

## First-timer overseas turns into “volunteer for life”: Alvenease Jackson

As 2017 draws to a close, your CH2M Foundation would like to honor Alvenease Jackson whose first experience overseas turned her into a volunteer for life. Alvenease traveled to Rwimvubu, Rwanda, on our Bridges to Prosperity trip in February and a few months later, she led a record-breaking Water For People employee giving campaign in her office of Peachtree Corners, Georgia.

### **Traveling to Rwanda to build a bridge**

“Although I have been exposed to many cultures and professional backgrounds in my work, I’ve never had such a rewarding experience as living under the same roof, sharing sleeping quarters and meals and experiencing incredible camaraderie and compassion with the CH2M team in Rwanda,” said Alvenease. “I learned many new skills from my team members. Every moment was a teachable moment. Now I can operate a power saw and a power drill and hammer nails safely.”

Alvenease was excited to journey outside her comfort zone to share her talents, learn new skills and work with like-minded teammates to ensure no Rwandan has to lose another family member, miss an opportunity to sell their goods and services or delay a health and wellness visit because of an unsafe passage across a dangerous river. Although she was out of her comfort zone, her teammates made her feel at home and she adapted to the living conditions well, including the cold bucket baths. She felt humbled by how their food was prepared and laundry washed, realizing she had taken her comforts for granted.

“The local community members had the best work ethic I’ve seen in my entire career,” said Alvenease. “They take tremendous pride in their work. They were happy to give a helping hand on any task. The people of Rwanda work very well as a team and as individual contributors, and I will foster their trust and teamwork in my office.”

Alvenease’s favorite moment was overcoming her anxiety of being suspended in mid-air on the bridge. “Once we started securing the cross-beams to the suspenders, passing boards down the bridge and hanging and nailing the fencing, I forgot about those anxieties,” she said. “The excitement of building something with my hands and working closely with such a gifted team to help provide safe passage for the community filled my heart with joy!”

“Every day in Rwanda with Alvenease was an honor, especially to witness first-hand her transformation from ‘citizen of the USA’ to ‘citizen of the world,’” said Ellen Sandberg, executive director of the CH2M Foundation. “If there were an award for “volunteer of the year,” I’d bestow it on her with tremendous joy and appreciation.”

### **Next, leading her first Water For People employee giving campaign**

After returning from Africa, Alvenease decided to jump into leading her local Water For People employee giving campaign. “In Rwanda I experienced limited access to clean drinking water and sanitation,” she reflected. “That experience revealed many basic needs I took for granted. The best gift I can give is service to others. Supporting Water for People matters to me because our gift improves the quality of life for so many people.”

Although it was the first time for her Peachtree Corners client office to participate in the employee giving campaign, they achieved 100% participation, a milestone no other office reached!

“Our campaign was focused on doing the right thing for our communities with a sense of urgency. No bake sales, raffles or fanfare,” said Alvenease. “We scheduled a team meeting to discuss the needs of people who do not have access to clean accessible water and sanitation. I shared my experience in

Rwanda. Mike Sargent, Peachtree Corners building official, shared his experience while serving in Africa as an active duty soldier. We simply appealed to the emotions of our peers to become active servants.”

Peachtree Corners office lead David Chastant matched US\$10 for every \$10 donation, and Alvenease signed up for payroll donation herself. They also reached out to other remote project sites and clients onsite to invite them to participate.

Alvenease has a passion for being a servant leader and supporting causes that improve the quality of life for those less fortunate. She has been involved in many community outreach activities in support of our client, the City of Peachtree Corners, including serving as a member of the Green Committee. In January 2016, she and her teammates were awarded a Bronze Level Certification in the Green Communities Program by the Atlanta Regional Commission for their sustainability efforts.

“Employees who donate their time and talent in the communities where we live, work and play demonstrate their genuine concern for people,” said Alvenease. “Joining together for a common goal, we can help every community enjoy the benefits of living in a safe, clean and healthy environment.”

In Rwanda, Alvenease learned how to say thank you in Kinyarwanda: Murakoze. For her rock star service as an employee volunteer, we say **Murakoze** to Alvenease!