



ANNE HEYMAN

building a village of hope

BY JULIE JACOBS

It all began on November 14, 2005, with a Hillel-sponsored lecture at Tufts University, where Paul Rusesabagina spoke about the 1994 genocide in his native country of Rwanda. Rusesabagina's valiant effort, to protect Tutsi refugees from the Hutu militia by housing them in the hotel he managed, was depicted in the Oscar-nominated film *Hotel Rwanda*. In the audience that evening was philanthropist Anne Heyman, a benefactor of the lecture, along with her husband, Seth Merrin. At the dinner following, they were seated with Rusesabagina. During a conversation that centered on the genocide and its devastating aftermath, an inquiry from Merrin sparked an idea in Heyman that would ultimately change her life and send her across the world to both Israel and Rwanda.

"My husband asked Paul, 'What is the biggest problem facing Rwanda today?' He said, 'In a country where you have 1.2 million orphans in a population of 8 million people, there's nothing you can do for that country unless you figure out how to help those children,'" recounts Heyman, lithe and casually dressed in a yellow T-shirt and khaki capris, her hair swept up in a ponytail, enjoying a cappuccino on the first day of summer in an Upper West Side café. "Almost immediately, the idea popped into my head. Do a youth village. I went home and just couldn't let it go."

She turned to the Internet to research the concept and mentioned it at meetings for other organizations in which she was involved. She connected with Steve Schwager, executive vice president of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), who referred her to Chaim Peri, Ed.D., director of the Yemin Orde Youth Village in the Carmel mountain region of Israel. Yemin Orde was established in 1953 to care for orphans of the Holocaust, and since then it has become a home and leading educational establishment for disadvantaged youth, mostly from Ethiopia, the former Soviet Union, and South America. Peri thought the project most worthwhile, and met with Heyman during a visit to Manhattan in the winter of 2006. After that,