



Of Gifts and Graces

Haiti Solar Oven Partners (HSOP) is best known for placing solar ovens, training, and hope into the hands of the people of Haiti. It also has a reputation for attracting passionate volunteers who bring incredible talents to the ministry. This summer’s mission trip is a perfect example. The July 27-August 5 trip showcased the gifts God brings to HSOP through the people who answer the call.

An enthusiastic five-person team of United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) was originally scheduled to assemble ovens for a single two-day seminar. Part of that assembly team—plus one—was also charged with construction of a shelter at HSOP’s new storage site outside of Port-au-Prince. The open-air work area, made of steel and wood, was to be constructed between four shipping

containers that store HSOP’s materials in Haiti. Its purpose: to provide a sheltered area—out of sun, wind and rain—for Haitian Fabrication Manager Jeanne Milcar to assemble the hundreds of solar ovens distributed in between mission trips.

Ensuring that the shelter could be built in a three-day time period required the input from a volunteer with lots of construction know-how. “I have been congratulating myself for ‘picking on’ Dave Stearns to head up the design and construction effort,” admits HSOP Director Rick Jost. “Dave’s gifts and graces—especially his passion and energy for our ministry—made all the difference.”

Dave, a retired field specialist for IBM, knows his way around a construction project. The member of the United Methodist Church in Hartford, SD, calls himself ‘the ultimate do-it-yourselfer.’ His experience includes building his own homes with the help of a contractor friend and assisting on more than a dozen Habitat for

(Continued on page 2)



HSOP’s shelter construction crew give a thumbs up as the project nears completion. From left to right: Tom Carlson, Montas Joseph, Rick Jost (on ladder), Dave Stearns and Robert (Rô-bare’).



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Sharing the HSOP Experience

Alex Cleary and Sara Bolme have a lot in common. They are both 17, high school seniors, and active at McCabe United Methodist in Bismarck, ND. They also share a passion for mission and the experience of a lifetime this past summer as part of the HSOP mission team.

These two friends were no strangers to Haiti Solar Oven Partners. They have been hearing amazing stories about the work HSOP has been doing from fellow church members like Karen Workman, HSOP Advisory Board member and veteran volunteer.

That compelling message finally caught fire. “I want to travel and do mission work in the future, so I figured I better get started,” says Alex, who talked with Karen about joining the summer mission trip. She also asked her friend if she’d like to go along. “It seemed like a really

good experience and so I agreed to go with her,” explains Sara.

Aware of Haiti’s status as a developing country, neither teen was surprised by the country’s challenges. They admitted,



Haitian children gather around Sara Bolme (left) and Alex Cleary after a church service where our UMVIM team was warmly welcomed for worship at L’Eglise Methodiste de Mellier in Haiti.

though, that a few things stood out. “One thing was how happy people were despite what we might consider ‘sub-par’ living conditions,” says Alex. “They are simply grateful for what they have

and are willing to share it.”

Sara was surprised by the sheer number of people in Haiti, and also impressed with how early Haitians begin their day, “They were up and carrying water back to their houses at around 5:30 every morning.”

Back in school, both are sharing their HSOP experience with fellow classmates. They hope their story inspires others. “If you have a desire to serve God, Haiti could always use more helping hands,” insists Sara. “You’ll never know how much you might love the country or the people if you don’t give it a try.”

Alex agrees. “If you’re even considering going, do it,” she says. “You never know when you’ll get another amazing chance like this to see lives changed for the better because of something you did...Haiti needs us. And I discovered that I need Haiti, too.”

Of Gifts and Graces (cont.)

Humanity homes. Dave was also familiar with the HSOP storage site, visiting it during his first HSOP mission trip last November.

Planning was critical, considering that all materials, including every nut, bolt and pre-sawed wood rafters and cut steel, had to be shipped ahead to Haiti. Rick and Dave worked with K&K Mobile Storage, an Elk Point, SD business that retrofits shipping containers, to create a design. “We shipped the shelter materials to Haiti in our sea container this spring, then opened and followed Dave’s instructions to assemble it during the trip,” explains Rick. “It literally was a shelter-in-a-box.”

On-site construction involved even more of God’s gifts and graces. First-time HSOP

UMVIM Tom Carlson of McCabe UMC in Bismarck, ND, worked alongside Rick and Dave—even as temperatures soared to the upper 90s. Tom, retired from both the U.S. Postal Service and the North Dakota National Guard, today works as a part-time custodian at McCabe. Making the trip was a last-minute decision, but one he does not regret.

“It was fulfilling,” says Tom. “Seeing the conditions that these people are living in, and the things that they don’t have but we take for granted, made our work very worthwhile.” The three-some worked alongside Robert (Rō-bare’) who assists the Haitian HSOP staff. Members of the oven assembly crew, Karen Workman, Alex Cleary and Sara Bolme, all of McCabe UMC, helped with construction

wherever needed.

The extreme temperatures caused a change in plans for the other focus of the mission trip. Since there was not enough shade available at the site for the expected 70 seminar participants, the event was postponed. Instead, the team assembled 110 ovens for the next seminar, giving the Haitian staff a head start.

