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## Soccer, friendship connects Bowling Green to Nairobi

CAROLINE EGGERS [ceggers@bgdailynews.com](mailto:ceggers@bgdailynews.com) 2 hrs ago

Luckio "Luke" Odero.

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When people think about helping others in need, the mind often fixates on the essentials: food, water and shelter.

“Who thinks about toys?” asked Luckio “Luke” Odero, who recently learned how much a single toy could bring joy to children.

Odero regularly travels between Bowling Green and Nairobi, Kenya. After one of his three children – his only daughter – began studying mathematics at Western Kentucky University, Odero visited about 3 1/2 ago and enjoyed Kentucky enough to stick around for a while. After his daughter married and had two children, he decided he had more reason to split his time between his children living in the two worlds – and is now even trying to secure a green card.

Two years ago, Odero met Tom Harris, a former Marine Corps League commandant who frequents Odero's workplace, Chick-fil-A. It started with amiable small talk, and eventually evolved into a friendship.

"My wife and I go over there to eat lunch about twice a week and chat with him while we're eating," Harris said. "He's a pretty amazing guy."

This past Christmas season, Harris accompanied the Southern Kentucky chapter of the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Program – which distributes toys to economically disadvantaged children in the community and of which Harris is a volunteer – as it brought a box to collect donations for needy children from patrons of Chick-fil-A, an area partner.

Odero told Harris about how toys could bring joy to his community back in Kenya. So Harris flattened a few soccer balls and provided several other toys to fit into Odero's suitcase before his trip.

Over the holidays, Odero gave one soccer ball and some toys to an orphanage near his hometown. He considered giving the other soccer ball to his own grandchildren.

"But it turned out an elementary school just close to where I live, they don't have a ball," Odero said. "So I said, 'I have a ball, can I give it to you?' They took it and they were so excited. It was a very colorful soccer ball from the United States. The children loved it.

"A toy matters to children. It gives them something to keep them busy. It enhances their imagination. It saves the child from being idle, from being mischievous or getting involved in a bad lifestyle."

Odero didn't have an extra pump, so the children simply filled the ball with air at a gas station. And now, with just a single ball, the St. James Primary School formed a recreational soccer team.

Odero returned to Bowling Green several weeks ago and shared the stories with Harris, who expressed enthusiasm and gratitude for playing a small role in bringing a little happiness to children.

“We see smiles on kids locally here,” Harris said, but hearing how “just a little inexpensive soccer ball making a soccer team on the other side of the world is pretty amazing.”

Though Toys for Tots assists children in seven southcentral Kentucky counties, Harris wishes that the program could spillover to Kenya, too, if the shipping rates weren’t such an impediment.

But “when he goes home next Christmas, we’ll give him what he can handle,” Harris said.

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## Caroline Eggers

News reporter.

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