

Mutombo opens huge Congo hospital

NEW YORK (AP) - Dikembe Mutombo will fulfill a lifelong dream soon, opening a hospital in the Congo named for his late mother.

The Houston Rockets center, who donated \$15 million to the project, will be opening the doors to the Biamba Marie Mutombo Hospital and Research Center on Sept. 2.

The 300-bed hospital will provide health care to people in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where Mutombo was born.

"We were very close," Mutombo said Monday in a telephone interview. "To do something of this caliber in the name of your beloved mom, it will mean a lot not just to me but to the people of Congo."

He created the Dikembe Mutombo Foundation in 1997, the year his 64-year-old mother died. She was unable to get to the hospital

because streets were closed due to civil unrest. His father, Samuel, was turned back from the hospital, just 10 minutes away.

"My mom played a big role, giving us all the tools to make us great human beings," Mutombo said of his nine siblings. "She did what moms are supposed to do — raise a child with a good understanding of life."

The \$29 million hospital and research center will include a pediatric wing, surgery suites and a women's center.

The health care crisis continues in the Congo, where one of five children dies before age 5. Malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, measles and cholera have reached epidemic proportions and continue to infect millions of adults and children. The average life expectancy is 42 years for men and 47 for women.

"Malaria is taking more lives than any other disease,



Former NBA star Dikembe Mutombo donated \$15 million to build a 300-bed hospital in Congo's capital of Kinshasa.

especially children under age 5," he said.

Mutombo had a life-threatening bout of malaria after returning from the Congo in 1999. He had a "huge headache" and passed out after an early season

game. His temperature rose to 104 degrees while at a suburban Boston hospital, but after 12 hours the doctors couldn't determine what was wrong until a Kenyan intern entered his room.

"Brother, are you from

Africa?" she asked. "Which spot?"

When she heard Congo, she asked if he'd been home lately. He'd been back the previous month.

"She saved my life," Mutombo said. "We got the malaria results 40 minutes later. We waited two hours for the malaria medicine from the CDC (in Atlanta). I wish I knew her name to thank her."

Mutombo came to the U.S. in 1987 on an academic scholarship to attend Georgetown. As a pre-med major, he expected to return to the Congo as a doctor.

In his second year, Georgetown basketball coach John Thompson invited the 7-foot-2 Mutombo to try out for the team. He grew up loving soccer, but eventually came around to basketball under Thompson's guidance.

"He took me by his wing," Mutombo said. "He made me who I became today, he's like

a father figure to me. I don't call him 'Coach,' I call him 'Pop.' He gave me all the tools to succeed — maturity and education."

Georgetown was ranked No. 1 and reached the final eight twice in his three years of play. He was Big East defensive player of the year, averaging 15.2 points, 12.2 rebounds and 4.71 blocks his senior year.

College basketball altered his plans to become a doctor, and he graduated instead with degrees in linguistics and diplomacy. He speaks English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and five African dialects.

Mutombo has averaged 10.6 points and 10.8 rebounds in his 15-year career.

Now he's satisfied to assist on the medical front. His goal is to get 100,000 people to contribute \$10 a month on his website to support the hospital and research.

"I'm still a doctor, serving the people," Mutombo said.

Abortion

(Continued from Page 4)

In central Houston, there had been no full-fledged pregnancy center until one opened in 2004 in a poor, minority neighborhood. While many of the Fifth Ward Pregnancy Help Center's financial backers and volunteers are from White areas, its executive director, Sylvia Johnson, is Black.

"This is hard territory," she said. "We try to be non-

partisan, to let our service speak for itself. We can't fix all the problems."

Among the clients was 28-year-old Karry Ann Morris. Already a single mother with a 3-year-old son, she got pregnant again last year after her boyfriend's condom broke. She ended up at the Fifth Ward center along with the boyfriend, who was suggesting abortion.

Morris, a hairstylist, didn't know what to expect.

But she became determined to keep the baby — now a 4-month-old girl named Mikaila — when shown ultrasound images at the center.

"As much as I didn't want to be pregnant, when I saw her heart beating at six weeks, I knew," Morris said.

