Earthquake victims in California and Haiti build together in the aftermath

By Emily Ming on June 3, 2011

IMPERIAL VALLEY, Calif.–A plate heaped with rice, sloppy beans, and chunks of questionable meat was lovingly set before Shelby Drye one evening in March 2010 in Barbancourt, Haiti. His poverty-stricken, disaster-weary dinner hosts shared just one paltry plate of the same food among themselves. It’s a meal Drye will never forget.
Shelby Drye, 20, shares his experiences from his home in Holtville, Calif. looking back on pictures taken during his Summer 2010 mission to Barbancourt, Haiti.--Photo by Emily Ming

“They wanted to make sure we ate before they did,” he said, remembering that he did not want to eat what was offered to him that evening two months after the 7.0-magnitude earthquake ripped through the Caribbean nation on January 12, 2010. But, because of the sincere depth of their gift, he ate anyway. “It was the best they had to give,” he said.

Drye, a San Diego State University student at the Imperial Valley campus, was a delegate in a group of local religious leaders and business people who went to Haiti on a mission of help, hope and good will that rapidly became a full-fledged, non-profit organization now known as I.V. Hope for Haiti to aid in the rebuilding of one Haitian community.

Ryan Rothfleisch, an Imperial Valley farmer, initiated that mission after seeing the heart-wrenching images of Haitians in the aftermath of the earthquake on television. “I found myself breaking down and crying,” said Rothfleisch,” remembering that he felt compelled to do something for the Haitians. “The Lord was pressing on my heart.”
During their assessment trip to Haiti, Rothfleisch, and prominent businessmen and clergy, Richard Moore, Walter Colace, Andrew Colace, and Jim Tucker, were charged with evaluating Barbancourt’s property resources, measuring its farming potential, and surmising other infrastructure needs following the earthquake.

They looked for opportunities to teach the Haitians how to provide for themselves by assessing land availability for agriculture, and housing reconstruction.

“It was overwhelming; the worst I’ve ever seen,” said Moore. He recalled seeing families without any electricity or running water. “Two to three miles in every direction, you could see buildings flattened.”

Ironically, only one month after that assessment tour to Haiti, their own hometowns 2,500 miles west of Haiti were violently shaken by the 7.2 Easter Sunday temblor, centered just south of the California-Mexico border in Guadalupe Victoria, Mexico.

Despite the local hardships created by the larger quake in the Mexicali and Imperial valleys, the delegation said there was no need to back out of the help they’d already committed to their Haitian charges. “We went where the biggest need was,” said Drye.

“Here (in the Imperial Valley), people can help themselves; there in Haiti, they needed all the help they could get,” said Drye.

The group turned the word hope into the acronym H.O.P.E for Haiti, which stands for homes, orphanages, provisions, and evangelism. I.V. Hope for Haiti, which launched in the summer of 2010, has since raised about $250,000 locally, 95 percent coming from local churches and the community.

The Imperial Valley’s I.V. Hope for Haiti is installing 30 new manufactured homes, one of which is pictured here, in the rural community of Barbancourt, Haiti that the Imperial Valley organization has purchased and shipped from China.-- Photo Courtesy I.V. Hope for Haiti
They’ve bought 30 manufactured homes from Chinese builders that they plan to continue installing in the next year in Barbancourt. They are also working on building an orphanage, called Children of Hope that will be located in the same community.

Throughout this first year, the organization has taken nine teams to Haiti to help build homes.

“It has brought me down to earth,” explained Drye, who helped lay the first foundations for new houses.

He remembers it being a tough trip, not just physically, but emotionally. “It was really devastating,” said Drye. “It was gut-wrenching, knowing I was going back to the U.S. while these people had to live here.”

The orphanage that I.V. Hope for Haiti is planning will house 105 Haitian children in a 40’ x 72’ foot building, surrounded by eight other smaller buildings that will house orphanage staff.

Nicole Rothfleisch, Ryan’s wife, heads the committee charged with running the orphanage, which is currently funded by local donors.

The Presidential Palace in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti, collapsed in the January 2010, 7.0-magnitude earthquake that struck Haiti. The collapse of nearby buildings killed many of the fathers of children in Barbancourt, Haiti, leaving dozens of children in the rural Haitian community orphaned. --Photo Courtesy I.V. Hope for Haiti

In Barbancourt, 50 to 70 percent of children lost at least one parent to the earthquake, many of whom were fathers who worked in the capital city of Port-Au-Prince, near the epicenter of the quake. When the quake struck, they were killed as buildings toppled.

Their plans for the orphanage are permanent, however, meaning that quake-damaged families are not the only focus of the orphanage. “We are there for the long haul.”
Nicole Rothfleisch has started a non-profit adoption agency here in the Imperial Valley called Amaris Ministries, named after her own adopted child. The agency is in the licensing process and has not yet facilitated any adoptions, although the goal is to make adoptions available internationally.

Currently, Children of Hope is a resource center for anyone who is interested in adopting Haitian children, or have any questions about the process.

I.V. Hope for Haiti focuses not only on the physical needs of the Haitians, like housing or an orphanage, but to reach out to the Haitians spiritually.

“Everything we do is for the glory of God,” said Steven Hawk, a Holtville grower and a delegate on one of the Haitian trips. “(The Haitians) want to know why we were there,” said Hawk. “I go to bless them.”

Though the labor of building the houses was tough enough in the squalor of a third world country slammed by disaster, he said that the fulfillment of helping the Haitians outweighed the hardships.

He recalled a Haitian woman who worked right along side him and the other Americans. “Everybody noticed this lady,” said Hawk. She was always working the hardest and always had a smile on her face. “She was doing it for the love of her community.”

For more information, you can visit I.V. Hope For Haiti online, or call them at (760) 337-9444.

Article Tags: Andrew Colace, Barbancourt Haiti, Children of Hope orphanage, Haiti earthquake, Haitian adoptions, Haitian help, Haitian orphanages, Haitian presidential palace, Holtville, I.V. Hope for Haiti, Imperial County, Imperial Valley Hope for Haiti, IV Hope for Haiti, Jim Tucker, Nicole Rothfleisch, Richard Moore, Ryan Rothfleisch, Shelby Drye, Walter Colace

4 Comments

- **Anna** says:
  
  June 7, 2011 at 12:23 pm

  Good story!!! Hoping the best for Haiti!

- **Jorge.** says:
  
  June 7, 2011 at 12:24 pm

  Wow I’m impressed. Great story. Didn’t know the valley was that involved. Nice photos too.!

- **Gina** says:
  
  June 14, 2011 at 8:34 pm
I agree with you, Jorge and Anna, good story. Very compelling. Emily, could you keep us posted here in the future?

Emily says:

June 15, 2011 at 6:55 pm

Thanks everyone! I will definitely keep everyone posted with upcoming news. In fact, the next team to be heading over to Haiti will be early July, where they will begin construction of the orphanage.

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