



Seva Canada Society • 100-2000 West 12th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V6J 2G2
Tel: 604-713-6622 Fax: 604-733-4292 Toll free 1-877-460-6622 www.seva.ca

MEDIA RELEASE

Eye Care Centre Opens in Tanzania with Canadian Help and UBC faculty members win prestigious International Blindness Prevention Award

Vancouver, BC – (October 21, 2008) Two back-to-back events on November 4 and November 10 mark the growth, success, and recognition of the Kilimanjaro Centre for Community Ophthalmology and its founders, Dr. Susan Lewallen and Dr. Paul Courtright.

KCCO, established in 2001 in Moshi, Tanzania is dedicated to reducing blindness in Africa and is a unique training institution in Africa. On November 4, its new three-story 25,700 square-foot training centre, at the base of Mount Kilimanjaro, will be inaugurated. The centre focuses on training, research and program development, aimed at decreasing blindness in eastern Africa, using local talent and skills.

In a note of congratulations, Dr Hannah Faal, past president of the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, praised the “focused investment being made in capacity building of Tanzanians” as a “unique feature” of the work of KCCO.

Funding for construction of the \$1.2 million centre came from organizations and individuals from around the globe including Vancouver. Besides a new modern surgical operating theatre for treatment of eye conditions for the Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre Eye Department (to which KCCO is attached), the training centre includes a large resource centre, lecture rooms, computer laboratory and offices.

Originally envisioned to serve eastern Africa, the demand for training has grown so that doctors and other eye care professionals have come from countries across the continent, Ghana to Eritrea to Madagascar, as well as those closer to Tanzania. Some of the programs assisted by KCCO have seen two and three-fold increases in eye care services provided.

Six days later, on November 10th Drs. Lewallen and Courtright will be honoured with the prestigious “International Blindness Prevention Award” for 2008 from the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO).

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The AAO is the world's largest association of eye physicians and surgeons, with more than 27,000 members worldwide. The International Blindness Prevention Award, established in 1992, honours "individuals who have made significant contributions to the prevention of blindness or restoration of sight". The award will be presented to Drs Courtright and Lewallen on November 10 at the Academy's Annual Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia.

Dr. Courtright, an epidemiologist, and Dr. Lewallen, an ophthalmologist, are both on faculty in the Department of Ophthalmology at the University of British Columbia. Dr. Courtright is also on faculty in the Department of Health Care and Epidemiology. Dr. Courtright established and directed the British Columbia Centre for Epidemiologic & International Ophthalmology, helping UBC to gain a reputation of expertise in international ophthalmology.

"Seva Canada is extremely proud of Drs. Courtright and Lewallen, both for their award and for their dedication in creating the only training institution for community ophthalmology in Africa," says Penny Lyons, Executive Director of Seva Canada (www.seva.ca). Seva Canada, an international eye care non-profit based in Vancouver, is a major funder of KCCO's work in Africa.

For interviews, pictures, and other information please contact Dr. Paul Courtright at pcourtright@kcco.net (phone 255-754-971174). Additional information can be found on the KCCO website: www.kcco.net. Or contact Seva Canada at 604-713-6622, fundraising@seva.ca, www.seva.ca.

On November 20th, Vancouver ophthalmologist Dr Janette Lindley and her husband Daniel Peart will be climbing Mount Kilimanjaro to raise funds for Seva Canada and the sight programs conducted by in eastern Africa. Dr Lindley and her sister, Dr. Susan Lindley, also an ophthalmologist, at McGill, have issued a challenge to their ophthalmologist colleagues to raise funds for Seva, UBC vs McGill.

Visit <http://www.seva.ca/kilimanjarochallengeforseva.htm> for more information or to donate.

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