Heartbeat International's current project is to open three to five centers in Black and Hispanic neighborhoods of greater Miami, then apply

that model to other cities.

The Rev. John Ensor, the project's White executive director, said Miami was chosen partly because it had far more abortion clinics than pregnancy centers. He has spoken to some Miami-area churches, and is cautiously encouraged.

"We're just learning how to communicate," Ensor said. "There's the African-American culture and subcultures you have to figure out. The same with Latino-Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans. All these wonderful complexities that you find in an urban community."

He acknowledged a gap between Democratic-leaning minorities and conservative, White anti-abortion activists.

"There's no doubt it's a problem for African-Americans to join a movement they perceive is antithetical to their interests in other areas," said Ensor, who nonetheless

believes that, with patience and hard work, he can recruit local minority leadership.

Though relatively few Blacks play prominent roles in the anti-abortion movement, national polls indicate that qualms about abortion are as widespread among Blacks as among Whites.

One outspoken Black leader is the Rev. Clenard H. Childress Jr. of Montclair, N.J., who depicts the high abortion rate among Blacks as a form of genocide. He applauds the inner-city goals of groups like Care Net, but questions whether they have the savvy to avoid looking like carpetbaggers.

"Without a strong relationship with the local pastors, their efforts in the urban community will be in vain," he said. "It won't be effective if you don't resonate with the community as someone they can trust."

In inner-city Dallas, one Black pastor, the Rev. Tony Evans, acted on his own to open a pregnancy center in his church, the Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship. He said it differs from the standard center by offering comprehensive prenatal and postnatal services for mothers, including help finding jobs.

Care Net's Lillie Epps agrees on the importance of courting Black pastors. Some share opposition to abortion but don't speak out for fear of offending their Democratic-leaning congregations, she said.

Another key, she said, is recruiting local volunteers so the counseling staff isn't overwhelmingly White. "We want people to come in and see someone who looks like them," Epps said.

"We can't charge into a community and say, 'We're your savior.'"

CD

(Continued from Page 8)

overplayed," Adams said.

Since the musical marriage of Natalie Cole with her late father Nat King Cole on "Unforgettable," technology has advanced to the point of making almost anything possible. Mashups, which marry artists and songs in odd combinations, have become an underground art form.

Adams said he will protect Charles' legacy but he doesn't know if the future holds any more such projects.

"This is the best use of technology, when we can bring an amazing Ray Charles performance — one of the best he ever had — and build a musical form around it," Field said. "You would hope that the people charged with the custody of master recordings would respect the way they should be used."

The disc will be released Oct. 3 at traditional retailers and at Starbucks stores, where more than 800,000 copies of "Genius Loves Company" have been sold.

Radio

(Continued from Page 12)

walking triffecta: She's young, female and of a Black and Jewish descent, making her a part of all three of the statistically hardest hit groups. Black women in the U.S. account for 67 percent of AIDS diagnoses among women.

"I'm blessed and I'm cursed at the same time. So, I'm cursed because society

will look at me as a statistic, but I'm blessed because I can work against those stereotypes," Shapiro said.

She already stood out from the crowd because of the large Afro forming a halo around her face, but her insights during the question and answer period of the panel made her seem wise beyond her years.

Part of the reason was be-

cause she knows HIV/AIDS all too well — her mother died of the disease when Shapiro was six. She was not infected and has made it her personal mission to protect her friends, especially the young people.

But even with all the knowledge and personal experience she's had, it is not easy to convince her friends to protect themselves.

"I have friends that practice unsafe sex. I'm like the condom lady. I have to actually go to the CVS [drugstore], deal with the dirty looks at the cashier — it's not like I care — and give them the information that I should. The biggest thing that breaks my heart is when I try to deliver the information and people think I'm nagging them."

Africa

(Continued from Page 7)

and native Africans seem to appreciate the programming the most and encourages African-American families to watch it together.

"You really want to watch this network because probably what you see and what you've read and what you've heard about Africa is a fraction of what Africa is, and it's probably skewed heavily toward the negative aspects of Africa," he said.

"What this network does is, it balances the picture. It lets you know and lets you see all those great things that go on everyday in Africa throughout the continent that you never hear."