

# Lawyer helps African school

## University in Cameroon would start with agriculture.

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A new university is in the works in Tali, Cameroon, thanks to the help of a man from Cameroon who is now a faculty member and administrator at Indiana University School of Medicine–Indianapolis, where he directs the Master of Science in Medical Science Program and Special Programs in the Office of Medical Student Affairs; a lawyer at the Indianapolis law firm Harrison & Moberly; and the Land Design Institute at the College of Architecture and Planning at Ball State University.

While the Cameroon government has already dedicated 10 square miles for African University in Tali, one of the next and most recent steps was to meet with community leaders in the area to get their support.

To do this, African University Foundation hosted a symposium Dec. 28 to 30 in Tali. Among the attendees were Dr. William Agbor Baiyee, chair of the African University Initiative and IU School of Medicine – Indianapolis professor, and attorney David Williams Russell of Harrison & Moberly.

Russell, vice chair of the African University Foundation, got involved after Dr. Baiyee sought his help with trademark issues for the foundation. Russell then attended a board meeting, and became vice chair of the board.

He added his family has a history of higher education professionals, and he's always had an interest in non-profit organizations and universities.

But most of the other guests were strictly from Cameroon, trying to make things better in Africa, which Russell said is the goal.

"We're hoping to offer education to build leaders," Russell said, adding many of the current universities in the area focus on how to create bureaucrats, considering the area was colonized and the local people didn't have many opportunities beyond that.

The country, which is politically stable, has had its independence since 1960.

It is also to empower all Africans – the university, though based in Cameroon, will be open to residents of all nations, even outside of Africa.

"People say we should drill wells and provide clean water to people in Africa, which is a good idea, but we can also teach Africans to do that and more for themselves," Russell said.

The university, then, will teach the practical issues, not just theories. The first schools of the university that will be available to students will teach about agriculture and ultimately agribusiness, something he said would be a huge help to the area.

"Until you're there on the ground, you may not see the potential for this university," he said. "But that quickly changes once you realize the greatest resource there is the people."

For instance, he said, because of the country's location in West Africa on the equator, just about any produce can be grown in the area – yams, cocoa, pineapples, other fruits and vegetables – due to the good soil and climate for crops.

However, getting some those crops out of the area into other areas that would be interested in buying them is logistically difficult if



Cameroon dignitary Tanyi Tiku Arikai Martin, left, met with David Williams Russell in Tali.

not impossible due to a lack of refrigerated trucks and other means to deliver fresh produce before it goes bad.

As an example, Russell said the distribution system for a locally brewed beer is those who sell the beer leave a box outside so passers by know where they can buy it.

"So the inherent knowledge of distribution is already there," he said.

But Russell said that can be learned and the knowledge will offer economic development to the area based on something that is already available.

Williams said that the people in the area also know how to grow these plants, but again, there is a need for regional supply chains in the area, and this will help Cameroon bring in items they have in short supply, such as protein sources.

The design of the university will be state of the art. The College of Architecture and Planning at Ball State University will work with the university administrators for a sustainable design that works in harmony with the grounds, making it a truly "green" university.

"People there are concerned about their environment," he said. "They want clean water and are very environmentally conscious. The land is their legacy and they are very dedicated to keeping it clean."

Students from Ball State will visit the campus in Cameroon during spring break and will begin work on a community center, which will be part of the university.

Williams has high hopes for the university because he has met with many Cameroonians who are highly educated – but many left Africa to attend university abroad, many on scholarships.

There are also concerns because many of the Cameroonians, as educated as they are, cannot find jobs in Cameroon and must work elsewhere due to a lack of jobs.

But at the end of the day, they all seem to have a sense of home, he said. When he was there, many of Dr. Baiyee's relatives who live outside of the area had returned for the Christmas holiday and to attend the symposium, and many of them come home for holidays as often as they can.

"They are super motivated, super bright, and concerned for their families," he said. "They are also concerned about how they can help their younger relatives get an education."

"We don't need to do another symposium to convince them this is a good idea," Russell said. "They see their children leave the country and want to do what they can to help keep them there."•