

OWU

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Rising Stars

Meet some of our young alumni whose leadership accomplishments are gaining momentum.

Katie Schlaudt's '10 determination and leadership skills are helping to stamp out Guinea worm disease.

DEMISE OF A DISEASE

By Pam Besel

DRACUNCULIASIS, OR GUINEA WORM DISEASE, IS FAR FROM THE LIVES AND LIFESTYLES OF MOST OF US. But then, we are not the poorest of the poor, living in places such as Chad, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Mali (the four countries in which the disease can still be found)—areas with limited or no basic health care services and unclean water, in which a roundworm parasite, *Dracunculus medinensis*, thrives. The disease is contracted when people drink water infested with larvae-infected fleas. The larvae travel to one's intestines, growing into a worm and, over the course of several months, burrow outward causing painful skin ulcers with blisters through which the worms exit the skin. The infection ravages the body with

malaria-like symptoms and can result in partial paralysis, usually of the arm or leg from which the worm emerges.

Enter OWU's Katie Schlaudt '10. Under the auspices of The Carter Center headquartered in Atlanta, Schlaudt began working in November 2012, in the country of Chad (Central Africa) as a Technical Advisor/Contractor for the Chad Guinea Worm Eradication Program (CGWEP). She assists the Federal Ministry of Health in managing a team of 21 field staff, as well as more than 350 village volunteers. The staff and volunteers' primary focus is to conduct active surveillance, providing health education on the prevention of Guinea worm disease to village

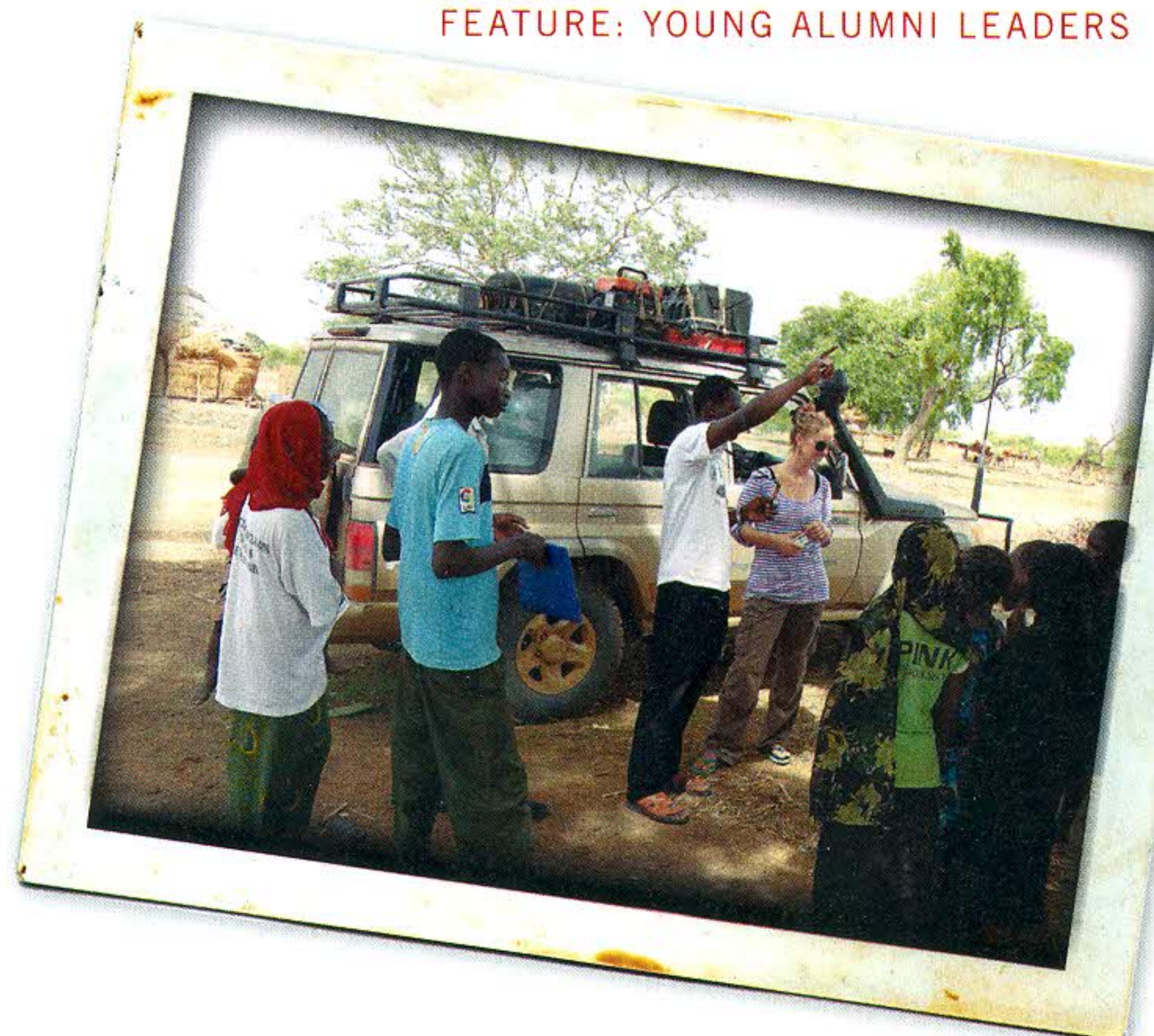
residents, explains Schlaudt.

