

## **How Long Are Your Arms?**

While most of us are content to belong to our local or regional guilds, four Midwestern quilters are finding a way to reach around the world to share sewing, quilting and business skills with refugee women at the Amani Ya Juu program in Nairobi, Kenya.

### **The Stitchin' Sisters Connection**

Rosemary Wissink, of Fall Creek, Wisconsin, began working with the women at Amani Ya Juu in 2001 when her daughter was teaching at an international academy in Nairobi. At the end of 2007, she is making her fifth trip to Nairobi. Her 2007 travel team includes Shelly Stokes of Miltona, MN, June Vogltance of Dodge, NE, and Bonnie Bosma of Rochester, MN. This will be Shelly's second trip to Nairobi, while June and Bonnie are joining the team for their first Amani adventure.

The travel team has a wide range of experience that will serve them well as they work at Amani at the end of this year. Team "mom" Rosemary Wissink, owner of Stitchin' Sisters, has been designing quilting patterns since 2000. Shelly Stokes, owner of Cedar Canyon Textiles, has a background in fabric dyeing and surface design. June Vogltance is a quilt designer and the owner of VOGIES Quilts and Treasures. Bonnie Bosma, owner of Quilting Magic, is an accomplished long-arm quilter, bringing much needed expertise in that area.

### **About Amani Ya Juu**

Amani Ya Juu is a sewing and marketing training project for marginalized women in Kenya. Many of these women are refugees from other parts of Africa and have endured war, ethnic conflict, abuse, neglect, poverty, and challenges beyond our comprehension. The name Amani Ya Juu is from the Kiswahili language and means "higher peace." The women are taught sewing, marketing and survival skills, and also learn about the peace that transcends all cultural and ethnic differences through God's love and reconciliation. At the Amani center, women experience nourishment not only for the body but also the soul, along with the healing of shattered lives. They find value within themselves through the love, acceptance and care of their sisters. These women, in turn, reach out to their African sisters, spreading the peace by helping them establish sister missions in Rwanda, Burundi and other parts of Kenya. To learn more about the Amani project, visit [www.amaniafrica.org](http://www.amaniafrica.org).

On past trips, Rosemary and her teams transported a number of sewing machines with them when they traveled to Nairobi. They chose Janome Gem machines because they were easily transported in the team's luggage. On the last trip, it became clear that the small machines were not heavy enough to use in a production facility. Shelly and Rosemary ventured into downtown Nairobi to visit the local sewing machine dealers and found a machine that is heavier than a typical domestic machine but not as intimidating as industrial machines.

With a specific machine in mind, they decided to start an Adopt-a-Machine program, asking groups and individuals to donate funds that will be pooled to purchase machines in

Nairobi. Buying machines in Nairobi supports the local economy and makes it much easier to purchase parts for the machines. It also allows the team to take other supplies in their luggage to be donated to the Amani project.

### **Getting Ready to Go**

The team is working on several fronts before this trip. They are raising funds to defray the cost of the trip and for the Adopt-a-Machine program, including a Nolting long-arm machine that will work with a frame donated by Hinterburg Designs. They are also collecting donations of specific sewing and quilting products that are easily transportable.

To prepare for their teaching role, the team met for a weekend in May to review ideas for wall hangings, postcards, tote bags and machine quilting designs. They also considered embellishment ideas for some of the items that are already in production at Amani. The team will refine the ideas for these projects before traveling to Nairobi in mid-November. Upon arrival at Amani Ya Juu, team members will be assigned to work with specific women, developing the techniques for each of the proposed products. These women, in turn, will be responsible for integrating the products (or variations of them) into the Amani lines by refining the products and then training women from the production teams.

### **How You Can Help**

You can make a tax-deductible contribution to the Adopt-a-Machine program or the Stitchin' Sisters 2007 travel team, or you can donate supplies for use at Amani. Visit [www.cedarcanyontextiles.com](http://www.cedarcanyontextiles.com) or [www.vogies.com](http://www.vogies.com) and look for the links to "Support Amani Ya Juu." These sites will have more information about the trip to Amani, links to the donation site, and a specific list of supplies that are needed for this trip. You may also send a check payable to the Amani Foundation, PO Box 28133, Chattanooga, TN 37424. Please designate your gift to the Stitchin' Sisters 2007 team or the Adopt-a-Machine program.

### **Reaping the Rewards**

While the teaching and fundraising activities are important, the real rewards are the personal connections made between the team members and the women at Amani Ya Juu. The women are truly amazed that people from around the world care enough to send supplies, support the Amani mission, and take the time away from their families and businesses to travel to Nairobi to work with them. It is this human connection, woman to woman, that leaves a profound mark on anyone who makes this type of trip. It is a privilege to be welcomed into their world, to share their frustrations and their joy.

Rosemary, Shelly, Bonnie and June hope that you will extend your arms to support our work with Amani Ya Juu. They appreciate your financial gifts, thoughts and prayers as they prepare for their Nairobi trip at the end of 2007.