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## **PROFESSOR LAUNCHES NON-PROFIT 'THE WORLD IS JUST A BOOK AWAY' TO BRING HOPE THROUGH BOOKS, LIBRARIES AND SCHOOLS WORLDWIDE**

### **FIRST FUNDRAISER EVENT HELD IN CONJUNCTION WITH TRIBAL ART EXHIBIT**

### **FIRST LIBRARY UNDERWAY IN SIDOARJO, INDONESIA**

Los Angeles, CA, USA (March 2009) – University of Southern California business professor James J. Owens loves reading, and firmly believes it opens doors that can forever alter one's life and even, perhaps, the course of history. To that end, he has launched a non-profit organization called *The World Is Just A Book Away (TWIJABA)*, to bring hope – in the form of books, libraries, and schools – to thousands of children in developing countries. The non-profit held their first online fundraiser at the end of 2008, but the first live fundraising event was held March 13th. They were the beneficiary of the opening night of Los Angeles Tribal's "Cultural Crossroads" exhibition of arts from Asia, Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, held at the Helms Bakery Building in Los Angeles.

*The World Is Just A Book Away* ([www.TheWorldIsJustABookAway.com](http://www.TheWorldIsJustABookAway.com)) will fund permanent and mobile lending libraries to service 33 primary schools in the initial region, providing many children with access to books for the first time. The program is being launched in Sidoarjo, Indonesia, site of the mudflow disaster that has displaced more than 60,000 people and destroyed many schools. The first library is underway, slated for completion by the end of this month. Pictures were on exhibit at the Friday night opening.

"Throughout childhood, books were my best friends. Before I could read, my mother showed me pictures in books that lined the walls of our apartment and told me stories of faraway places. I continued to travel through books until I was old enough to travel in earnest. That early travel through reading led to my love of language, which led to my love of writing," states Owens, who is an assistant professor of clinical management communication at the USC Marshall School of Business.

"A few years ago, I began to think: What role have books and reading played in the lives of prominent people? And I began working on a book, which now features submissions from more than 70 of the world's most prominent people, across the arts and sciences, politics, business, and philanthropy. I learned more about the plague of illiteracy and decided to help those who had never experienced the thrill of seeing new worlds unfold on the written page. I plan to donate all my profits from the future book sales to non-profits, including this organization I established that bears the book's name: *The World is Just A Book Away*. It just happens that the non-profit has come first!"

*TWIJABA* has attracted strong supporters. The first person to commit to the organization's Board of Advisors was Jenny Ming, former President of Old Navy and one of *Fortune* magazine's "50 Most Powerful Women in American Business." Rounding out the Board of Advisors are Jim Ellis, Dean of the USC Marshall School of Business, and Tim Monich, highly-respected dialect coach of Hollywood. Prominent people in the worlds of business, entertainment and academia have signed on to the Board as well, inspired by Owens' enthusiasm, drive, mission, and their own love of the written word.

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Owens has also enlisted the help of students and young professionals for the non-profit. As a university professor, he realized early on how their knowledge of new technologies, including social networking, could help spread the word. He also realized that this current generation wanted to start early in their lives and give back. He wanted to encourage the idea that being on a Board shouldn't be restricted to the over 40 or 50 age group. So *TWIJABA*'s Board has members in their 30s, and he created the "Ambassadors" program for students and young professionals, as a stepping stone.

Friday's "Cultural Crossroads" exhibition brought out a number of participants, including Board Members such as author Audrey Johnson, film producer Robin Jonas, Platino Boutique owner Sabine Lehmann, and Gregory White, Sr. Consultant, Watson Wyatt & C. Showing their support as well were actors Jason Connery and CCH Pounder (*The Shield*, *Law & Order: SVU*, *Baghdad Café*). The show was presented by Los Angeles Tribal ([www.latribal.com](http://www.latribal.com)) whose members specialize in the tribal arts of Asia, Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, and are recognized as reputable dealers who sell only authentic material and actively participate in the worldwide tribal art markets. The LA Tribal members provide the best local sourcing for the highest quality works of art, including: wood and stone sculptures, pottery, bronzes, masks, textiles, beadwork, basketry, jewelry and architectural pieces. The association's mission is to advocate for cooperation within the Los Angeles area art community; to promote related arts events; to provide resource/contact information; and to maintain an organization where only art dealers who adhere to the highest standards of quality and authenticity may be members.

"We're proud that our opening night can benefit *The World Is Just A Book Away*", says LA Tribal founder Mark A. Johnson. "In my search for traditional tribal artifacts, I have visited many countries in Asia, and I have grown to appreciate how important it is that we give back and support literacy and educational projects. And I credit my love of reading—whether books, newspapers, online—with helping me be inspired by and better understand people and their cultures."

#### ADDITIONAL *TWIJABA* NEWS:

- June 2009—Completion of first five libraries in Sidoarjo, Indonesia
- April 1st—Alumni USC Club of Indonesia's annual Charity Ball will benefit *TWIJABA*. Additionally, the AUSCI will work with the non-profit to distribute books to Indonesian children in impoverished areas of the country.
- March 2009—Professor Owens was invited to the *Education Without Borders 2009 Conference* in Dubai, UAE, as a Distinguished Guest and Mentor, and Panel Judge.
- March 2009—Completion of first library in Sidoarjo, Indonesia
- In November 2008, "The World is Just a Book Away 20/20 Club" launched on Facebook to garner broader support from the general public. Each member commits to an annual minimum donation of \$20 (which translates into 20 books). In the first two months, nearly 200 signed up, and almost \$10,000 was raised.
- Oct. 15, 2008 – launch of [www.theworldisjustabookaway.com](http://www.theworldisjustabookaway.com)

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