

Philanthropy Corner – January 31, 2010

“Keys Residents Extend a Helping Hand Across the Caribbean Sea”

Dianna L. Sutton

Nobody knows better than Keys residents how isolated living on an island can be when a catastrophic natural disaster strikes. Add pervasive poverty, a collapsed government and hundreds of thousands of fatalities or injured victims and one can just begin to imagine what it might be like in Haiti after the massive earthquake that struck on January 12th.

Local relief efforts include fundraisers organized by participating bars and restaurants, banks, businesses, churches, service clubs, and relief organizations like the American Red Cross, a list of which is published daily in the Citizen newspaper. The Citizen also recently published articles about local pilots delivering aide and crewmen of the Key West-based Coast Guard cutter Mohawk that recently returned to Key West after a week long deployment bringing relief supplies and providing medical assistance to the Haitians. Then there are local Key West residents John Andola and George Fontana who are carrying the “One Human Family” message to our neighbors in Haiti by delivering cash and nutritional health bars they collected on their front porch.

Additionally, the Key West noon Rotary Club has been a longtime sponsor and supporter of the Hospital Albert Schwietzer in Haiti that is located three hours north of Port au Prince and managed to survive the earthquake. The club has sent funds for immediate relief aid and continues to raise additional funds. Although cut off from cell phone communication with Port-au-Prince, the hospital’s medical staff are in email communication with local Keys residents Sandy Higgs and Rachel Oropeza, former and current International Chairs for the Rotary Club. Hospital Director, Dr. Ian Rawlson, reports that the medical staff is inundated with patients and awaiting medicine, supplies and volunteers while working steadily to provide medical assistance. Dr. Rawlson described the overwhelming impact of people arriving for treatment, “Every hour more come, packed in the back of Tap Taps, the open pickup trucks which ply the roads and serve as taxis. We assume about 150 as of this evening. We took all beds out of storage, commandeered others from people’s houses, bought some in the nearest town, and still some are sleeping on the floor and on benches. ...We are using our quarterly stock of medicines at rapid rates –one week’s worth yesterday alone....we will have to restock soon.”

These are but a few examples of the many extraordinary relief efforts underway throughout the Keys. They are emblematic of the many Keys residents who are passionate, caring and sharing neighbors---locally and globally—truly acting as One Human Family.

Across the nation Americans have donated a record amount of more than \$470 million for Haiti relief efforts through United States nonprofit relief groups, via a celebrity telethon, and through text messages. According to the Council on Foundations, the rate of giving for the same time period is outpacing the September 11 attacks and the Asian tsunami, but just shy of giving after Hurricane Katrina. Americans keep stepping forward to help the country as it faces critical and overwhelming challenges.

Clearly, Haiti will need continuing help with emergency aid and rebuilding efforts. Dr. Rawlson explains what the future may hold for Haiti, “We assume that this is only Phase I of the disaster. Phase II will entail the invasion of multinational relief agencies and press helicopters, which will be closely followed by Phase III, in which those of us who have been here, and will be here, gather up the pieces and slowly begin to put them together in a way which will address Haiti’s future needs.”

Additional contributions to the earthquake relief in Haiti continue to be encouraged. Congress has enacted a new law that allows taxpayers to claim a tax deduction on their 2009 tax returns for contributions made before March 1, 2010. Only cash contributions qualify and the new law allows donors to use

documentation other than a canceled check or obtain written acknowledgement from a charity, such as a telephone bill, for taxpayers who itemize their deductions.

Please consider joining your neighbors by extending a helping hand to our neighbors in Haiti.

You can find local donation stations listed in the Citizen, or for on-line resources of ways to contribute to the Haiti relief efforts visit The Council on Foundations (cof.org), Association of Fundraising Professionals (afpnet.org), and Guidestar (guidestar.org) websites.