

North Naples engineer, Fort Myers nonprofit team up on building Haiti village

By TRACY X. MIGUEL

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NORTH NAPLES —As early as high school, Norman Trebilcock wanted to become an engineer and design buildings in Haiti.

Growing up in Miami, where many Haitian immigrants landed after fleeing their country, Trebilcock recognized their struggles and wanted to help. As a high school senior, he wrote an essay about his interest in getting involved in projects in Haiti, one of the poorest nations in the world.

Now, with 23 years of experience as an engineer, Trebilcock, 47, said he's always considered his work a public service. So when asked by John Boldt, a national field representative of the organization Engineering Ministries International, to help with the devastating earthquake that hit Haiti's capital on Jan. 12, 2010, the North Naples resident didn't hesitate. Trebilcock agreed to lend his expertise to help design Miracle Village and Abundant Life Marketplace, a 78-acre sustainable community in Haiti for earthquake evacuees and amputees.

Miracle Village is about 30 miles east of Port-au-Prince.

The project's developer is Love A Child Inc., a Fort Myers-based nonprofit Christian humanitarian organization. Love A Child has been helping Haiti since the 1970s.

"This is the most important subdivision I have ever worked on," said Trebilcock, who uses his vacation time and money to go to Haiti to help.

With Saturday's third anniversary of the devastating earthquake that hit Haiti's capital, there remains a great need. Love A Child Inc. is trying to meet it.

Even though there have been challenges in responding to the Haitians' needs after the 7.0 quake hit Port-au-Prince and outlying areas, Love A Child continues to provide humanitarian aid. The organization is promoting development and self-sustainability for the residents of Miracle Village and the surrounding area.

"After our first trip in March 2010, two months after the quake hit and witnessing the suffering and devastation, I was fully committed to help out," Trebilcock said in an email.

Rad Hazelip, assistant executive director for Love A Child, said there are two key elements to making the project sustainable — the marketplace, which will add 600 new businesses, and agricultural training for village residents.

The new 60-acre community has about 500 homes designed to stand up to hurricanes and earthquakes. Miracle Village, a \$3 million project paid for by donors, includes homes, roads, fresh water wells, a school and a clinic, Hazelip said.

More than 2,500 earthquake evacuees and amputees moved into the homes about 15 months after the earthquake. For many families, it was their first time sleeping in beds.

The prerequisite to reside in the community was to have gone to the Love A Child hospital, Trebilcock said.

Trebilcock, along with his team members at Trebilcock Planning Engineering of North Naples who are volunteering through the Engineering Ministries International, are finishing the land design plan of The Abundant Life Marketplace. The marketplace is a 16-acre commercial area adjacent to Miracle Village. The estimated 1,800-foot by 30-foot market will include more than 600 stalls for selling goods and will provide direct employment to more than 2,400 people.

Trebilcock said the market will enable residents of the Miracle Village and the Fond Pariesien, an adjacent community, to become more self-sufficient by managing a sustainable business using learned skills and selling their products.

The Haitian government granted the group the land for the marketplace, which is slated to open in July.

Trebilcock said the project team has to keep the design as simple as possible to avoid problems once the plans are sent to Haiti, where someone else will build it.

"It's expected that this marketplace will change many thousands of Haitians' lives for years to come," Hazelip said.

The estimated cost of the marketplace is nearly \$973,000, though less than \$30,000 of that has been raised so far.

"Everything Love A Child has been able to do in Haiti has been done by walking in faith and this will be done the same way," Hazelip said. "We know the donations will come in. They have always come in for God's projects."

In addition, Love A Child plans to open an agriculture training center that will teach sustainable agriculture practices.

Hazelip said parts of the agriculture training center, which is adjacent to the marketplace in the rear of Miracle Village, already are open, including family garden plots.

The overall project also includes an area for worship, a school, a recreation area and preserves. The community church is in the final phase of construction. The village is adjacent to an orphanage run by Love a Child, a radio station, medical clinic, tilapia farm and a regional food distribution warehouse.

Last year, the organization distributed more than 13 million meals throughout Haiti, Trebilcock said.

The organization also teaches life skills, which trains and equips Haitians to have successful businesses, such as in baking, tailoring and beauty salons.

"It's the most comprehensive approach of breaking the cycle of poverty that we are aware of," Hazelip said.

Engineering Ministries International, a Christian design professionals volunteering group, works mostly with missionaries in Third World countries on projects, such as schools, orphanages and other community services. Since 1982, the group, with about 9,000 professionals in the U.S., has worked on more than 1,000 relief and development projects in 90 countries.

The group has volunteers from across the country with different professional backgrounds — from mechanical and electrical engineers to surveyors and design professionals.

There are about 145 Engineering Ministries International professionals in Southwest Florida and about 20 from Naples and Fort Myers have made trips to Haiti, said John Boldt, EMI national field representative.

Since the project began, Trebilcock has visited Haiti four times.

"This experience has given me a real respect for the Haitian people and how they are able to continue on in spite of endless obstacles and suffering," he said. "I am uplifted and dedicated to helping in the future to rebuild Haiti."



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