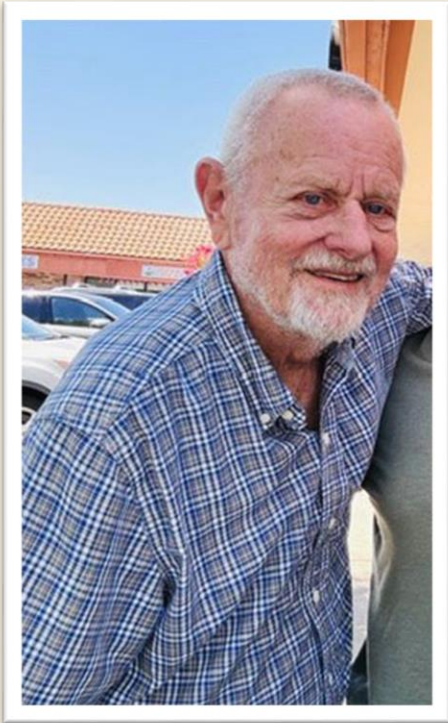


IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Larry Vrieling

Founding Board Member, Friends of Yimbo • 1942–2026



IN MEMORY

Larry Vrieling



Larry dancing with Mama Odipo during his first visit to Yimbo (2009)

This June 2026, Friends of Yimbo lost one of their own. **Larry Vrieling**, a founding board member and one of the truest friends Yimbo has ever known, passed away after a long battle with illness. He was, in every sense, that matters, family and the hole he leaves behind is the size of the life he lived.

We write this not only to mourn him, but to hold up everything he built, celebrate him and to make sure that everyone who drinks clean water in Yimbo today, everyone who signs up for their first humanitarian trip, and everyone who sits at our board table for years to come, understands exactly whose shoulders they are stand on.

A LIFE SHAPED BY SERVICE

Larry grew up on a farm in Escalon, California, where he learned early what it meant to work the land and to build a life around self-sufficiency a lesson that never left him, and one that would later make him feel instantly at home in a farming village in Kenya, half a world away.

Before he ever became an educator, Larry spent years in the Peace Corps in Bangalore, India, working in agricultural extension. That experience, immersed in a rural community's daily struggle to grow enough food to feed themselves and access clean water, planted something in him that would not fully bloom until decades later, on the other side of the world, in a village called Muguna.

Larry went on to build a 30-plus year career as an academic counselor and International Student Coordinator/Advisor at American River College in the Los Rios Community College District in Sacramento, guiding thousands of students toward their futures. And Ben was one of these students. He retired 24 years ago and then simply kept working, just without a paycheck. He mentored, traveled, served his community in Sacramento, and eventually found us.

THE WISDOM WE NEEDED

When Charles and Ben Odipo were first building Friends of Yimbo, other accomplished nonprofits gave them a piece of advice: surround yourself with depth. Find people whose life experience is wide enough, varied enough, and hard-won enough to sharpen your decisions. Larry was exactly like that person. His years in India and his decades of counseling gave every board conversation a depth it would not have had without him.

Larry was one of nine voices on our board, and he was often the loudest in the best way spirited, passionate, unwilling to let us take the easy answer. He was the one who, repeatedly, brought us back to the basics: slow down, and listen. In those early years, as a young organization still trying to earn the trust of a village that had every reason to be cautious of outsiders, Larry insisted that Yimbo was our partner, not our project. That single idea shaped everything Friends of Yimbo became.



Larry with the first ever volunteer group to Yimbo, 2009 humanitarian trip

LISTENING FIRST: THE 2009 VILLAGE FORUM

When Friends of Yimbo organized its very first humanitarian trip in 2009, Larry was one of the first to sign up. Once there, he was instrumental in hosting the first-ever FOY-Yimbo village forum in a room listening, exactly as he had always urged.

The village was clear. Their top priority was not a school building or a clinic. It was clean, safe water. Larry had seen this exact struggle before, in rural communities across the developing world, and he understood immediately what it meant: without water, so many young people's dreams simply never had a chance to begin.

FROM LISTENING TO WATER

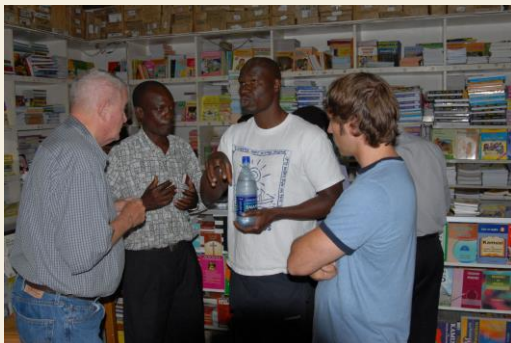
Larry did not let that forum become just a memory. When he came home to Sacramento, he got to work, reaching out to as many water experts as he could find to figure out how Friends of Yimbo could deliver on what Yimbo had asked for.

He was instrumental in organizing our very first major fundraiser, tracking down a water expert to serve as guest speaker and securing the event's venue through a family friend, Rominger West Winery, in Winters, California. That evening became the foundation for everything that followed.

Larry's efforts helped deliver Yimbo's first water well in 2014. He didn't stop there. Over the following years, he kept fundraising for household water tanks. Today, more than 75% of households (about 200 water tanks) across three villages have access to fresh water, via tanks. Every one of those households carries a piece of Larry in it.

THE SMALL THINGS THAT WEREN'T SMALL AT ALL

Larry's generosity showed in the grand gestures as well, a fundraiser, years of tank installations, but it also showed up in the small ones. He personally donated the very first National Geographic subscription to the Muguna School Library, so that students who had never left Yimbo could still see the wide, wonderful world around them. It was a small thing to give and an enormous thing to receive.



Larry chats with Fred (headmaster 2009), Charles and Aaron (FOY Board Members) at a bookstore in Kisumu. Larry was a strong advocate for adequate textbooks.



As a world traveler, Larry was always curious to learn about other people and how they live. Here is seen chatting with masai warriors in Masai Mara Village in 2009.

HIS LEGACY LIVES ON

We will miss Larry's friendship, his counsel, and his wisdom more than words can hold. He gave Yimbo a hand up, not a handout, exactly the way he believed it should be done, and he gave us, his fellow board members, a model of what it looks like to show up, to listen, and to keep showing up for twenty years.

Larry was family. Every glass of clean water poured in Muguna, Angwenyo, and Uyoma; every student who opens a National Geographic in the Muguna School Library and imagines a bigger world; every new board member who is reminded to listen before they act is informed by Larry Vrieling's legacy.

Rest well, Larry. We will carry and honor your legacy.



With love and gratitude, from your Friends of Yimbo family

