

salute to **NURSES**

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Helping hands

Tennesseans help Kenyan nurse in fight against AIDS

Excellence in nursing

Highlights from annual STN awards

Nurse **Jocelyn Macharia** of Kenya recently earned her master's degree thanks to donations from Middle Tennessees



Nashville nurses help fight against AIDS in Kenya

For most Americans, attending grad school means driving across town, sitting in an air-conditioned or heated building, getting home a little late and missing out on some leisure time. But for Jocelyn Macharia, a nurse in Kenya, it meant extensive travel — often in circumstances that Americans would find less than desirable — and closing her health clinic for days at a time.

“Distance learning takes on a different meaning in Kenya,” says Nashville resident Mary Gresham Buchanan Barr.

Barr is a nurse and the daughter of Nashville’s Poppy Buchanan, a Vanderbilt nursing grad and former nursing instructor who founded Burning Bush Inc., a nonprofit microloan lender that once helped fund the efforts of community health workers (like Macharia) in Kenya.

Salute to Nurses first introduced readers to Macharia back in 2009, just as she was preparing to enter graduate school at St. Paul’s University in Limuru, Kenya; she graduated in October of 2012 with a master’s degree in Community Pastoral Care and HIV/AIDS. In a 2009 email exchange with *STN*, Macharia expressed her deep desire to fight the AIDS epidemic in her country and her frustration at being unable to do more for her patients.

“They need somebody to support them, counsel them — and actually they have no funds to meet their treatment and the services,” Macharia said. “There are also very many questions they ask, and I have no answer for them due to lack of enough knowledge.”

But Macharia could not afford the tuition for the master’s program. That’s where Burning Bush came in. Buchanan and fellow Vandy nursing grad Ginger Manley teamed up with other Vanderbilt graduates to produce a book of essays (*Gotcha Covered: A Legacy of Service and Protection*) with proceeds going to Burning Bush. Published under the auspices of the Tennessee Nurses Apron



ABOVE: Nurse Jocelyn Macharia receives her master’s degree from St. Paul’s University in Limuru, Kenya.

RIGHT: Macharia runs a health clinic in Kenya that is focused on HIV/AIDS awareness, prevention and treatment. SUBMITTED PHOTOS



Partnership, the book contained essays written by nurses, each one inspired by one of several vintage kitchen aprons that Manley inherited from an aunt.

Barr, who contributed an essay to

Gotcha Covered, accompanied her mother to visit Macharia in Kenya in 2009. She says Macharia's dedication to her education — and her ultimate goal of treating and preventing AIDS in her community — was unwavering. Barr describes the lengths that Macharia had to go to in order to complete her master's degree.

"Jocelyn would have to close her clinic every other month for four days, as there were not enough nurse practitioners to substitute for the owner," says Barr. "She would travel two hours by matatu, a small taxi bus — usually a VW minivan where the owner/operator's sole aim is to stuff as many people as possible into it to maximize profit. Comfort is not a consideration."

After traveling to the school campus, Macharia would have to secure room and board at a safe guesthouse, incurring not only the expense of lodging but also the loss of income from closing her clinic.

"Jocelyn described this to me matter-of-factly and seemed almost surprised by my questions," says Barr. "Education was her goal, so that she, in turn, could care for the people in her community. No effort was too great."

According to Nyokabi Kamau, director of the master's program at St. Paul's, Macharia is now better equipped to meet the health needs of her community.

"The program that Jocelyn undertook prepares her to better understand issues beyond the practice of a health provider but also be able to be analytical in questioning why things happen the way they do," Kamau told *STV* via email. "I am confident that she is now able to see HIV as more of a social/economic/political problem rather than just a medical one. This to me is the greatest achievement we get from this M.A."



Jocelyn Macharia (left) assists a patient at her clinic in Kenya.

Macharia says one important lesson she learned while earning her master's is that no one has a "monopoly of knowledge" and that everyone in a community has an important role to play in order to help effect change.

"We all need one another to transform the world, and together we can make it," Macharia said in a recent email, noting that teamwork is necessary to help fill the missing gaps in the treatment and prevention of HIV and AIDS.

It's an effort that Kamau says is fraught with obstacles.

"HIV and AIDS continue to be a major problem in Kenya — with prevalence rates in some areas still standing at over 10 percent," says Kamau. "Issues

of stigma, shame, silence, blame are still thriving. I had an opportunity to visit Jocelyn's base group in her home area and was amazed by the challenges they still face. People are still ashamed of the disease."

And the challenge is not just educating the community about AIDS and fighting the stigma that surrounds it. Macharia and her team must also deal with the issues of poverty, unemployment and limited resources.

In an effort to address some of these issues, Macharia's clinic is involved in creating IGAs (income generating activities) that engage the community. Macharia is currently focused on the youth in her area, involving them in planting trees to sell, raising rabbits, weaving mats, making beads, and making and selling liquid soap. These activities not only keep the youth from being idle but also provide employment and a paycheck for some. The efforts also raise money to provide better resources at the clinic and to help fund treatment for those who cannot afford it.

"We are trying to network with other funding organizations," says Macharia.

