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An NGO's commitment to peoples' welfare

By Wale Emosu, Online Editor



Femi Odeleye, the administrator of the Abel Ogundokun Odeleye Foundation checking a patient's blood pressure.

THE Detroit Free Press – the largest daily newspaper in Detroit, Michigan, USA – has featured their activities twice, yet members of the Odeleye family from Iloro, Oyo State, Nigeria believe that they are only operating “in a small corner of our world.”

By their activities in the last three years, they have basically been touching human lives through the Abel Ogundokun Odeleye Foundation (AEOF), a non-profit-making organisation, in honour of their patriarch, the late Chief Abel Ogundokun Odeleye, who died on August 24, 2003.

At the inception of the foundation in 2004, 21 students were awarded scholarships, while in a Community Outreach Health Fairs programme for the same year, over 400 men and women were screened for diabetes with 15 special referrals granted; 300 women were screened for cervical cancer with three referrals granted after the screening. These were in addition to over 800 men and women tested for hypertension after which 50 among them were granted referrals and five, admitted for emergency treatment.

Children were not left out as over 400 boys and girls were de-wormed, with over 500 of them provided with vitamins.

Overtime, improved efforts have been made on these fronts to better the lot of the people of Ilora and AFIJIO communities for who the foundation was basically put in place. For instance the number of scholarship awardees increased to 31 in 2005 and 36 in 2006.

The programme for 2007, spread over four days, took off on Saturday, October 13, 2007 at Plaza de Aruna Hotel, Oyo, where a total number of 47 students – 11 Junior Secondary School students, 13 Senior Secondary School students and 23 students from tertiary institutions – emerged the privileged awardees for the year.

At First Baptist School, Ilora, hundreds of children were dewormed the following day, while between Monday, October 15, 2007 and Wednesday, the 17th, checks for hypertension, diabetes, prostate, breast and cervical cancers were carried out on adults at the General Hospital, also in Ilora.



Patients waiting to be attended to at the General Hospital, Ilora.

The Saturday programme was not limited to presentation of scholarship awards as children and relatives of the late Chief Odeleye took turn to extol the virtues of the late community leader, writer and politician.

Retired ace broadcaster, Chief Bamiji Ojo, also an indigene of Ilora, who said that “I happen to be one of the adopted sons of Dr. Odeleye” at the occasion, speaking later with Nigerian Tribune described the man as “a great philanthropist; somebody you can't predict in the ways of doing good...He was always competing to be ahead of others.”

While addressing the awardees earlier, the President-in-council of the Abel Ogundokun Odeleye Foundation and one of the children of the late Chief Odeleye, Mr. Stephen Oladapo Odeleye said; “It is all about you children. If he (the late Chief Odeleye) were around, he would have said the same.” The president had journeyed to Nigeria from the United Kingdom, like his younger brother, Roland Olufemi, who came from the United States. The younger Odeleye and the administrator of the foundation had said in the course of the programme: “We are duty-bound to continue the legacy of the old man.”

These testimonies, together with the one given by another son of the late Chief Odeleye, Reverend (Dr.) Bidemi Odeleye, only confirm the selfless life lived by their father. According to him, their father had entrenched in his will his wish for the establishment of a foundation that would see to

the needs of Ilorá and the whole of AFIJIO, (an acronym for A-we/Akinmorin, F-iditi, I-lora, J-obebe, I-mini, O-luwatedo).

By the instructions the late Chief Odeleye left in the will, the foundation was to be dedicated to the promotion of the education of youths and service to the community, but the family, blessed with experts in other areas, took the initiative to widen the scope of the AOOF. This explains why health, for instance, has come to be part of the annual programme with the foundation's Executive Director, Dr. (Mrs.) Titi Akinremi (nee Odeleye), a consultant pathologist at the Federal Medical Centre, Abeokuta always readily on hand with others to oversee activities in that area.

Of course the family of educationists has never been in lack of personnel to oversee the foundation's educational concerns, what with Reverend (Dr.) Bidemi Odeleye of the Counselling and Psychology Department of the Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu-Ode and Dr (Mrs.) Opeoluwa Okunola (nee Odeleye), the principal of Eleyele High School, Ibadan . Their ilk drew the presence of personalities like Professor Jide Owoeye, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Lead City University, Ibadan and General J.O. Olorunfemi, Commandant, Army Education Corps (represented by Colonel Jide Adaramoye), to the scholarship awards programme at Plaza de Aruna Hotel.

Professor Owoeye, chairman of the occasion, in his address underscored the importance of education much as the foundation emphasized it, saying: "There is nothing much better to give than education. If you give a child education, you have given him everything he needs in life." The awardees, particularly the foursome – Oladimeji Olawale, Olubukola Olayiwola, Temitope Olawale and Iyabode Awoleye —who got the special award for Mathematics and those in the junior secondary school, senior secondary school and the tertiary categories, were no less appreciative of the same goal the foundation has set to achieve.

As a non-profit-making organisation which relies basically on individuals for sponsorship, some interesting and touching stories can not but be told of how certain individuals made sacrifice just to ensure that this project does not die.

The administrator of the foundation, Roland Odeleye, who is based in the United States told of how a little girl, by name Maura Kruse, after getting to know about the foundation, gathered her total proceeds from the sale of lemonade, amounting to \$22.65 Cent and donated to the foundation. He also relayed the story of a New York-based Christopher Thomas, who gave a large sum to the foundation from his first pay packet.

In Nigeria, a widow, Mrs. Longe gave to the foundation her widow's mite of N500, while the students of International School of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Ibadan, whose school has been partner with the foundation in the area of infrastructural development since last year, also donated the sum of N125,000. The students had earlier visited Community Primary School, Onikoko village, for which the foundation plans to build a block of classrooms in place of the dilapidated structure.

Some other individuals and institution also committed various sums of money to the foundation. While Professor Owoeye, on behalf of Lead City University, announced the sum of five million naira for the foundation, General Olorunfemi, Commandant of Army Education Corps, made a donation of fifty thousand naira, with his representative, Colonel Adaramoye making a personal donation of forty thousand naira.

The man in whose honour the programme was being held, the late Chief (Dr.) Abel Ogundokun Odeleye was born in 1923 at Ilorá, in present-day Oyo State. He attended Baptist Boys High School, Abeokuta and finished in 1948. He is reputed to be the first African to have studied for all three degrees at home, having obtained his B.Sc (Economics) from the University of London in 1959; M.Sc Political Science in 1961 and PhD in Political Science in 1982.

Dr. Abel Odeleye, the first development officer of the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), became the executive secretary to the National Library Board in 1967 and retired in 1976 to become a public service commissioner in the newly created Oyo State.