

# CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

For a UAlbany grad student, an internship in Tanzania sheds new light on life in the U.S.



Michelle Gill always had a certain, shall we say, wanderlust. After graduating from Ohio University with a degree in psychology, the Cincinnati native hit the road, applying to U.S. grad schools "out of her backpack" while on a yearlong tour of Europe.

Back in the States, pursuing her master's as a prestigious Axelrod Fellow at the University at Albany's School of Public Health, the peripatetic itch struck Gill again. She knew she wanted to merge international health and politics, but wasn't sure how to do it until Jim Ketterer, director of UAlbany's Center for International Development, gave a speech at the school.

Ketterer spoke about opportunities for graduate students to participate in internships, learning from and lending their own experiences and insights, to a task no less significant than helping build effective democracies in developing countries.

It was Tanzania, an eastern Africa nation more than twice the size of California and one of the world's poorest countries, that called to Gill.

After decades of one-party rule, Tanzania had held democratic elections in 1995. Ketterer said there were opportunities for

American students familiar with public policy and health to work with newly elected members of parliament — some of whom were completely unfamiliar with the political process — helping them learn how to convey the health and welfare concerns of their people to the highest levels, and begin nationwide changes.

"Students are doing internships at the (New York state) Legislature and in the British Parliament, why not send students to the countries (CID) is working in, that are in the process of undergoing really important transitions?" said Ketterer, who describes his center as aiming to "strike a balance between the theory and practice of developing democratic institutions."

In Tanzania, "they're going through something now that we went through over 200 years ago. I think it's really a great experience for a SUNY student to see that process as it's happening, to see the sacrifices people are making, to really be part of it," Ketterer said.

Gill was sold.

The only catch was, Gill would be



PROVIDED BY MICHELLE GILL

MICHELLE GILL, the first University at Albany graduate fellow sent abroad through the Center for International Development and UAlbany's School of Public Health, greets Lazaro Nyalandu, a member of the Tanzanian parliament.

## COMMUNITY

# Thanks to volunteers, disabled kids get their day at the pool

By KATHERINE MCCARTHY  
Special to the Times Union

It was a big day for Joseph Razanousky. The autistic 10-year-old had abandoned the noodle he'd clung to for most of that day's 45-minute session in the Adaptive Aquatics program at Mohonasen High School in Rotterdam.

"He never swims with it when we're at hotel pools," his mother, Lisa Razanousky, said, "but he's wanted to use it here."

No more. Joseph swam confidently in the deep end of the pool with high school freshman volunteer Sara Hickey. Next to them, Eddie Vendetti, also 10 and Joseph's classmate since preschool, swam happily.

All together, 18 kids participated in one of the district's nine Adaptive Aquatics sessions, which are being held on Saturdays this fall. Each child with a disability worked with a volunteer, and the kicking, splashing and jumping into the water looked like just another day at the beach — well, the pool.

For the kids, it was a rare chance to participate in an extracurricular activity. For their parents, it was a chance to catch up, take a break and trade tips and information. Elaine Hickey, Sara's mother, and Eddie's mother, Jacqui Vendetti, one of the founders of the 3-year-old program, kept things moving. Hickey also has an 11-year-old daughter, Emily, with autism; she was her mother's primary incentive for starting the program, which is modeled after a similar one in Voorheesville.

"Autism is a neurological disorder," said Hickey, a physical therapist in the Bethlehem school district. She described it as a "spectrum disorder," meaning it affects each person differently. "For most children, it affects their ability to interact and communicate," she said.

Hickey noticed that Emily and other children with autism love to be in the water. Kitty Sansone, a special education teacher at Bradt Elementary School in the Mohonasen district, attributed some of this to the water's therapeutic value, and praised the program for

Please see KIDS D4 ▶



CINDY SCHULTZ/TIMES UNION

**VOLUNTEERS SWIM** with children with developmental disabilities during an Adaptive Aquatics program Saturday at Mohonasen High School in Rotterdam.

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If this isn't a cutting-edge cooking tool, we don't know what is.

Friday

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