

Making A Splash

By Mark Ray

How one **Eagle Scout** is bringing water — and a whole lot more — to **South Sudan**.

Like most kids, Buey Tut hated doing chores when he was young. And in his Sudanese village, one chore ranked by far the worst: fetching water from a river 3 or 4 miles away. Today, he jokes that he missed out on a soccer career because he was always fetching water for his mother.

But, of course, access to clean drinking water is no laughing matter in Tut's homeland of South Sudan, which declared independence from Sudan in 2011. Only half of the country's residents have access to improved water sources like wells. The rest must make long treks to rivers and waste precious resources purifying surface water.



“None of it would be possible if I was doing it by myself. The reason I’ve been able to build up the support is because of my Eagle Scout experience.”

Tut left his homeland at age 8, as a part of a wave of refugees escaping civil unrest. After he arrived in Omaha, Neb., in 1998, he had to worry about fetching water only when he was camping with Boy Scout Troop 33, in which he became an Eagle Scout. But memories of trips to the river with Stubborn, his family's mule, never left him. Nor did those memories leave fellow refugee and Troop 33 Eagle Scout Jacob Khol. At the University of Nebraska at Omaha, the friends began dreaming of ways to support their hurting homeland.

In 2011, the same year Tut became a U.S. citizen, he and Khol founded the nonprofit organization Aqua-Africa, along with fellow South Sudanese expatriate Buay Wiyual. As of this summer, Aqua-Africa has drilled 13 wells, which now serve 6,500 people. And that's just the beginning. Aqua-Africa's five-year goal is to provide 200,000 people with clean water.



Fresh water brings smiles to the children of New Site, a village in South Sudan. The well, built near a school, is the work of Eagle Scout Buey Tut's Aqua-Africa organization.



Raising Money and More

Each water system Aqua-Africa builds costs about \$15,000. Most of the organization’s support comes from foundations (40 percent), churches and other organizations (40 percent), and individuals (10 percent). To raise the last 10 percent — and to raise awareness — Aqua-Africa holds an array of events, such as “Drink for Africa” nights at pubs around Omaha. Last year, the group tried something new: “Laugh for Africa,” a comedy night featuring local stand-up comics, including one Buey Tut.

Much of Tut’s material came from his many trips to South Sudan. “I don’t think anything should be taken too seriously,” he says.

On a more serious note, Tut testified before Congress in August 2013, appearing before a panel examining the effectiveness of U.S. government funding of international water programs. And last fall, he accepted a Sustainability Award (right) at the BSA’s second Sustainability Summit.



Tut (lower left), Aqua-Africa’s executive director, visits his organization’s first well in Langabu village, South Sudan. Before breaking ground on a well in Nuglere village (upper left), Tut honors village elders’ requests to form a circle and pray for water. Elsewhere, Tut and a child from the village (above) test Aqua-Africa’s “Village Supplier” water-delivery system.

A PRECIOUS RESOURCE

Aqua-Africa doesn’t just swoop in and dig wells. Simply drilling a well and walking away raises more questions than it answers: Who will manage this precious resource? Who will fix the well if it breaks? How invested is the village in the well’s success?

To answer some of those questions, Aqua-Africa conducts feasibility studies of proposed sites, favoring villages that are already making progress. It also expects the village to be a partner in the project. “Eighty-five percent of the responsibility is on Aqua-Africa in terms of machinery and things of that nature,” Tut says. “Fifteen percent becomes their responsibility.”

Moreover, water is just the beginning. While it takes only a few days to install a well, Tut and other Aqua-Africa workers typically stay in a village for up to two months. Much of that additional time is spent teaching resource management and microdemocracy. The vehicle for that teaching is the water committee, a local board formed to manage and maintain each new well, decide what to charge for the water and ensure that everyone has equal access to it. To form a water committee, Aqua-Africa teaches villagers how democracy works, then runs elections — complete with secret ballots, term limits and official announcements of the results.

Don’t be surprised if that sounds familiar. “We’re basically using the patrol



Drilling wells in South Sudan is the final step in a long process that starts at Tut’s office in Omaha, Neb. That’s where he meets with board members (above), plans routes for supplies to safely enter South Sudan (above right) and designs fundraiser T-shirts (right). Tut’s board members include his former Scoutmaster, Dr. Lyn Graves (far right, top), and Buay Wiyual (far right, left).

method,” Tut says. “My Scouting experience is intertwined with what I do now. Everything I’ve done there, I’ve applied now in Aqua-Africa.”

PREPARED FOR THE FUTURE

And just as patrol elections prepare Scouts to vote in “real” elections, water-committee elections are preparing villagers to vote in South Sudan’s first general election, slated for 2017. Tut envisions villagers who’ve formed local water committees demanding fair national elections.

Tut is also working to build a sense of national unity in a fledgling nation beset by tribal fighting. “In South Sudan and other developing countries, the biggest issue you have is different groups, like the Nuer and the Dinka, fighting against each other,” he says. “What we wanted to do is bridge that gap.” To that end, he has intentionally not drilled wells in his home Upper Nile State, where his own Nuer tribe dominates, choosing instead to serve villages in Dinka-dominated states.

Although Tut has high aspirations for the villages he serves, he doesn’t spend all his time in South Sudan bridging gaps and teaching democracy. He also enjoys simply getting to know people, visiting schools and even playing pickup games of soccer.

After all, kids who don’t have to fetch water have time to sharpen their skills on the soccer pitch. 🏈



From South Sudan to Scouting and Back



Buey Tut joined Scouting when fellow Sudanese refugee (and future Aqua-Africa cofounder) Jacob Khol invited him to a troop meeting. The pitch was simple: “They talk about a lot of character-development stuff, and you get to play basketball.” But Troop 33 offered more than basketball: It offered a refuge from Omaha’s dingy and dangerous Wintergreen Apartments, where Africans like Tut were constantly harassed. “For us to get to go somewhere on Saturday afternoons where it was safe, where nobody bothered us, where nobody called us names was just amazing,” he says.

The troop also offered Tut his first introduction to leadership. He remembers when, on his third or fourth campout, Scoutmaster Dr. Lyn Graves sent him to deliver some instructions to a group of older Scouts. “I was like, ‘Dr. Graves, they’re kind of big. I can’t tell these guys what to do,’” he recalls. Graves insisted, the older Scouts obeyed and Tut was on his way to being a leader.

For his Eagle Scout project, Tut worked on a trail in Hummel Park, a favorite troop destination. He refurbished the first half of the trail, while Khol did the second half. They later became Eagle Scouts in the same order. “I’m pretty sure we’re the first South Sudanese to become Eagle Scouts,” he says.

After graduating from college with a degree in economics and political science, Tut worked as a district Scout executive for the Mid-America Council. There he learned many of the community-building skills he uses today when he works with South Sudanese villagers.

Tut, now 27, remains an assistant Scoutmaster with Troop 33, and Graves, who still leads the troop, chairs Aqua-Africa’s board of directors. “It’s been pretty amazing to have a friendship with Buey,” Graves says. “He certainly credits Scouting with developing the leadership skills that have enabled him to step out as a small-businessman to start this nonprofit.”

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: BSA FILE; COURTESY OF AQUA-AFRICA (3); W. GARTH DOWLING (4); COURTESY OF BUEY TUT