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## BUSINESS

## Key link for Haiti: 2 Orlando firms fly in satellite equipment and other supplies

By Jeff Weiner and Orlando Sentinel  
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FEEDBACK

When he returned to Haiti last month, Joel Trimble Jr. struggled to recognize the place where he grew up.

With many landmarks destroyed by the devastating Jan. 12 earthquake, Trimble, a network engineer for Orlando-based IT Broadcasting, said he had a hard time navigating the familiar streets. Seeing the devastation

first-hand, Trimble said he wondered whether he could do anything that would make a difference.

"It was like, what can I do?" he said.

As it turned out, Trimble and his business colleagues have been able to do quite a lot.

On Jan. 15, IT Broadcasting, a technology-consulting firm, and TracStar Systems, a mobile satellite communications company, chartered a flight to Haiti, with a plane full of supplies and a single TracStar satellite antenna. Since then, the two companies have made more than a dozen flights, bringing more than 50 satellite antennas as well as doctors and medical supplies to the ravaged nation, according to IT President Ann Margaret Howard and Mike Gregg, TracStar's director of special projects.

Both said that neither company has asked for or been paid a dime for their equipment or their efforts — despite a price tag they placed in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

And both said they wouldn't have it any other way.

"It wasn't even a decision," Howard said.

Seeing the destruction wrought by the earthquake on television, Trimble said he felt compelled to help.

His father, Joel Trimble Sr., runs a mission in Haiti and hosts a popular Haitian television show called *La Bonne Nouvelle*. The younger Trimble lived in Haiti for much of his childhood and adolescence.

"I was dying to go," he said. "Something was driving me there."

That was all Howard needed to hear. IT Broadcasting contacted TracStar and set up their first flight — a small charter plane loaded with the mobile satellite antenna and some food and water.

Describing the destruction they found, Trimble's eyes seemed distant, as though still focused on a home nearly 900 miles away.

"You'd see a four-story business or buildings where all four stories are laying on top of each other, with nothing in between them," Trimble said.

"You can only assume there's bodies in there," he said, "especially when you smell them."

Asked how he was able to continue working despite the death around him, Trimble explained that he had a job to do.

"Mentally, I think my mind kind of took over, and kind of put up some walls," he said.

The companies' generosity was crucial to Dr. Hilarie Cranmer, to whom Haiti was another in a long line of disasters.

The director of educational initiatives at Harvard University's Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, Cranmer has helped in relief efforts as near as post-Katrina New Orleans and as far away as post-war Kosovo.

In January, in the aftermath of the quake, Cranmer helped organize of the Fond Parisien Disaster Recovery



Center, a medical compound coordinated by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative in Fond Parisien, Haiti, on land donated by Love A Child Inc.

When they first set up shop, Cranmer, the center's director, said her staff had only their cell phones and spotty reception.

Cranmer said she contacted Haiti Satellite, a company owned by Joel Trimble Sr., and soon the makeshift hospital had phone lines, Internet and a local network — all courtesy of IT Broadcasting and TracStar technology.

"We were able to do patient tracking and logging," Cranmer said. "It also helped with linking together all of our volunteers"

Perhaps more importantly, Cranmer said, the equipment helped her and her staff get displaced Haitians back in touch with their families.

The satellite antennas manufactured by TracStar are designed to break down and fit inside small cargo cases for easy transport. Requiring only a power source, the antennas allow for streaming video, data transfer, Internet phone and other Web services from remote locations.

Dr. Evan Lyon, a longtime volunteer for Partners in Health in Haiti, was working at University Hospital in Port-au-Prince within days of the disaster, as an adviser and coordinator for the hospital's director.

Without reliable communications gear and no Internet, the hospital staff could only communicate with one another in person, he said. Then two people from Haiti Satellites arrived on motorcycles and asked if Lyon wanted a communications system, he said.

"Instantly we said, 'Yes, we'd love the system,'" Lyon said. Lyon said that having the ability to coordinate supplies was literally a life-saver.

"When the offer came to put in an Internet system, that's manna from heaven," he said.

Moving forward, Howard said her company will likely continue to increase its presence in the Haiti by hiring Haitians to help in its three main goals: supporting Haiti Satellite, supporting the Haitian government and providing solutions for the country's healthcare system.

Howard said she continues to view her company's effort as a humanitarian mission, not a business proposition.

"It's not about sales right now," she said.

Reached at his mission, Haiti for Christ, Joel Trimble Sr. said he was amazed by the commitment made by his son's employer.

"Lives were saved as a result of this small private company," he said.

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