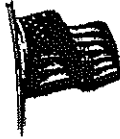


**PALM BEACH COUNTY  
SHERIFF'S OFFICE**

RIC L. BRADSHAW, SHERIFF



After the January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010 earthquake that ravished the Republic of Haiti, killing more than 200,000 and displacing millions more, several members of the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office District 14 – City of Lake Worth were moved to respond in a meaningful way. (District 14 serves over 8,000 Haitians living in Lake Worth.) There has always been tension between law enforcement and the Haitian Community because of the general distrust by the Haitian Culture based on their experiences from in their country.

The community policing team knew a meaningful effort would involve traveling to Haiti themselves to see firsthand how they could be most effective in bringing about real help. They understood that by getting involved and attempting to bring relief to those who were really hurting, they would not only help those who were seriously suffering, but also it would achieve an ancillary benefit- help "bridge the gap" with the local Haitian Community. With these goals in mind, the team comprised of Captain Rolando Silva, Sergeant Enrique Ponce, Deputy Pierre Rouzeau, and Deputy Patrick Desir embarked on their good will mission. The team funded this trip with their own money along with a \$1,000 grant from the Police Benevolent Association.

On May 13<sup>th</sup>, the team departed for a 3 day trip to Port-Au-Prince and the surrounding areas. While in Haiti, the team met with various government officials to see where the needs were most critical. They identified groups of people who were living the dire situations- literally thousands were living in tent cities, starving, and going without medical attention. In short, the situation was shockingly bad, beyond the team's imagination.

While in Haiti, the team toured a makeshift hospital at the airport and the Croix-de-Bouquet branch of the Haitian National Police which was destroyed near the capital. Everyone the team spoke with was appreciative that the team would take the initiative to come to Haiti like they did to offer help, and as a result, many were given hope. The team captured their efforts in a documentary style video, which was used to garner donations and to raise relief funds. (Click on [Mitzvah Mission to Haiti 2010](#) to see the video that is uploaded on You Tube.)

Upon their return, the team embarked on *Operation Kembe Fem*, which translates to "hold strong" in Creole. The purpose of this part of the mission was to garner critically need supplies to take back to those hurting the most in Haiti and to support the entity responsible for safeguarding them, the Haitian National Police (HNP). The team partnered with the American Jewish Committee (AJC) of Palm Beach County on the second phase of their project.

The team in their new partnership with the AJC engaged in vigorous fundraising for the purpose of filling two large shipping containers (set up on the grounds of District 14 in Lake Worth) with what they felt was the most critically needed items. The team strategically used several media outlets- the evening news, several local newspapers, and even local Haitian radio stations- to get their message across to the public. They put on a Haiti Relief Reception at the

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Colony Hotel in Palm Beach where over \$4,000 was raised in that event alone. The team continued from there, initiating more fund raising meetings throughout Lake Worth and aboard. As a result of the concerted efforts, the team and the AJC raised over \$17,000 in cash which went to buying supplies and funding the return trip. These efforts even inspired a movie actress (Maria Bello known most for her lead role in *Coyote Ugly*) to join the effort and have 10,000 whistles shipped in the team's containers to Haiti so that women living in camps who are at risk of sexual assaults could have whistles to alert others for help.

The total estimated value of all of the donated supplies is \$175,000. Included was an operating table to be used at a hospital in one of the poorest towns in Haiti, two used police cars which were refurbished and donated to the Haitian National Police, and wheel chairs. Also collected were over 1,000 units of protective police gear and equipment such as ballistic vests, shields, helmets, flashlights, 182 sleeping cots for children sleeping on the hard ground, and 20,000 pounds of rice and beans, which can feed up to thousands living in the tent cities and orphanages.

The team members traveled back to Haiti in November to ensure these items were delivered to the intended recipients -people actually living in the tent cities they visited and the HNP. Getting relief supplies through Haitian Customs was an issue that has been problematic and the team knew that overcoming that potential obstacle would be a challenge. After their arrival in Port-Au-Prince, the team began the process of cutting through the governmental bureaucracy that stood in the way of having the donated items released from the Port of St. Marc. The team solicited the help of Congressman Ted Deutch, and after 12 days of dealing with government officials up to and including meeting with the Minister of Interior for country, the team was able to get the relief supplies released by the authorities. On day thirteen of the mission, they began their distribution efforts.

The team collaborated with the HNP and went back to the tent cities visited during their first trip. They set up distribution points and gave away the collected items. They captured their efforts in a second documentary style video which they shared with their supporters upon their return to the states. (Click on this hyperlink to view on You Tube: [Mitzvah Mission to Haiti II](#))

As a result of the project, the District 14 Team helped many suffering in Haiti and have "built bridges" between the Haitian Community living here and law enforcement. This project instilled a better understanding and trust between the two groups and will pay dividends for many years to come.