Dave, who left Haiti after the three-day construction project due to a family commitment, says he was happy to help. “The people in Haiti are wonderful,” he says. “I thought that if my talents are needed here and I could help, why not?” It’s that volunteer attitude that keeps this ministry forging ahead, making a difference to the people of Haiti.

HSOP Hires Associate Director

After a year working part-time as a fundraiser for HSOP, Cathy Hoss has been hired to fill the new associate director position. She couldn't be more excited. "I feel very blessed and thrilled to be able to work much more closely with HSOP," says Cathy. "A lot of people worked very hard to get this position funded, and I continue to be truly inspired by all of the generous, loving people behind the scenes that make this ministry work."

Cathy was hired for the full-time position in late August, less than one year after focused fundraising for the position began. The need for an associate director, says HSOP Director Rick Jost, is directly related to the success of the ministry. "Haiti Solar Ovens has come so far and grown so much since its inception," says Rick. "Volunteers have stepped up to assist in all aspects of the work, but we have also come to a juncture where our vitality depends on expertise in fundraising and grant writing, together with a daily passion for the future of our ministry."

Cathy, an experienced professional fundraiser, has focused this past year on helping implement a fundraising plan for HSOP, as well as securing a number of grants that will help the solar oven



ministry move forward. Her role will now be expanded. "My job is to match people to this mission," Cathy says, explaining that HSOP will be looking at a multi-pronged approach in order to partner with foundations, churches and individuals who share HSOP's Christian goals and passion for helping the people of Haiti.

The Rev. Morris Nelson of Hot Springs, SD, a member of the HSOP task force charged with

interviewing and selecting an associate director, is impressed with Cathy's understanding of both HSOP's mission and finances. "I feel very confident in Cathy's ability to grasp and pull together the

various tasks that are a part of HSOP," says Morris.

While Cathy's primary focus will be fundraising, she will also become involved in the day-to-day operations of the ministry, assisting Rick at all levels. She will be taking her first mission trip as part of the HSOP team this November. "The grant proposals I've been writing

for Haiti Solar Oven Partners are often a combination of the basic facts of what this ministry does and who it serves plus the stories that people tell me, but I've never experienced it first-hand," explains Cathy. "I've really been a spectator. Being in this new position and being part of the mission team will allow me to experience the whole journey."

Cathy and husband Bryan Bortnem live in rural Rutland, SD.

Knowing Results Matter

For HSOP mission team members, the smile they receive from a Haitian receiving a solar oven is evidence enough that the program works. Foundations awarding grants, however, require more concrete evidence that the ministry is truly having a positive impact on lives in Haiti. HSOP also seeks data for oven improvements and program advancement.

That need for numbers is why HSOP's survey team headed to Haiti this summer to continue

collecting data that can help tell the HSOP story. It was the third survey since March 2012. This time the team, led by SDSU's Dr. Molly Krueger Enz, surveyed 271 solar oven users over a period of four days from July 21-27. Enz, associate professor of French at South Dakota State University, was assisted by Luanne Napton, Bonnie Junker, Chris Iverson and HSOP's Haitian staff members.

Questions addressing charcoal usage, water pasteurization and who in the

family cooks with the solar oven are part of the study. Survey participants received lunch as well as a bread pan, black cloth (to cover/bake the bread), and either a mango or lime tree.

While the team is still working on analyzing and graphing the results, most of the participants were very enthusiastic about their ovens and are using them regularly for either cooking meals or water pasteurization. Final survey results will be available later this fall.

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HSOP's Church Challenge: An Oven-a-Month

Success is a wonderful thing. Fourteen years ago, when Haiti Solar Oven Partners first began, it was an uphill battle convincing Haitians that they could cook and pasteurize water with the power of the sun rather than expensive and unsustainable charcoal. Today, word of the life-changing impact of solar cooking is spreading. Even as we strive toward a goal of distributing 2,300 ovens annually to trained Haitians, demand far exceeds that.

Success is also a challenge. Having the necessary financial resources on an ongoing basis throughout the year to meet this growing demand is no small task. While HSOP has been blessed with generous and committed

financial supporters, it will take additional funds to reach more Haitians with ovens and training. In addition, the majority of supporters donate toward the end of the year. A more regular income would better allow HSOP to even out its purchases of materials, and assembly and shipment of ovens.

Enter the ***HSOP Church Challenge—the Oven-a-Month Partner Campaign***. The HSOP Advisory Board is asking churches to consider donating \$150—the cost of one oven, training and shipment—per month in order to enable HSOP to place more ovens in the hands of the people of Haiti.

“We really need to be able to depend on a regular income so

we can buy the needed supplies throughout the year rather than breaking up the purchases as we can afford them,” explains HSOP Advisory Board Chairman Gene Bethke.

More funds, more predictably, is the means by which we can respond to the amazing acceptance of this sustainable technology that empowers the people of Haiti. Please prayerfully consider becoming an ***Oven-a-Month Partner***. Contact Cathy (hsopadmin@brookings.net) or Rick (rjost@brookings.net) or phone 605-692-3391. Automated debit authorization makes it easy!