Though Burning Bush has ceased operation, the need in Kenya still continues. But other organizations are working to address health crises around the globe — including in Kenya. One is Hope Through Healing Hands, a group associated with the Frist Global Scholars Program. Together they invest in efforts to support sustainable health development and also sponsor college students from Vanderbilt, Meharry, East Tennessee State University and Princeton University, sending them to underserved parts of the world to "promote peace through

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LEFT: While learning to prepare soil for planting trees (one of several income generating activities in Macharia's community), a woman living positively with HIV (standing) talks to others about the importance of antiretroviral drugs. Macharia is seated at right. **RIGHT:** Macharia trains her staff on the importance of making the community aware of how to prevent HIV transmission from mother to child.



Why I love my job

Saint Thomas FNP wouldn't work anywhere else

During her college years, Kim Ervin found personal fulfillment in helping others. That beneficent attitude has served her well in establishing herself as a successful nurse practitioner. Ervin shares a glimpse at her life and work with *Salute to Nurses* readers.

How did you become interested in nursing as a profession?

I discovered great satisfaction in helping people while working at a psychiatric facility when I was in college. It was that experience that led to the interest in nursing as a profession. As a registered nurse and eventually as a nurse practitioner, I've been privileged to work at the Saint Thomas Family Health Center West with some of the best people I've known.

What are your daily responsibilities?

Physical examinations, diagnosing, ordering and interpreting lab and imaging results, prescribing medication and — just as importantly — extending compassion.

Is there anything about your work that people might find surprising?

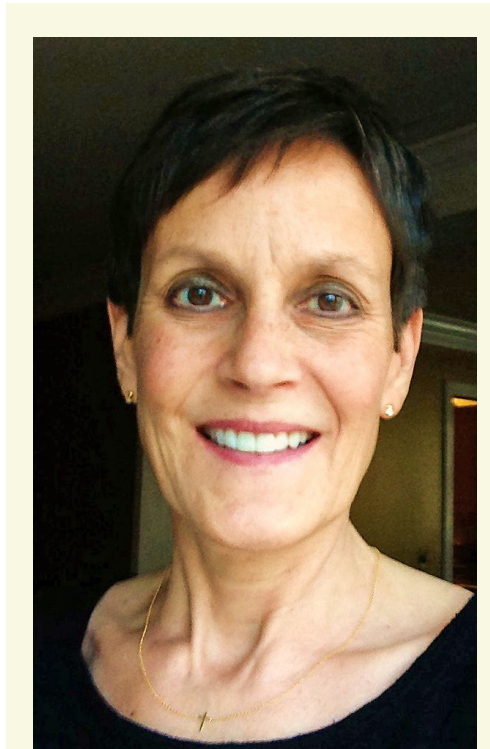
People are often surprised to learn that the Saint Thomas Family Health Center is not just for acute medical problems. While we do see our share of acute problems, we are a primary care clinic. We are very involved in preventive care, among both those with and without disease. Each provider sees many patients on a regular basis. We cultivate relationships with our patients.

What do you find rewarding or frustrating about your work?

It's very rewarding to see people take an interest in their health care. It's frustrating to deal with the barriers to health care, particularly among those who are uninsured or underinsured.

How do you stay motivated?

I stay motivated when I remember it's not



Kim Ervin, FNP

Job title: Nurse practitioner, Saint Thomas Family Health Center

Education: Master of Science in nursing (MSN), certified by American Academy of Nurse Practitioners (AANP)

Affiliations: Member of Middle Tennessee Advanced Nurses and American Association of Nurse Practitioners

about me and by regularly seeking God's guidance. I believe He often provides that guidance through my colleagues. I can't overstate what a wonderful group of caring people we have at the clinic. There's nowhere else I'd rather work.

What do you consider to be the greatest accomplishment of your nursing career?

If I've ever helped lighten the burden for anyone, I'm thankful.

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health."

Regardless of how much outside assistance comes to Kenya and communities like Macharia's, it seems clear she is dedicated to doing all that she can to improve the lives of her countrymen. Though she is past the age of 50, Macharia has already set new goals, among them, earning a PhD.

"The next dream, God willing, is to further my studies by specializing on gender," she says.

Macharia also plans to continue managing her clinic and teach part-time at area universities. Kamau has little doubt that Macharia will succeed in her plans, describing her as "committed, hardworking and very eager to learn and to improve on her work."

"Jocelyn is a capable woman who can manage the academic rigor that goes with doctoral studies. I am certain this would help her to even better understand the big-picture issues surrounding the AIDS pandemic rather than the focus on individual behavioral issues."

As we close this chapter of Macharia's story, we look forward to hearing from Dr. Macharia in the next one.

LEARN MORE

Read more about the efforts of **Hope Through Healing Hands** at hope-throughhealinghands.org.

To find out more about the book **Gotcha Covered** — or to obtain one of the few remaining copies — visit www.amazon.com/Gotcha-Covered-Legacy-Service-Protection/dp/1935271350.

To learn even more about the book — and the aprons and history behind them — visit [the-nursesapronpartnership.com](http://thenursesapronpartnership.com).