

PRESS RELEASE

May 30, 2010

Press Release: Students kick off Kwita Izina with the Art of Conservation 3K Gorilla Fun Run

Musanze, Rwanda – To kick off Kwita Izina, a week-long celebration of Rwanda's mountain gorillas, 250 children from primary schools located near Volcanoes National Park raced in the "Art of Conservation 3K Gorilla Fun Run" on the morning of May 30. The event was organized by the non-profit Art of Conservation (AoC), which teaches Rwandan schoolchildren about the importance of conservation and maintaining good health to help prevent the spread of disease to other people, domestic animals, and wildlife species.

"We planned the first annual 3K Gorilla Fun Run in order to engage local children in Kwita Izina and in the mountain gorilla conservation movement in general," said Julie Ghrist, Director of AoC. "We hope they come away from the race feeling proud of their country's involvement in gorilla conservation and their own athletic accomplishment. And of course we hope everyone had lots of fun."

In collaboration with Volcanoes National Park (PNV) management, AoC invited fifth-form students from Rushubi and Nyange I primary schools who are enrolled in the AoC conservation education program, plus third- and sixth-form students from Nyabistinde, Kabwende, and Kampanga primary schools. The morning of race, all invited children gathered at the playground in Kinigi town to register for the race. Each child was given a race number, an AoC t-shirt, and face paint. AoC staff members and volunteers, teachers from the participating schools, Red Cross workers trained in first-aid, policemen, and PNV staff members were on hand to supervise the race.

The runners commenced the race at 10:00 am from Kinigi town center and ran 3 kilometers uphill to PNV's Kinigi headquarters where a crowd of spectators awaited their arrival. The race winner, 15-year-old Theoneste Nshimiyimana of Kabwende, crossed the finish line approximately 15 minutes after the start. The top five boys included Nshimiyimana, Donat Tuyisenge and James Murwanashyaka of Kampanga, Jean d'Amour Imanizabayo of Rushubi, and Niyonsenga of Kampanga. Sixteen-year-old Mukamashami of Kabwende was the first girl, followed by Perus Hakuzwimana, Claudine Iradukunda, Nyirazuba, and Niyigena, all from Rushubi. The top 5 boys and girls were presented with prizes of school supplies from Julie Ghrist.

Following the race, all runners gathered in front of PNV Kinigi headquarters for soft drinks and to practice singing "Mu Birunga," or "In Virunga," a song about mountain gorillas written by the New York-based musicians Kaiser Cartel for the AoC Project. The song will be performed at Igitaramo by 50 AoC students from Rushubi Primary School. Igitaramo, Kwita Izina's community party, will be held in Kinigi town on Friday, June 4, from 4:30pm to 8:30pm.

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/>>

Press Contacts:

Molly Feltner

AoC Communications Manager (for questions in English)

+250 (0) 783885168

mollyfeltner@gmail.com

Olivier Habimana

AoC Staff Manager (for questions in Kinyarwanda)

+250 (0) 788539991

haboliver2002@yahoo.fr