



Update

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The Haiti Project

After receiving news of the earthquake in Haiti, WMF president, Tom Wells suggested we hold a clothing drive to benefit the quake victims. Partnering with the Ridgewood YMCA, collection boxes were set up for the month of February 2010 in Addison County, Vermont and in Paramus and Ridgewood, New Jersey. Paramus Building Supply generously donated the use of an empty warehouse on Century Road as a place to collect, sort and pack the donated items.



Volunteers sort and pack donated clothing in the Paramus warehouse. Most of the boxes in the background contain the donated blue jeans from Aeropostale. Clothes were sorted by sex, size and category. This space was empty before our drive!

The response was incredible! People dropped off bags of clothing and shoes and large companies shipped in new clothes. Do Something, Inc arranged for jeans from Aeropostale's Jeans for Teens program to come to us. We lost count as over 7000 boxes and bags of donated clothes and shoes came pouring in.



Pastor Dave Wood of Lincoln, Vermont helps distribute the very popular blue jeans in Port au Prince.

The next challenge was to sort and pack all the donated clothes to facilitate their distribution in Haiti. The four Saturdays in March were designated as days to sort and pack. Each Saturday drew over 150 volunteers! Teens, families, seniors, Rotarians, Y members, church groups, high school teams and clubs, all shapes, sizes, ages and colors came together to help Haiti.

Now, how to get the boxes of clothes to Haiti? After researching options, we bought twelve 40 foot containers to fill and ship to Haiti. Once emptied, the containers would be converted to hurricane and earthquake-proof YMCA buildings with doors and windows to be used for classrooms, libraries and community centers.

The Haiti Project continued

Although the containers were shipped in May and arrived in the Dominican Republic in June, it took several more months to get the containers through the convoluted customs process and transported to Port au Prince to be emptied.

This February, one year after beginning the project, a WMF team of 17 energetic volunteers, hailing from New York, New Jersey, Vermont and Ohio, traveled to Haiti to distribute the clothes and retrofit the containers. The team labored alongside YMCA d'Haiti staff and volunteers, as distribution sites were set up and containers morphed into buildings.



Residents of Laboule, a community up the mountain and east of Port au Prince, line up for one of our three clothing distributions in the Port au Prince area.



An excited young boy of Laboule runs to show his mother his new clothes.

During our week-long stay, we enjoyed the warmth of the Haitian people which came close to eclipsing that of the sun. Together with our new Haitian friends, we toted heavy boxes, devised clothing distribution systems, learned Creole for clothing items, painted murals on containers, welded, used power tools, ate meals together, talked of their up-coming elections and laughed as we tried to communicate with the youth using hand gestures and dusty high school French.

On the last day of work, our team was proud of what we had accomplished. Clothing was distributed to over 1200 men, women and children during three distribution events. Two containers were almost completely transformed into a gaily-painted, new YMCA building perched near the top of a mountain with a stunning panoramic view. The new YMCA will provide adult literacy classes, a youth soccer program, a library and other social services for the community of Laboule.

will have enough clothes to continue distributions for a year or more. Tools, materials and newly-acquired skills were left behind so the YMCA d'Haiti staff and volunteers can convert the remaining containers and create new centers of hope throughout the still recovering country.

To all our friends and supporters who donated to this amazing project, we at WMF thank you from the bottom of our heart. Contributions are still welcome, as the retrofit project and clothing distribution will continue well into 2012.

Our Haitian partners will continue the clothing distributions around the country. With the quantities collected, they



Still needing its roof, a few doors and some walls, the new YMCA of Laboule is dedicated at the end of our week in Haiti.