



COURSE CORRECTOR
Mary Grace Henry (center) with two girls she supports. Below: A class in Uganda that benefits from her designs, such as these two pony buttons.



to girls in Africa—they can rely on her to fund a minimum of four years of secondary school.

In the process she has discovered the best way to maneuver in the nonprofit world, which she knows from both sides. On the one hand, she boosts the amount generated by her business with grants won through her own 501c3 organization. On the other, she channels the combined funds through U.S.-based NGOs such as Maasai Girls Education Fund, with a staff both here and in Africa, because she has found that these operations have effective programs and proven ties to the communities and so can provide the highest return on her investment.

Somehow, Mary Grace has accomplished all

this without missing out on other activities—she's co-captain of her school's squash team—or losing touch with her friends, who like to come to street fairs and sell the accessories in the booth with her. And she has turned into a poised spokeswoman for the power of education; she held her own at T&C's May Philanthropy Summit amid some impressive company. "If you educate a girl," she says, "the statistics show that when she has children, she'll be more likely to see that they too get an education."

She likes to imagine the ripple effect of her contributions leading to lasting change. "This is a message I've discovered through my own entrepreneurship: When you give someone a skill set, they don't have to beg for a job. They can go into their community and identify a need and address it. Because these girls know the best way to go about it, change will happen faster." «

Scrunchie POWER

FOR SIX YEARS MARY GRACE HENRY HAS BEEN EDUCATING GIRLS IN AFRICA. SHE'S ALL OF 18 NOW.

By Kevin Conley

It isn't easy to reach Mary Grace Henry, the teenage founder of the nonprofit **Reverse the Course**, a New York accessories company named partly for its first big hit—reversible headbands—and partly for its lofty ambition: to change girls' lives in sub-Saharan Africa through higher education. On Friday she was at golf practice at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, in Greenwich, Connecticut. On Sunday she had to edit a documentary about the plight of girls targeted by Reverse the Course, which has helped 66 thus far get through 154 combined years of higher education. Eventually a voice answers that sounds like Mary Grace. "Oh, no. I'm her mom. Hold on. Let me go grab her."

At 18, Mary Grace is already a veteran businesswoman, with

six years at the head of her independently operated accessories line. She started at 12, when, inspired by her school's regular fund drives to support sister schools in Uganda, she begged her parents for a sewing machine. "They officially didn't react. My dad just turned the page of his newspaper," Mary Grace remembers. "And my mom didn't even glance at me." Finally, she says, after weeks of campaigning, her dad "caved," and she spent the next two months sewing and resewing reversible headbands until she had 50 she liked. Her school bookstore sold out the entire stock in two days, and Reverse the Course was in business, although it wasn't officially incorporated until two months later, a detail Mary Grace delegated to her father, since for the next five years it would be illegal for her to perform many normal CEO duties, such as signing checks or contracts.

Her product line has since

expanded into barrettes, bows, buttons, and 67 new styles of headband, in addition to rapidly proliferating versions of the original, not to mention a full complement of ponytail technology: pony bows, pony buttons, pony frills, and pony slides. The collection (available at reversethecourse.org) is pitched at a tween and teenage sweet spot somewhere between dress-up box and beauty closet.

And in the meantime Mary Grace has picked up some serious skills: She has learned how to create a website, market her ideas, and be prompt in her responses. She has made it policy to direct 100 percent of her profits to girls' education. ("I don't make any money," she says. "And my mom volunteers for free.") She has also learned to maintain a sizable cash reserve, so that no matter how the business is doing at any given time, she will always have enough on hand to honor the commitments she has made

