

**HELPING IN
HAITI**
A Story of Hope,
Charity and Faith



■ **Briel Laveille, whose family has lived in Fond des Blancs, Haiti, for generations, helps run many of the initiatives funded by the St. Boniface Haiti Foundation, including a goat exchange program.**



■ **Jean David Edume talks to some youngsters. He runs Xavier House, the St. Boniface Haiti Foundation's residential facility for older children. It sends to secondary or vocational schools in Port-au-Prince.**

HOW TO HELP

For more information on the St. Boniface Haiti Foundation visit www.haitihealth.org.

Donations can be made online or mailed to St. Boniface Haiti Foundation, 14 Pond Lane, Randolph 02368.

People interested in making nonmonetary contributions of medicine or other supplies, or who want to learn more about the foundation's work retreats to Haiti, should call 781-961-6927.

ON THE WEB

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Learning CURVE

■ **OPPORTUNITY**
Continued from Page 1

is also sending children to school and trying to put families on the path to economic self-sufficiency.

The foundation recently started offering small business loans to people who come up with plans to make money but who don't have the cash to jump start their initiatives. A woman with sewing skills, for example, might recognize a market for school uniforms but need help making the initial purchase of material, said Nannette Canniff of Randolph, who is the foundation's executive director.

"One thing keeps leading to another," Canniff said. "If you're going to give them good health care, you have to educate them. Now some people who have been living longer want to try some commerce and better their lives."

For children like Fenol Jacquet, education offers the best chance.

Fenol knocks on the door to the residence where Canniff and other Americans stay during visits to Fond des Blancs. He pulls a crumpled piece of paper out of his pocket and hands it to Canniff. She scans the Creole words, then congratulates the boy: His report card is filled with promising grades.

Jobs simply don't exist in any great number in Haiti. If children hope to become an exception in a country where most people are unemployed, they have to go to school.

But in a place where nothing comes easy, even that is a struggle. There are few free schools in Haiti, and most families can't afford tuition, let alone pay for required uniforms and books. For high school students, the annual cost of education is about \$120. The per capita income in Haiti is \$250 a year.

"Fond des Blancs is a very dry area in Haiti, so when they put the seeds in the ground, nothing comes out of it most of the time, so many parents cannot afford to send their kids to school," said Durand Dubreus, a Fond des Blancs resident who administers scholarship and self-sufficiency programs for the St. Boniface Haiti Foundation.

Children who go to school one year might miss the next two if the weather is uncooperative and plants refuse to grow.

This year, the St. Boniface Haiti Foundation will help send about 275 children to schools throughout Fond des

Blancs. Based on a family's need, the foundation pays for all or part of the cost of tuition, uniforms and supplies. Altogether, the program will cost slightly less than \$6,000.

In addition, hundreds of children attend St. Francis Xavier School, built by the South Shore group and run by the local Catholic parish in Fond des Blancs. In most rural regions, run-down chapels double as schoolhouses. St. Francis Xavier is one of the few schools with desks and chalkboards. Outside, another rarity awaits the children: colorful playground equipment.

Some especially bright teenagers are sent to high school or technical school in Port-au-Prince, the country's capital. The foundation rents the house where they live

and pays for their tuition, food and supplies. The foundation is also paying for a young woman to attend medical school in Haiti.

For other Fond des Blancs families, hope is delivered via slightly odd packages: goats.

Jilner Gelmy and his wife, Veronique Poulard, are among 500 families who each have been given two female goats and one male as part of the foundation's self-sufficiency program. The goats reproduce quickly; within six months four kids can be born.

On a recent Wednesday morning, Gelmy, Poulard and several of their 11 children sit in the dirt under a makeshift shelter pieced together with tree branches. A small fire burns in the center. This is the family's

kitchen.

The children wear tattered clothes. One who is completely naked clutches what looks to be a rusted soup can missing its label. He reaches in with a spoon, pulls out a few hard, yellow corn kernels, and gulps them down.

Gelmy and Poulard were given three goats and soon had eight. Like the other families, they will repay the cost of the goats — \$62 for all three — over several years. In the meantime, they either kill them for food or sell them at market.

Gelmy and Poulard used profits from selling some of the goats to send nine of their children to school.

Like others among the volunteers, Canniff has spent two decades of her life and energy trying to improve the

lives of the people of Fond des Blancs and giving them the means to do that themselves.

She looks to the future now, and sees the great need for others to take up the task.

"I hope the work we've begun will continue," she said, "and we can find some very dedicated people who will have as much compassion and concern as St. Boniface has shown over the years and it will grow and the people of Fond des Blancs will prosper."

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■ **Ymmaculee Jacques, above, lives with her six children, a niece and her ailing mother in a small, crumbling mud hut. The St. Boniface Haiti Foundation is building the family a more secure home. At left, a woman and her children travel to St. Boniface Hospital, where a nutrition program provides food.**

FACES OF HAITI

Jean David Edume grips the steering wheel of the SUV and swerves, avoiding a pothole.

He's talking about a high school student and says he's worried the boy needs focus, maybe to train for a trade.

Edume runs Xavier House, a St. Boniface Haiti Foundation residential facility where older Fond des Blancs students live while continuing secondary education at a high school or technical school in Port-au-Prince.

"It will help them be better able to help their families," Edume said. "They can help their brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers. It will help them to find a job, if possible. It is not easy to find a job, but it is more likely they will find a job with education."

Edume has been working with the St. Boniface Haiti Foundation for years. Shortly after South Shore residents began traveling to Haiti in 1983, Edume started assisting as a tour guide for the visitors. Once he got his license (and after enough practice on sometimes dangerous Haitian roads) he took over driving Americans during their trips.

Edume lives in Xavier House with his wife, their four children, and four nieces and nephews they took in when a relative died. Six students from Fond des Blancs share the space with them.

He lives in Port-au-Prince, but his work takes him to Fond des Blancs often.

One of the Fond des Blancs students living in Xavier House is Celaine Ennaude's son, Julner. When Julner made his First Communion, Edume bought Ennaude a dress, picked her up and drove her to Port-au-Prince to see the ceremony.

It was her first time in the country's capital.

Edume has seen up close how the St. Boniface foundation changes lives, and how much the organization and its volunteers mean to the people of Fond des Blancs.

"Sometimes we don't have anything to give back, but we give them a smile," he said.

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Gary Higgins

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