

## LOCAL MAN FINDS HIS MISSION IN HAITI

BY Susan Belford

Mark Dreibelius felt panic, anguish and terrifying fear as he listened to news reports about the 7.0 magnitude earthquake which had hit Haiti. He desperately searched for air transportation to Port-au-Prince but to no avail. The airport was barely open and most planes were not cleared to land. Finally, a week later, he found a flight to the Dominican Republic and, upon arrival, drove 8 hours across the country on narrow windy roads to the city. He had to reach the Mission Ranch compound that he had so carefully built (or what was left of it) as soon as possible to help the staff take care of the Haitians pouring into the facility. He had to make certain the children in his orphanage were emotionally and physically surviving the aftermaths of the earthquake. He desperately wanted to be on hand to help the medical center treat the victims who were arriving by hundreds. Everything in Mission Ranch except the medical clinic had been destroyed – but the children and the staff were all alive.

They were in Port-au-Prince for the 6.5 magnitude aftershock. Dreibelius shared what the experience was like. “The sound of the earth shaking is like a freight train. It is a remarkable sound. It’s a loud rumble that comes from the center of the earth. After these tremors, everyone refused to stay or sleep in their homes. They were afraid they would collapse on them. Being poor can be a blessing because the tin shacks shook, but they did not fall down.”

How did Dreibelius become so involved in Haiti? In 2004, he traveled to Haiti to visit a child he was sponsoring. The ten day visit changed his life. He returned home to Gaithersburg vowing to start a non-profit to provide feeding programs, medical care and an orphanage for the children. After researching the many rules and regulations of a 501C3., Mark founded the Famine Relief Foundation to raise the funds for his dream. A member of the Potomac Rotary, Dreibelius received funding from this organization. After he raised enough money, he traveled to Leilet, Haiti, a rural community near the Dominican Republic border and started a feeding program. “All you need is a willing servant’s heart and a passion to succeed,” states Dreibelius when asked how he learned to manage such a program. . “Haiti is the most impoverished country in the western hemisphere. I felt a calling to return there.”

After two years in the rural area, he felt a calling to Cite Soleil, the poorest ghetto in Port au Prince. This slum is infested with gangs, crime, homeless children and drugs. He found some abandoned buildings which had been owned by a gangster named Evans. Evans ran Cite Soleil – he was the warlord of the city. Most of the gangster activity included kidnapping, ransoms and assassinations for President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. When Evans went to prison in 2007, people were afraid to touch the property, for fear of repercussions from the gangs. However, the city government trusted Dreibelbis and turned over Evans’ complex to the Famine Relief Foundation to build a medical center, feeding center, religious center and orphanage. After, these were built, they introduced programs for delivering medical care, vitamins, dental care, clothing, and food. GNC sent them 60,000 vitamins to distribute to the children and they partnered with the Haiti Clinic, a nonprofit from Florida to get help and support to run the medical clinic. “After the earthquake, the Haiti Clinic provided two doctors and many bags of antibiotics

and supplies. “ Dreibelbis stated, “They were very instrumental in helping the number and the volume of patients we saw We saw roughly 1500 to 2000 patients in the first two and a half weeks.”

Since he is not able to be in Haiti most of the time, a Haitian named Robinson manages the day-to-day activities of the orphanage and the complex. Robinson, along with a staff of 10, has built a family atmosphere for fifteen children. Dreibelieus explained, “We must rely on one another. The children are expected to get along, to be respectful and to help. Most of the children are schooled within the complex. They are taught academics as well as skills related to their career interests. If one of the children thinks she or he wants to grow up and work in the market, we will teach them the necessary skills and then we plan to build them the store in the market to start their business. Many of the children come to us with no schooling at all, so we must start with the basics. One of our children was a child slave and severely beaten - we saved her from that life. The children have horrendous life stories, and we are giving them a chance to be children again.”

Dreibelius is a professional photographer who owns Fine Art Photography and Hot Shots Photography, but his true calling is his missionary work. Now he is busy fundraising. The Famine Relief Foundation needs at least \$105,000 to rebuild the orphanage, religious center and feeding center. After the earthquake, the only building standing is the newly built Medical Center, built to withstand Category 4 hurricanes. The Famine Relief Foundation also needs additional money for food, medical supplies, and vitamins and to meet the basic needs of the earthquake victims. Dreibelieus donates a portion of each photography event check to his cause.

“One hundred percent of the funds go to help the people of Haiti and the Mission Ranch facility,” he states. . To sponsor a child is only \$30.00 per month.” To learn more about the Famine Relief Foundation, see the website at [www.Faminerelief foundation.com](http://www.Faminerelief foundation.com). Mark Dreibelieus’ email is [frf@faminerelieffoundation.com](mailto:frf@faminerelieffoundation.com) and his telephone is 301-990-0976. Videos are also available on his website, and at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v+1f3oduaOxM> . They do contain graphic and disturbing images.