

Engineering Ministries International Volunteers Design Training Center

Gitega February 2007, by Peggy Parsons

On February 3, a team of eight volunteers with Engineering Ministries International arrived in Burundi. This team included 2 architects, a surveyor, a water chemist and 4 civil or structural engineers. EMI is a 25 year old organization that sends volunteer architects and engineers on short-term projects to design facilities for third world groups meeting the needs of the poor and oppressed. Their mission this time was to help THARS make a top quality master plan for the training center that is envisioned for Gitega.

In 2006 the Governor of Gitega gave a multiple acre piece of land to THARS with the condition that it must be built upon within a year. Construction was started immediately on a building that could serve as temporary offices for THARS and become a residence later on. In January 2007 a foundation was dug and laid for a multi-purpose teaching center/chapel/dining hall.

When the team arrived, the surveyors got to work first. The land slopes gently down one side of a gentle valley with a river called the Dawn River running at the bottom. There are roads on two sides of the property. There is a ravine running long-ways through the site. The existing building and foundation of the second building are at the top of the site. The surveyors carefully mapped the entire property and this info was entered into a computer program for the site.

City water runs right to the corner of the site. The water chemist tested this water. It was found to be low in bacteria, minerals and iron, low in turbidity and generally of good to excellent quality. There is at this point no electricity to the site. While the surveyors were working, the architects spent two days walking the property with David and listening to his dreams for God's use of it.

They interviewed other THARS staff members and started drawing a plan that would eventually include fourteen buildings. These buildings make an entire campus of training and healing, which can house staff, students, clients and people on retreats. David envisions a place of healing for the traumatized, a place of renewal and training for healers, clinical and research facilities, and a permanent home for THARS.

The structural engineers were making a careful study of materials and local construction techniques and conferring with David's local contractor, Jerome. They developed a catalogue of *best building practices for Burundi* combining local expertise and the knowledge that the engineers brought with them. Then computers and drawing boards were set up, and not much sleep was taken, as in the last two days a full set of drawings of the master site plan

and detailed drawings of the phase one buildings were prepared. These drawings were reviewed on another walk of the site and refinements were made. The final set of designs was presented to a group of THARS supporters in Bujumbura on the sixth day.

Careful consideration was given to costs. The design team was amazed to find out that while a building in the USA usually costs about \$100-120 per square foot, this campus can be built for about \$20 per square foot. Buildings on the site have been priced out at between \$25,000 and \$50,000 for the most part. With complete infrastructure and landscaping, the entire campus of 14 buildings, parking, sports facilities can be built for about \$800,000. The architects estimated that the same campus in the U.S., without land would cost ten times as much.

The design is entirely pleasing, looks to be very functional, will be easily constructed with local materials and workers. Everyone connected with the work this week can now see the healing and training center in their mind and hearts. The designs will be ready for volunteer building crews and fundraising within a couple of months.

It is an exciting time to be a supporter of THARS.