

Dear Svitek Family,

I am writing to say thank you for giving me the means to have an incredible internship this summer in Madagascar with the NGO Honko (mangrove protection and sustainable development). This internship gave me a once in a lifetime opportunity to work in one of the most amazing environments in the world and truly showed me some of the professional opportunities that await me after school.

Honko's goal is to help the communities in the southwest of Madagascar develop sustainably while protecting the mangrove ecosystems in the area. I had the opportunity to see what it was like to run an NGO like Honko. The normal director Benjamin Deridder left to go to South Africa from late May to August leaving me to watch over the center. I helped in all facets of the NGO's work which included, directing the three guides that worked at the center every day, organizing tourist visits, organizing a huge international mangrove party between the five villages Honko works with, I set up a soccer tournament to promote Honko, conducted forest transects throughout the mangrove, and was responsible for all of the financial regulation of the NGO. Outside of these duties I had to take on whatever challenge the people brought me. I was forced to learn to adapt in many situations that were completely foreign to me. I got to know the Malagasy people in a way that would not have been possible in any other setting. I believe that Honko is doing wonderful things for the villages I worked with and Madagascar as a whole. This organization is showing the people that there are sustainable ways to live without destroying a valuable mangrove environment.

Before I had this internship I had developed a pessimistic view of the environmental field. From all I had learned it seemed almost a hopeless cause, due to the fact that there is always a tradeoff to go "green." Usually that trade off was money. Asking someone who already is struggling to eat to spend more money, or sacrifice their time in the name of environmental protection is a difficult task. Honko gave me faith. The people who the NGO worked with really were starting to become more environmentally sustainable and seeing a return from their actions. I came into this internship worried that I would never see a practical way to protect valuable natural resources. This internship showed me that there are realistic methods to preserving the environment without disrupting peoples' livelihoods entirely.

Finally, without your generosity I would not have had this opportunity at all. This internship shaped my career path and my beliefs about working for the environment. I developed a deep interest in the global environment and ways to incorporate peoples' livelihoods into protecting it. I can't express how much your contribution means and did for me.

Thanks,  
Ralph Rogers

