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Opportunities for Communities, Inc. Newsletter

October 2012

Dear Elizabeth,

NEWS FROM HAITI

Timothe (OfC's Haitian Project Coordinator) reported that flooding from Hurricane Sandy destroyed all of the crops in the fields surrounding the village, before much of anything could be harvested. He was approached by representatives of the 73 farmers in Bellabe, requesting micro-loans to help them buy seeds so they can replant right away.

OfC's goal is to raise \$20 for each farmer (\$1460 total). They will be expected to repay half (\$10 each) to an emergency fund for the village.

Climb to Platon Fortress in February 2012



During the February 2012 program in Haiti, the participants made several amazing discoveries during a day trek to the mountains near Pic Macaya National Park with OfC friend Paul Rudenberg as guide.

After a drive through beautiful rural country and up the side of the mountain, the group left the vehicle behind for a three-hour trek on a steep, narrow trail through farms and clusters of thatched huts to Platon Fortress, built in 1805 by General Nicolas Geffard, a Haitian mulatto patriot who fought in the war for Haiti's independence from France. The fortress perches on the mountain top with a view down a deep valley and across the coastal plain to the Caribbean Sea.

Before reaching Platon Fortress, the group encountered a tree nursery that provides trees to local residents for fruit, wood, shelter, and to reforest some of the land. They also met a farmer actively practicing permaculture that she learned from her father and grandfather. Permaculture is a system of cultivation intended to maintain permanent agriculture or horticulture by relying on renewable resources and a self-sustaining ecosystem.

Cloud Forest Ecology

Massif de la Hotte is an area of high mountains that are almost constantly shrouded in clouds. This is one of Haiti's few remaining forests, with many unique species of animals and plants. It is an important area for migrant birds, including some species that summer in New England. This area is so important that it is both a Haitian National Park (Pic Macaya National Park) and a UNESCO world heritage site.



View of Cloud Forest from Platon Fortress

OfC's New Year's course will include a hiking adventure to the top of Pic Macaya and into the cloud forest. The round trip will take four days and three nights, starting from our home base in Bellabe. The group will be driven to the end of the "road", hike for several hours, set up camp, and explore the plant life supported by this unusual ecosystem. Local guides who are residents of the mountain area will lead us up the mountain and into the forest.

In addition to OfC President Doug Albertson, we will have two guest leaders: Mr. William Cinea - Haitian botanist, forest engineer, professor at American University of the Caribbean and founder and director of Cayes Botanical Garden, the only botanical garden in Haiti. He also founded Haïti Verte (Green Haiti), a company whose main objectives are to contribute to reforestation, conservation and protection of biodiversity.

Dr. Paul Rudenberg - Paul is a large animal veterinarian, educator, and permaculturist. He has lived in Haiti for many years and has thorough knowledge of the culture, language and landscape.

Lekol Dete 2012 - A growing success



Last year, OfC student Amanda Mundt received grants from the Davis Peace Foundation and the Restavek Freedom Foundation to initiate Lekol Dete 2011. Lekol Dete provides children fun educational activities for six weeks during the summer, and more importantly, works to dissolve the social barriers between restavek children and free children. The restavek system in Haiti keeps thousands of children in indentured servitude, and they are often treated as slaves. Very few

attend school and other Haitians disdain them as a lower social class. Lekol Dete deliberately erodes this artificial social boundary and has as its motto, "Nou tout se youn", that is, "We all are one".

For the second year, OfC sponsored Lekol Dete (Summer School) in Simon, Les Cayes. Timothe Indrik, OfC Program coordinator in Haiti wrote about Lekol Dete 2012:

Lekol Dete 2012 was another great success! This year we had 10 teachers (Maitre Amos, Maitre Jephthe, Maitre Enel, Madame Claudette, Madame Genis, Madame Clarence, Madame Promise, Madame Italienne, Madame Leonne and Madame Aline), 4 people in the kitchen cooking the meals, Wilbert, Claudy & friends as volunteers, all serving 176 children from the Restavek school and the Bon Samaritain School.

All the kids and teachers testify how great it was and how they really enjoyed learning a lot of different educational games. Everyone would like to have Lekol Dete next year. Lekol Dete touched a lot of lives and made a great change in the relationship/ friendship of all the kids who participated and all the parents of the kids understood and saw that from the actions and reactions of the kids. (I personally heard them talking about it).

We had a group of youth from around Simon who came to help where we had some new sport activities for about one hour per day. It's HOT and INTERESTING. Many people on the street stopped at the gate to watch our sports competitions . . . they are so funny.

At the beach, Madame Ulisse asked me to give a SPECIAL THANKS to Amanda, OfC and everyone who contributed to Lekol Dete 2012. Met Amos and all the teachers also said "Thank you" to everyone who helped with Lekol Dete. They said that they will be praying that we continue organizing and planning such great activities which really bless and help everyone in our community.



Haiti Course announcements

Cloud Forest Ecology and trek to Pic Macaya: January 2-9, 2013

OfC is planning a special course that will focus on life in the mountains, including agriculture and permaculture, conservation and subsistence, botany, and an excursion to the Massif de la Hotte Cloud Forest area - home of one of the only remaining cloud forests in the Caribbean (see article above). Visit Les Cayes, the birthplace of Jean Jacques (John James) Audubon.

The course is limited to five students. You must be fit as the hike will be rigorous and conditions uncomfortable. The climate is wet and night temperatures are in the 50s.

If you are interested, please let us know by November 15th.

High School Course: February 16-23, 2013

This course is specially designed for high school age students interested in life in our rural village of Bellabe, and helping out at a community school in Lafrisiliere and at a special

school for Restavek children in Les Cayes. Students will learn about the power of micro-lending, vocational training and the importance of sports in community life. Haitian Creole lessons will be provided, and students will use their new language skills as they interact with our neighbors there to learn about their lives (and teach the village kids some English)! One day will be spent at the beautiful Port Salut beach!

Community Health in Rural Haiti: March 16-23, 2013

What happens when people in rural Haiti get sick? What kinds of diseases afflict them? What do they do to stay healthy, and what do they do when they get sick, especially if they cannot afford to see a doctor? What is the role of the witch doctor and local herbal medicines in Haitian culture? Learn about these and related health topics with our special medical guest course leaders. Look for more information in the next newsletter, or contact OfC.

registrar@opportunitiesforcommunities.org

Thanks for taking the time to learn more about what's happening at OfC.

Doug Albertson, President, Board of Directors
Ken Mundt, Board Member
Timothe Indrik, Haitian Project Coordinator (Les Cayes)

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