"Our goal is to end transmission of the disease by the year 2015," says Schlaudt, whose responsibility it is to make sure the surveillance and health education are conducted and reported. This will be the second disease—smallpox is expected to be the first—to be stamped out by skilled and determined world citizens. "And we will do it!" Schlaudt's enthusiasm is surpassed only by her great love for Ohio Wesleyan and intuitive understanding of her need to utilize her OWU education and leadership skills for the common good. She mentions mentors such as her grandma Ellie, who have inspired her.

"If she were alive today, I don't think we'd

“Leadership isn’t about being the smartest or the strongest or the most outgoing; it’s about working closely together with your team toward a specific objective, and finding a way to best utilize each other’s potential and talents. I think the best leaders are probably the best teachers.”

-KATIE SCHLAUDT '10



Schlaudt, her reinforcement agent, Bienveno, and children of the Milton District in Chad talk about filtering water with their t-shirts to prevent Guinea worm disease.

agree on many political issues,” jokes Schlaudt. But as for life’s “guts and glory”—those experiences and memorable moments that really matter—Grandma Ellie made an indelible impression on her granddaughter.

“She showed me to always act with dignity and to be conscious of how your actions may affect others,” says Schlaudt. “As a leader, you must remember that your actions are scrutinized and you have to earn the respect of your colleagues through dignified and fair leadership.” It was another of her mentors, the late Margaret Fete, OWU’s modern foreign languages professor, who introduced Schlaudt to francophone Africa.

“Dr. Fete encouraged me to study abroad in Cameroon,” recalls Schlaudt, thinking back to her former professor’s love for her profession, and how she had what Schlaudt describes as “complete confidence in me and in my future, even when I didn’t believe in myself.” While at OWU, Schlaudt decided to major in French and Spanish and minored in Latin American Studies. Those interests led her to study abroad in Granada, Spain, and Cameroon, and to participate in a Travel-Learning Course on Mexican Migration in Puebla, Mexico. Schlaudt pursued a Theory-to-Practice Grant, using allocated funds to collect much-needed French books and supplies from 71 libraries, schools, and agencies in Michigan and Ohio, and shipped these materials to the refugee camp in Cameroon.

“Katie is one of the most thoughtful, wise, caring, persistent, and impactful students I have ever known,” shares OWU Chaplain Jon Powers, who served as her project advisor. “What

a resourceful person she is and what a tribute to Ohio Wesleyan that she continues to do such wonderful service in the world.”

After receiving her Master of Arts in International Affairs and in International Development/African Community Health at Ohio University, Schlaudt found herself in a holding position for a while, working in landscaping and as a daycare assistant, still keeping a positive outlook. The tide began to turn as she was offered an opportunity to return to OWU as a post-graduate intern in the Community Service Learning office.

“I was so excited to be back at OWU, and I loved working with the students,” recalls Schlaudt. “I could help them manage their work, but they also taught me a lot, including the true meaning of leadership.”

And then there was Chad, and Schlaudt’s encounter with language barriers, extreme poverty, cultural differences, physical challenges of being in a harsh environment—and the dreaded Guinea worm disease. The good news is that eradication of the disease appears to be not far away. Through education and prevention techniques—not drinking unfiltered water, safely treating stagnant ponds on a regular basis, providing safe drinking water when possible, and by encouraging people to report those who have symptoms of the disease—cases of Guinea worm disease are dwindling. Its demise is becoming a reality because of the commitment and leadership of Schlaudt and her many co-workers.

“Despite the fact that my education at OWU provided so many opportunities for leadership, I

learned that you can’t be completely ready for the leadership challenges that you’ll face in the field,” Schlaudt says. An older and wiser Katie thinks back to her high school days, recalling that her leadership experiences were mostly in the athletic arena. Arriving at Ohio Wesleyan for her meant becoming involved in campus groups such as ProgressOWU and other organizations.

“Now I realize that leadership really isn’t just about giving speeches and having your picture on posters,” Schlaudt says. “It’s really about taking the initiative to make something better and inviting others to learn from the experience with you.” At the end of each day, she is thankful for the skills and strengths she developed while at OWU and on her own.

“Being able to adapt to any situation that comes your way, not letting others’ criticism lower your confidence, humility, being a good teacher, and determination—these attributes are what I think the leaders in our world today really need,” says Schlaudt. “I am so grateful to be able to witness the capacity building of our field agents here, and know that even after we eliminate Guinea worm from Chad, these staff members and volunteers will be likely to continue leading others and make positive changes for their country. It’s at that moment that I will know that all of this is worth it!”

Pam Besel is Director of Internal Communications and Editor of the OWU Magazine.