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**For Immediate Release**

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## **ASKINOSIE PARTNERS WITH MABABU FARMERS TO BUILD PRESCHOOL**

Springfield, Missouri - The Askinosie Foundation, Mababu Central Cocoa Fermentary (CCF) Farmer Cooperative and Askinosie Chocolate have partnered to create a wondrous preschool in a Tanzanian cocoa farming village.

The Chekechea (Swahili translation: preschool) can serve up to 300 five and six year olds and offers an unmatched, student-centered, early childhood learning option for this age group. The school brings new thinking to the standard chekechea curriculum and positive classroom management. The farmers intend to use the school as a future training center improving early childhood education throughout the region.

Inspired by Askinosie Chocolate's Mababu farmer partners' 2014 Vision of Greatness, discussion about the need for early childhood education began in 2017 and the group jointly chartered the preschool project in July 2018. Construction was contracted and managed by the Mababu CCF. Startup construction and initial infill costs were funded entirely by a private donation to the Askinosie Foundation from Amy and Michael Aquilino of Potomac, Maryland. Executive Director, Melissa Gelner, shares, "The confidence and trust shared by the Aquilino Family was paramount in the development of curriculum-based lessons and new discipline models, critical teacher training, and ultimately, the timely opening of the chekechea in January 2020." Additional donor funds were allocated to establish the nutrition program and fund student scholarships. The startup cost of the chekechea totaled \$90,000 USD.

Mababu CCF chairwoman, Mizinara Iutolo, shares, "We are excited to see that this dream has come to be true. We are proud to lead the addition of preschool education for Mababu and believe the chekechea investment will return many times the benefits in each child's life."

Founding Askinosie Foundation Board member, Shawn Askinosie, reflects, "Seeing the chekechea come to life is a result of the deep dedication of the farmers to their community. We are thankful to have the opportunity to support the startup costs and know that the farmers will work to provide quality education options to all students in their village."

Visit [chocolateuniversity.org](http://chocolateuniversity.org) for more information.

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About Chocolate University: Chocolate University is a neighborhood and global outreach and experiential learning initiative of Askinosie Chocolate currently managed within The Askinosie Foundation. It was formed with a vision to provide learning experiences to neighborhood elementary and middle school and local area high school students through the lens of artisan chocolate making and innovative small business models. The Foundation also supports improved learning outcomes and empowerment in the neighborhoods of the cocoa farmers who partner to supply Askinosie Chocolate. The mission of

Chocolate University is, “to inspire students to become global citizens and understand that businesses can solve world problems”. Chocolate University initiatives are funded through factory tour proceeds and generous donations.

About Mababu Central Cocoa Fermentary: The 60-member smallholder farmer cooperative produces cocoa beans for Askinosie from the lush Livingstone Mountain range in Southwest Tanzania. Mababu cocoa beans are acclaimed in several international chocolate awards for bars produced by Askinosie Chocolate. The group manages several business endeavors and leads community efforts throughout the village. Askinosie Chocolate has been working with this farmer group for a decade.

About Askinosie Chocolate: Askinosie Chocolate is a small batch chocolate manufacturer with 17 employees located in Springfield, Missouri, sourcing all of their beans directly from farmers and founded at the outset of the American craft chocolate movement. Considered a pioneer of direct trade, Shawn Askinosie, founder and CEO, travels to Ecuador, the Amazon, Tanzania and the Philippines to work directly with farmers, source premium cocoa beans, and get involved in their communities. This allows the chocolate to be one hundred-percent traceable and labeled authentic single origin chocolate. It also enables Askinosie Chocolate to open their books and share profits with the farmers, honoring them as partners in this endeavor. The Askinosie Chocolate mission is to craft exceptional chocolate and serve their farmers, their customers, their community and each other, striving in all they do to leave whatever part of the world they touch better for the encounter.