy, New Madrid Co. R-I – fifth grade, Matthews Elementary
- Rhett Oldham, Ste. Genevieve Co. R-II – history, Ste. Genevieve Middle School

Southwest Center

- Tobin Schultz, Carl Junction R-I – business/social studies/marketing, Carl Junction High School
- Ruth Wydick, Lamar R-I – special education, West Elementary

St. Louis

- Scott Borcherding, Hazelwood – mathematics, Hazelwood West High School
- Stacy Castro, Valley Park – kindergarten, Valley Park Elementary
- Jennifer Luker, Confluence Academies – social science, Confluence Preparatory Academy
- Shelly Parks, Francis Howell R-III – English, Francis Howell North High School
- Jennifer Riesenmy, Ladue – English language arts, Old Bonhomme Elementary
- Fawn Ruch, Northwest R-I – art, Northwest High School
- Albert Sanders, St. Louis City – pre-K, Adams Elementary
- Danielle Stilts, Parkway C-2 – library media, Highcroft Ridge Elementary
- Laura Thomas, Lindbergh Schools – mathematics, Lindbergh Sr. High School
- Katherine Zak, Wentzville R-IV – first grade, Lakeview Elementary

The Regional Teacher of the Year program began in 2016 in an effort to celebrate outstanding teachers from all areas of the state. The Missouri Teacher of the Year for 2018-19 will be selected in August. The program recognizes the efforts of effective teachers in providing a quality education to their students. Beth Davey, a music teacher from Iveland Elementary (Ritenour) is the current Missouri Teacher of the Year. DESE conducts the Missouri Teacher of the Year program with financial support provided by the Boeing Company and the Monsanto Fund.

July 17, 2018