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SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

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Life

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IN TRIBUTE

Former Santa Barbara resident designs line of bath and beauty products inspired by her grandmothers

COMING MONDAY



Her 'aha!' moment

FACE Africa leader to talk to Girls' Inc. about helping Liberia with clean water

By **DAVE MASON**
NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER

Saran Kaba Jones enjoyed a happy childhood in thriving Liberia.

Then a civil war erupted. It was 1989. Mrs. Jones was 8 when she moved with her father, Brahima Kaba, a sociology professor at the University of Liberia in Monrovia, and her mother, businesswoman Fatmata Kaba, to nearby Abidjan, Ivory Coast. They left Liberia just before a six-year war, which preceded another civil war from 1999 to 2003.

When Mrs. Jones revisited a still-recovering Liberia in 2008, she was shocked.

"It was a completely different Liberia," Mrs. Jones, 32, told the News-Press by phone from her Boston home, where she lives with husband, attorney

Ainsworth Jones, and their son Maick, 4, and daughter Ma'j, 5.

"The Liberia I grew up in, as a young child, was prosperous and booming," Mrs. Jones said. "We had electricity; we had running water. We had health care facilities. We had great schools. It was a fairly developed country, like any other developed country you could think of."

The two wars changed all of that, and Mrs. Jones was determined to help Liberia by starting FACE Africa. "FACE Africa" originally stood for Fund a Children's Education Africa, but Mrs. Jones soon realized Liberia needed something else before it could heal and grow.

Clean water. Mrs. Jones kept the name FACE Africa, but changed its emphasis from education to building wells with clean water. She'll discuss her efforts at Girls Inc. of Carpinteria's "Women of Inspiration" Luncheon

at 11:30 a.m. Monday at the nonprofit, 5315 Foothill Road, in Carpinteria.

Victoria Juarez, Girls Inc. of Carpinteria executive director, praised Mrs. Jones as an ideal role model for the nonprofit, which works to help girls be "strong, smart and bold."

"She went in with one goal, to provide education (in Liberia), but she realized to do that, other issues had to be addressed (such as water)," Ms. Juarez said. "She wasn't afraid to change course. I think that says a lot about her as a leader."

The civil wars in Liberia led to the destruction of pipes and ended running water in homes, said Mrs. Jones, who lived with her parents in Cairo, Paris and Cyprus after leaving Liberia. Her father's work included serving as ambassador to Egypt, and she inherited his interest in world affairs, earning a bachelor's degree in international relations in 2005 at Lesley University in Cambridge, Mass.

She worked from 2005 to 2010 in Boston for the Singapore Economic Development Board, and that was when she learned about dire conditions in Liberia. Liberians drink from dirty



PHOTO BY KEIKO HIROMI

Mrs. Jones, right, has a selfie taken with girls in Kpor Town, in Montserrado County, Liberia. She has worked with communities in Liberia on clean water.

rivers, creeks and swamps, and that has led to an increase in diarrhea, the No. 1 killer of children under 5 in Liberia, and other water-borne diseases such as typhoid and cholera. Malaria cases also rose because of mosquitoes that are attracted to stagnant water.

"Water is a basic necessity

that truly affects every single aspect of development, whether it's health, whether it's education, whether it's economic productivity because women and girls spend hours every single day to fetch water if they don't have a close source

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PHOTO COURTESY FACE AFRICA

Saran Kaba Jones, founder of FACE Africa, learned the best way to help her native country of Liberia was to build wells with clean water. She'll discuss her efforts Monday at Girls Inc. of Carpinteria's "Women of Inspiration" Luncheon.

Nonprofit plans to serve about 60,000 people

■ 'AHA'

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of clean water nearby. It affects everything," Mrs. Jones said. "I had an 'aha' moment. Water is so basic and fundamental to life. You can't tackle any other area of development. You can't tackle health if you can't tackle the issue of water."

Since FACE Africa was incorporated in 2009, the Cambridge, Mass.-based nonprofit has raised \$600,000 and built about 50 wells, 22 to 45 feet deep and with hand pumps so anyone can retrieve water, Mrs. Jones said. She added that each well meets the Liberian government guideline of serving 250 people and is dug where there's fresh groundwater.

"We chlorinate the water a little bit," she said. "We work with local health agencies to test the water on all of our wells to ensure it's safe for drinking."

About 40 of the wells are in River Cess County, where FACE Africa is now focusing all its efforts. The nonprofit plans to build 250 wells in the county and ultimately serve about 60,000 people.

"Initially, we were everywhere (in Liberia), but we felt our impact was not being measured effectively," Mrs. Jones said. "What we're trying to do is prove a point: If we focus on one



PHOTO BY KEIKO HIROMI

Saran Kaba Jones, sitting in the back, talks to Kpor Town residents about clean water. She said efforts also have included educating communities about frequent hand washing to prevent the spread of Ebola.

county, every single person will have access to water."

She said she hopes FACE Africa's example will encourage development agencies and the government to join forces for similar efforts.

Mrs. Jones said the wells already have led to a decline in diarrhea cases in River Cess County. FACE Africa has started to track the number of incidents and hopes to have figures within a year.

After River Cess County, FACE Africa plans to focus on another Liberian county and nearby nations such as Sierra Leone, Ghana and Guinea, Mrs. Jones said.

Since July 2014, FACE Africa also has helped in educating River Cess County residents about Ebola, which has struck in Liberia, Sierra Leone and New Guinea. Mrs. Jones said her nonprofit's members have talked to villages about the importance

of washing their hands.

The talks have paid off, she said, noting River Cess County hasn't had an Ebola case since November 2014. That puts the county ahead of the curve in Liberia, which won't be declared free of the disease by the World Health Organization until May at the earliest. The last patient died March 27, and Liberia must go 42 days without new cases for the declaration.

Mrs. Jones said she hopes her talk about FACE Africa will show the girls at the Girls' Inc. luncheon what they can do to make a difference.

"When I started FACE Africa, I started it with zero experience in running a nonprofit. It was something I felt was my calling and my duty. I was willing to do whatever it took to see it through. If you have passion and are willing to work hard, you're able to achieve anything and everything you put your mind to."

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MORE ONLINE

Saran Kaba Jones, founder of FACE Africa, talks further about FACE Africa's efforts for clean water in Liberia and her life and career at www.newspress.com.

IF YOU GO

Saran Kaba Jones, founder of FACE Africa, will speak at Girls Inc. of Carpinteria's "Women of Inspiration" Luncheon at 11:30 a.m. Monday at the nonprofit, 5315 Foothill Road, in Carpinteria. Girls Inc. participants Ana Delgado and Arianna Lopez are the emcees and will present awards to Michelle Apodaca, the director overseeing philanthropic efforts at Deckers Brands in Goleta; Jennifer Freed and Rendy Freedman, co-founders and co-directors of AHA! (Attitude Harmony Achievement!), a nonprofit working with youths; and Donna Jordan, Carpinteria's first female mayor and co-founder of Carpinteria Beautiful.

Tickets cost \$75.

To purchase, contact Ericka Loza-Lopez at 684-6364 or go to www.girlsinc-carp.org.

For more about FACE Africa, call 617-922-9572 or go to www.faceafrica.org.