

GCS VIA hosts charcuterie board party for Ugandan girls

By Kyla Woodard
For Clay Today

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Food is known for bringing people together, and the Green Cove Springs Village Improvement Association, kept that feeling going with their charcuterie board event on Thursday, May 18.



"I just like it when everybody is here together and laughing. For me, it's stuff that I never would have done on my own," said

Larianne Stutts, VIA president.

The VIA partnered with Jinja, Uganda's Sonrisa School of Culinary Arts and Bakery, to host a charcuterie board event to raise money for the Ugandan people – specifically girls.

In Uganda, the prevalence of children forced into marriage is astounding. Sonrisa co-founder Pam Graves said in Uganda, six out of 10 girls are married before the age of 15, and eight out of 10 are married before the age of 18.

Graves founded the school in 2021 along with Ugandan native Mary Apio. The school is a farm-to-table culinary school program that helps girls in getting an education on how to grow their food. Graves said that allows them to return to their homes, utilize their



PHOTOS BY KYLA WOODARD

Women at the Village Improvement Association collected \$1,000 to help people, particularly girls, in Uganda.

land and help feed their families.

"If they're able to survive, then get out of the situation, then there really are no resources for these women. So, we wanted to start a culinary school to give them skills and hope and empower them, so they'd have something to support themselves and their children," Graves said.

Graves also said that not only does the

school keep the girls educated, but it also keeps them away from forced marriages.

"I feel like we're making a difference by getting these little girls in school," Graves said. "And hopefully, that will break their cycle and their little village. It'll keep them from being married off."

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Graves led the event and fostered demonstrations on how to put the boards together.

The charcuterie class was \$100 a person, with 100% of the proceeds going toward Sonrisa. Graves said the money would be used towards the school's upgraded dorms and new retail store for their bakery.

Attendees placed creative combinations of foods such as salami, olives, pepperoni, strawberries, cheese and crackers on a wooden board for a fun day and a tasty way to support a greater cause.

Experienced or not, the attendees took their time decorating their boards with their creations. Each table was donned with a board, plate, a napkin and pictures

of the people of Uganda.

The event opened with the women ushered to the center table to fill their plates with colorful hors d'oeuvres. The women excitedly decided which snacks they would pick and where they would place them on their boards. In addition to the charcuterie boards, there was also a donation table filled with artifacts Graves brought back from Uganda. The table was filled with beaded bracelets, necklaces, dresses and fabric. Guests were allowed to pick from the table and donate to the cause.

Stutts said the idea for the event began when she met Graves at a president's meeting for local women's clubs.

"I thought it would be a neat, fun thing to do. We like to have fun things going on for our ladies, but also that would benefit someone else too," Stutts said.

After the event concluded, guests could wrap up their boards and take them home. Coleen Stoffa attended the event and said she enjoyed meeting new people.

"It was loads of fun and delicious, too," Stoffa said.

In total, Graves said the event raised almost \$1,000 for Sonrisa.

For the future, Stutts says she hopes to have more events like these for the community.

"We love doing things in Green Cove. And we are trying to have more activities in our building because it's the oldest historical building in Green Cove that's still being used for what it was originally built for. So, we think it's really neat to have women of today in this building and to do other things to promote the growth in the community," Stutts said.

