

# St. Edward School learned traditions in Ugandan cultural day

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*St. Edward School fifth-graders Allie Mills, Caleb Clinger, Jackson Brockway and Alizah Perry perform a traditional Ugandan dance with Godfrey Muwulya for the other students Friday, May 5. (T-G photo/Tom E. Puskar)*

## St. Edward students learn dances, music and traditions of Uganda

Learning about other countries can be fun, exciting and loud. Fifth-graders at St. Edward School enjoyed learning traditional Ugandan dances and performing for the rest of the school during a cultural day assembly Friday, May 5.

Sponsored by a one-time grant through the **Ashland County Community Foundation**, the assembly began in the morning with the entire student body to give everyone a chance to meet special guests from The Yard.

Based on the Massachusetts island of Martha's Vineyard, "The Yard is a nonprofit performing arts organization and we mainly specialize in dance and performing arts," said Jesse Keller, program director and co-producer.

Keller, an Ashland native, teaches dance to local schools and adults, and performs during vacationing season with dancers from around the world, like Godfrey Muwulya. A Ugandan native, Muwulya shared about his culture and experiences both at the organization and at home. Dancing since he was 5 years old, he has been traveling around the world since 2001, performing music and dance.

After meeting Keller, he started working at the Yard in January, and goes back and forth between his work teaching and performing in the U.S. and at a music school he started three years ago in Uganda. Near his home in Uganda, Muwulya teaches music to students at a school he's created for talented children who come from poor backgrounds.

The project came about when he met an orphaned boy who had been abducted by the rebel army during the 20-year Ugandan Civil War. One evening when Muwulya was playing his harp, a boy

appeared and asked if he could play it and Muwulya obliged. After the boy played, his eyes filled with tears. "The boy told me, 'I used to play the song when my mommy and daddy were around,'" Muwulya said. A while later, he noticed the boy was hanging around and Muwulya invited him to tell his story and learned the boy used to play the harp in church before he was abducted, never seeing his parents again.

"From that moment I started living with that boy and then I started developing up an idea of helping these talented children with a poor background as a way of paying back," Muwulya said. "Not many people travel to different countries, so I'm like paying back. You know, I have a feeling if you do good things, God will always bless you."

Muwulya also took time to share his instruments with the school. Muwulya plays the solo Adungu, or bow harp; Endingidi, or African tube fiddle; Ugandan traditional drums; and xylophone. "We call the harp, which is a bow harp, Adungu. We have a solo, the small one. We have the medium, which is a little bit bigger and we have a big bass," Muwulya said.

The morning assembly had time for questions.

"Do you have turtles in Africa?" one student asked. "Oh yeah, we have them."

"Do you have trains?" "We have one train in the country, just for goods, no passengers," Muwulya said.

"How long do you practice (your music)?" "At home when I practice with my kids, we do practice after breakfast, we have lunch, practice again and then we can rest," Muwulya said.

"So like do you play the guitar in your country?" "Yes, some people play the guitar but me I play three types of harp. When you hear my harp, it will sound like a guitar."

One of his favorite foods in Uganda is bananas. "We have planting called matooke. It's banana planting," he said.

One student asked what language is spoken in Uganda. "In Uganda, we have 57 tribes and every tribe, they have their indigenous language, they have their culture, they have their dances ... I come from the central, so my tribe is Buganda," Muwulya said.

Since the country was organized by Great Britain, English is the official language, but many other languages are used. Of the five languages he knows, Muwulya speaks Luganda when in Buganda. "For example, if I'm greeting you, I'll say 'oli otya.'" Muwulya said. "Now if you are fine, your response will be 'bulungi.'" "

The entire student body got to warm up with a dance combination of Ugandan dances and choreography from the Yard before returning to their regular classes for the remainder of the day.

The fifth-grade class spent the whole day with Muwulya, learning more about his culture, his instruments and dance. Muwulya taught them a traditional Ugandan dance to perform to the rest of the school at the end of the day and how to make raffia skirts to go along with their dance costumes.

To see students perform, find the video at [bit.ly/2q3qovB](http://bit.ly/2q3qovB).

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