

PRESS RELEASE

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Rwandan Youth Show Off Their Skills at Art of Conservation Children's Tennis Tournament

Musanze, Rwanda – On Saturday, May 22, 11 young Rwandans in Musanze District got the chance to show off their athletic skills and demonstrate good sportsmanship before an audience of their peers, parents, NGO representatives, and District officials at the first annual Art of Conservation Children's Tennis Tournament. All competitors are disadvantaged children from Muhoza Sector who are sponsored by the non-profit educational organization Art of Conservation (AoC).

"This competition is culmination of four years of training and hard work by the AoC Children's Tennis Team members and Antoine Musengimana, who has served as their coach and a father figure for the last two years," said Julie Ghrist, Director of AoC. "These children are my neighbors and were my first friends when I moved to Rwanda in 2006 to start my NGO, Art of Conservation. I saw within them a desire to participate in sports and to do more with their lives than get into trouble. Since then, I have seen them grow into talented tennis players and role models for their peers. They have embraced discipline, honesty, and respect."

Through AoC, Ghrist runs year-long intensive conservation education courses for children attending primary schools located near Volcanoes National Park. However, she also spends much of her free time getting children who live near her home and office in Musanze involved in sports including tennis and running. The tennis program has been supported by Bunny Bruning and John Terpkosh of the U.S. Tennis Association (USTA), who have donated athletic equipment, and just recently granted AoC \$1,000 USD to rehabilitate the Musanze District tennis courts.

The May 22 competition was the AoC Team's first official tournament, which included five singles matches with players matched by age and skill level and one doubles match pairing the team's top four players. Moise "Habibo" Habineza, who is only 14 years old, won three matches, including the final match against 16-year-old Jean Bosco Hakorimana, earning the title of tournament champion. Habibo was congratulated by Coach Musengimana, Ghrist, and his ecstatic mother, who said "I am so proud of Habibo, I know now that he can achieve great things in life." For his accomplishment, Habibo was awarded a t-shirt, cap, tennis balls, and a water bottle from the USTA, and school supplies donated by Jennifer Conour, a friend of the AoC project.

Other winners included Emmanuel Twagirayesu, winner of the 12- to 13-year-old category, Valens "Baby" Muhawenimana, winner of 9- to 11-year-old category, and Clementine Uwineza, winner of the 12- to 13-year-old girl's category. These winners, along with the six other competitors, were also given prizes from the USTA and Jennifer Conour.

Ignace Harelimana, who is in charge of Sports, Culture, and Youth for Musanze District, was present at the tournament as well as the Musanze District Immigration Officer Andrew Nyarwaya and representatives from the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project, Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International, Comprehensive Community Health Initiatives and Programs, and Project Rwanda.

"Tennis is an amazing game in that it's played by all generations," said Coach Musengimana, addressing the invited guests and spectators after the matches. "It's also a wonderful way of making new friends and spending time with old friends. That's why we're really excited whenever anyone helps foster the sport of tennis in Musanze District. AoC and I appreciate the collaboration with the Musanze District in helping support tennis in this area."

About Art of Conservation

Art of Conservation, Inc., works in poor rural communities bordering Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda, teaching schoolchildren and other community members about the importance of maintaining a healthy environment for both people and animals and instilling them with an understanding and respect for themselves, their peers, and the natural world. Art of Conservation approaches learning through a unique method, using visual, auditory, and performance arts to teach lessons and inspire creativity in its students. In partnership with other organizations which attend directly to the well-being of the Volcanoes National Park ecosystem and its resident mountain gorillas, Art of Conservation seeks to fill the education gap in the local communities through its activities. More information: www.art-of-conservation.com
<<http://www.art-of-conservation.com>>

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