

Very Special People

by Pierre Barbeau
Executive Director

The most cost effective way we know to help the elderly poor in developing countries and in Canada is through our volunteer network. Not only do we have dedicated volunteers locally in developing countries who are helping the poor like Sister Johanne Grenier (photo) but we also have over 100 Canadians assisting us with our administration and management activities. Most of them have been with us for an average of eight years and the value of their volunteer time is conservatively estimated at \$850,000 annually. This newsletter profiles just a few of those who have been travelling to Haiti on our behalf for many years and who plan to continue their volunteer work despite the personal risks involved. It is on their behalf that I thank you for the very generous support you continue to provide to help victims of extreme poverty in Haiti and other countries.



Haiti: Job Descriptions You Wouldn't Believe



One of the walls at the Brenda Strafford Hospital had to be partially torn down and rebuilt to allow a donated laundry machine to be installed.

Many qualities are required for a volunteer to succeed in such a difficult country as Haiti. Two of them are resourcefulness and flexibility. For example, the two photos (left) illustrate how Help the Aged handyman André Ouellette and fellow volunteer Léonard Labbé solved a difficult problem at the Brenda Strafford Hospital in Les Cayes: How do you move a huge, donated laundry machine into a room with a regular size door? As shown in the photos, the solution was to tear down part of the wall, lift and drag in the laundry machine on wood beams through the opening and rebuild the wall. The photo with André shows him connecting the hospital laundry machine to the electrical panel.

Marguerite Saint Louis, a volunteer from Mont Laurier, Quebec travels to Bombardopolis, Haiti on our behalf every year for approximately eight weeks to assist our Adopt-A-Gran sponsorship program. She frequently comes across abandoned seniors who are at the edge of starvation and require food and urgent medical help. Sometimes, it can be bedridden seniors who have not been washed for many months and are infested with fleas and lice. Marguerite doesn't hesitate to help when she witnesses extreme cases, such as the handicapped man in the photo below who had not been washed for several months.



Volunteer handyman André Ouellette setting up the laundry machine's electrical and plumbing connections.

He was unable to walk and had to be carried outside to be washed. Marguerite wrote that his bed consisted of three pieces of wood and that she was able to find a mattress and pillow for him as well as food. Gilbert Excicus has since been sponsored by a generous Canadian supporter. Marguerite mentioned to me that she "had a good cry" when she was washing Gilbert because his body was shaking due to the cold water and he was so frail.

Volunteer Marguerite Saint-Louis took a few minutes to wash a newly sponsored handicapped elderly person during her last trip to Haiti. Gilbert Excicus was near starvation and his relatives had just finished building his casket, assuming he would die in the very near future. His food, clothing and medicines are now being provided through our Adopt-A-Gran program.



Risks and Rewards



Laurian Saint-Amour has lived in Haiti for the last five years and has been a key HTA volunteer for eight years.

Volunteers Léonard Labbé and Laurian Saint-Amour have been travelling to Haiti on our behalf for the past eight years. In fact, Laurian has been living in Haiti for at least ten months every year despite being robbed at gunpoint in his home in the middle of the night and being shot at when he escaped Haiti during the last civil war in February 2004. Both he and Léonard are retired, having worked as hospital technicians for most of their lives. Leonard and André Ouellette were in the same vehicle as Laurian when they were shot at by thieves when trying to escape the country. All three of them were flown out of Port Au Prince in a Mexican military aircraft sent to evacuate victims. Despite the dangerous situations they encounter, including the possibility of being kidnapped for ransom in Port Au Prince, both have become so attached to the Haitian seniors that we support that they are eager and willing to return every year.



Jocelyne Gosselin travels to Haiti every year and is on our Board of Directors.

The same applies to Alfred Laberge who has travelled (and lived) in Haiti on and off for the last 12 years. Al and wife Nicole adopted Carrie Anne, a baby who had been abandoned in Belize 14 years ago when they were volunteering for Help the Aged in that country. Al, Nicole and Carrie-Anne had to return home to Canada last year from Port au Prince when the situation became too dangerous. Bullets were flying closer and closer to home and their dog had been kidnapped for a ransom of \$200 US. (they paid it) They are nevertheless planning to return to Haiti when the situation in Port Au Prince improves. The number of kidnappings in this city of 1.8 million has skyrocketed during the last two years. Rich Haitians and foreigners are the victims despite the 9,000 United Nations troops who are in Haiti trying to prevent another civil war.



Joseph Lambert has travelled to Haiti every year since 1989 and recruited Laurian Saint-Amour, Marguerite Saint-Louis and other key HTA volunteers.

Jocelyne Gosselin and Guy Martel are also planning to return to Haiti despite the risks involved. Both are members of our Board of Directors and both have endured a great deal of personal discomfort to work with the Haitian elderly. For example, Jocelyne has traveled on horseback to visit some of our sponsored grans in Camp Perrin because the roads were so poor and Guy has repeatedly emptied out 40 foot containers of medical supplies and equipment we shipped from Canada in temperatures that exceeded 130 degrees Fahrenheit. Unfortunately, the disadvantage of metal containers is that they in effect become large ovens when exposed to the hot Haitian sun.



Léonard Labbé not only helps us in Haiti but he and wife Marguerite have recruited numerous Adopt-A-Gran sponsors for us in the Quebec City area.



Guy Martel is also on our Board of Directors and assists with the management of our projects in Haiti.



Volunteer Al Laberge with one of Mother Theresa's sisters (Missionaries of Charity) in Les Cayes.

Your Generous Gift ...

will be used to support our programs in Haiti including a new project recently approved for match funding by the Quebec Ministry of International Relations. This is an inter-generational project involving primary school children in Bombardopolis planting 28,000 fruit trees near their homes and the homes of the elderly poor in the community.

The addition of fruit trees will add a valuable food source to the poor and combat serious erosion in this drought stricken area. Also, two large water reservoirs will be constructed.

All donations to this project will be tripled by the Quebec government and all donations towards our other overseas projects will be tripled by CIDA.

Thank you and best wishes from our volunteers and staff!