



DAILY PILOT

Yemin Orde Graduate Makes a Splash in Southern California

Jewish Federation families host international student for O.C. tour

*By Alex Chan
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After years of supporting children through the philanthropy division of the Jewish Federation & Family Services, four Newport Beach families decided to offer a trip to the U.S. for one of the international students who benefited from their giving.

The families hosted 24-year-old Jean Luc for a nine-day visit during which they saw the sites, including Disneyland and Angel Stadium.

The federation, based in Irvine, focuses on bringing the Jewish community together through programs and community service in Orange County and Israel.

The families met Luc when he was living in Yemin Orde Youth Village in Israel — his home after a series of events that left him an orphan and separated from the family he had left in Guinea.

Yemin Orde is a 77-acre village on Mount Carmel. It is home for about 400 youths from around the world who have been orphaned or abandoned or who come from extreme poverty. It offers not only shelter but also academics, sports and various other opportunities.

While living in the village, Luc said, he wanted nothing more than an education. It was through the village's scholarship fund, which is supported by the federation and those four Newport families — Susan and Sam Wyman, Nadine and Jeff Glass, Adrienne and Rick

Matros, and Susanna and Stuart Wolfe — that he was able to reach his goal. He will graduate from the Academic College of Tel Aviv-Jaffa in Israel this June.

Sam Wyman, one of the federation's leaders, first met Luc during a mission trip to the youth village in 2008. After learning of Luc's journey to Israel, Wyman told his friends and family in Newport about the young man.

Luc was born into a Muslim family in Guinea. He remembers being 10 years old when a group of rebel fighters stormed into his family's two-bedroom home one night. He heard them fire the gunshots that killed his parents and newborn brother.

Luc took his 4-year-old sister and they jumped out a window. They ran and hid in a forest until early morning.

When they returned home, they found it destroyed and went to live with their grandmother in another village.

Luc often thought about how his father would speak about the importance of education. He knew he had to get into school somehow, and this desire may have pushed him toward a frightening but ultimately fruitful path.

When Luc was a young teenager, he met a man in a Senegal marketplace who promised he could take him to Europe to attend a decent school. Luc was skeptical, but he took the man's offer.

One morning, the man picked up Luc in a jeep that carried a few other men. As they drove, he noticed they were not heading toward the airport as promised.

"I started asking a lot of questions about where we were going," Luc said. "Then the men in the car pulled out their guns."

He realized he had encountered human smugglers. They drove from Guinea to Egypt in six months.

As they neared the Israeli border, Luc said, the smugglers feared they would be discovered by border patrols. They fled and left Luc behind.

With no home or family nearby, he was arrested and presented to an Israeli magistrate. The judge, a former member of Yemin Orde, knew the young man could find safety in the youth village.

Luc embraced his newfound home.

"It was a new culture and new religion," Luc said. "But I didn't feel like a stranger. I was given hope and learned from being in Israel."

His sister continued to live in Guinea with her grandmother and is in contact with her brother.

After Luc met the families of the federation's family philanthropy division, a friendship formed.

He arrived in Orange County on April 19 for his first visit to the United States. The Wyman and Glass family hosted him during his trip.

Toward the end of the week, Luc visited the Tarbut V'Torah Community Day School in Irvine to share his story with the students.

Nadine Glass considers it an honor to support a student who has championed a difficult past.

"My husband has a philosophy that if you give a man a fish, then you feed him for a day, but if you teach him how to fish, you feed him for life," she said. "That's why it's so important that Jean Luc receives his education."

Luc is now preparing to attend the business program at his current university. He is in the process of renewing his student visa to pursue his master's degree.