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Ameritrade and Opportunity Education founder Joe Ricketts speaks to LC TEACH students. Photo Credit: Al Quartemont

## Ameritrade founder embraces educational opportunity with LC

by Al Quartemont

### Joe Ricketts visits campus as part of LC partnership with Opportunity Education

Ameritrade founder Joe Ricketts believes strongly in two solid pillars for a successful society - free enterprise and education.

He is using his success in the first, which includes his family's ownership of the Chicago

Cubs, as a way to promote success in the other in countries such as Africa, and he is calling upon Louisiana College to help him get that done.

Ricketts, his brother Jim, and other officers with his philanthropic organization, [Opportunity Education](#), have been in Pineville this week to meet with LC's leaders including the School of Education.

It is the latest development in a quickly growing partnership that has seen LC host several educators from Tanzania, a key country in the Opportunity Education program. Later this summer, LC will send a team of educators to Tanzania to extend the training to those who could not come here.

Call it a marriage of two visions - that of Ricketts whose foundation's mission is to make quality education available to children in developing nations - and that of Louisiana College whose mission is to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ around the world.

"This was really an answer to a prayer – it's quite wonderful," said Ricketts following his speech at Guinn Auditorium to a group of educators who are currently enrolled in LC's summer TEACH program. "The fact that this university will provide teacher enhancement in education is a big deal. It will affect millions of lives because one teacher over there will have an affect on many students over a lifetime."

LC's connection to Opportunity Education came as the result of Dean of Education Randy Esters' pursuit of a relationship with the relatively new organization. Esters felt LC's development of [TEACH](#) and the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) programs were a perfect match for what Opportunity Education is beginning to do around the world. His call to the organization came even as Ricketts had been presented with the need to educate more teachers within his program to meet the demand of children wanting to learn in developing countries.

"The knowledge and willingness is there. They just need some help with the foundation," Ricketts said of the desire for education in underdeveloped areas of Africa, Asia and India. "To have the resources from this wonderful teacher's college is fantastic."

Ricketts' vision for Opportunity Education came after a family trip to Africa seven years ago. Part of that trip included a trek up Mt. Kilimanjaro. Ricketts developed an instant relationship with his guide and was surprised to learn the man had started his own school despite the fact he could neither read nor write. However, the man understood that his children's best hope for success was to be educated.

From there, Ricketts and his family got to see the guide's "school house" first-hand. It was nothing more than a small, one-room building. But as Ricketts noted, there were no pencils, no paper, nothing but 23 students with a desire to learn.

The name of the school was St. Wilson's Academy.

"I've been involved in Catholic schools all my life, and I've never heard of St. Wilson," Ricketts recalls.

Turns out that was the name of the guide. Not knowing any better, he had named the school after himself.

Ricketts was touched by the fact this man was using whatever money he had to improve the lives of those around him and sent the man a DVD of educational program from America and bought him a DVD player and television. The next year, the guide's school had grown to two buildings and nearly twice as many students.

Ricketts, again inspired, returned to the U.S., and this time, he had educational lessons from kindergarten and first grade classes put onto DVD and sent to the little school in Tanzania. Thus was born the idea that is largely the same today.

Only now, Opportunity Education has been set up in 11 countries and consists of 1,053 schools, more than 5,000 teachers and more than 500,000 students.

Through its website, [Opportunity Education](#) is promoting a quickly growing "Sister Schools" component where schools in the United States become "pen pals" with schools in other countries. Not only is there an exchange of letters, but many of the U.S. schools help raise money to sponsor supplies and even nutrition for their new friends across the world.

The financial component is no small issue as the average income for most of the 1.5 billion people in the countries served by Opportunity Education is \$3 per day.

For Ricketts, the best way to change that is to change the education as many of these countries. He said many of the countries, especially in Africa, have been impoverished through failed Socialistic governments. Many now are in the early stages of Democratic Capitalism. If those same two pillars that

helped make America what it is - free enterprise and education - come together in countries such as Tanzania, Ricketts has no doubt they might see similar success one day as well.

"I fell in love with economics and the free enterprise system when I went to college when I was told what it would do," Ricketts said. "You start a business, you employ people. They buy cars and they buy houses. They send their kids to college. Families flourish and the economy flourishes. People are able to have a quality lifestyle."

For more information on Opportunity Education, you can visit their website at:

<http://www.opportunityeducation.org/>