



Mission of Love



"You are not here to save the world, but are here to touch the hands that are within your reach."

Austintown group launches Hope for Haiti

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Despite the early morning chill at a warehouse in Ravenna, Kathleen Price, the director of Mission of Love, high-fived all of her volunteers after each pallet of Haiti relief aid is loaded onto a truck. The cargo hold is already brimming with relief supplies — including syringes, wheelchairs, tomato sauce and 160 cases of bottled water — for the victims of this month's massive earthquake in Port-au-Prince.

"That's going to be their whole life," Price says, pointing to a load of tarps and buckets.

Although the warehouse has no electricity or heat, and volunteers have been working in below freezing temperatures throughout the morning, Price's enthusiasm is infectious. Volunteers laugh, joke and hug as they unload donated supplies from the back of Price's truck onto the loading dock. Sammy Waller, a Vietnam veteran who has volunteered with Mission of Love for 20 years, jokes that he'd rather be bass fishing as he loads bottled water.

Mission of Love is a humanitarian aid organization based out of Austintown. The foundation provides disaster relief and assistance to third world countries.

Mission of Love operates without funds or grants, and is run solely by volunteer efforts and donations.



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"For every \$1 donated to Mission of Love, we generate \$122 worth of goods and services using the goods we have," Price said. "People really engage when they realize what we can do."

The organization is the most frequent user of the Denton Program, which allows private citizens and organizations to use military cargo planes to transport humanitarian goods.

"We keep it very grassroots," Price said. "We have built basic bathrooms in Guatemala, and we were doing surgeries at Walmarts after Hurricane Katrina."

Perhaps as a result of Price's grassroots mentality, Mission of Love has taken on some prestigious projects. Price is well-acquainted with the famous primatologist Jane Goodall. Mission of Love built the office for Goodall's Roots and Chutes program on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

Founded in 1989 by Price, an Austintown native, Mission of Love has provided relief and aid to 16 countries, including Afghanistan, Colombia, the Congo and Sri Lanka. The organization was among the first responders to Hurricane Katrina. Mission of Love has also sent volunteers to communities in Kentucky and at the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

Price leases a warehouse from the Ohio Army National Guard base in Ravenna and has filled it with donations and surplus items that were headed for the landfill, such as broken furniture, toys and discarded clothing.

"It's more or less recycling...but it helps so many people who don't have anything," Price said. "I am the queen of trash."

Mission of Love has shipped over 35 million pounds of aid out of its warehouse, Price added.

The Hope for Haiti mission is a testimony to Price's power to get things done. Price was building latrines at an orphanage in Rio Dulce, Guatemala when the earthquake struck in Haiti on Jan. 12. She returned from Guatemala on Jan. 16, and sent an email to launch her Hope for Haiti mission and solicit suggestions from her team of volunteers as to how to best conduct relief efforts for the earthquake victims.

A volunteer forwarded her email to Zach Coblenz, a Hartville resident who had previously donated tools to Mission of Love for their work at the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Coblenz' brother, Jared, has been in Haiti with Christian Fellowship Missions for the past two months, helping to start a girl's orphanage.

Zach and his brother, Seth, started a Help Haiti campaign after the earthquake to raise money for supplies to send to Jared in Haiti. So far, they have raised \$70,000, after local businesses agreed to match contributions from the community.



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Mission of Love teamed up with the Coblentzes, using the organization's network of volunteers and donors and the warehouse in Ravenna to send food and survival supplies to Haiti. Nine different Handel's locations volunteered as drop-off locations for the Hope for Haiti campaign and Bob Testa, the owner of Hartville Hardware, where Zach works in the John Deere department, donated free advertising for the campaign.

"Minds met and said 'Let's get this done,'" Zach said. "With love, everything is possible, and with love comes trust. It was just trusting each other from the get-go."

The aid to Haiti — which included 10,000 pounds of corn and 25,000 pounds of rice donated by local growers — was loaded on Jan. 22 and 23, and taken to Miami. It was loaded on to a boat to St. Marks port in Haiti on Thursday, where it will be received by the Coblentz'.

"It's a gift from God, I think," said Brandon Triola, a friend of the Coblentzes who volunteered to help load supplies.

"He just takes care of us when disasters happen. Look at everything that's been happening and all of the good that's come of it. What the government [in Haiti] won't get done, the Lord will do."

Although Mission of Love is a nondenominational organization, the volunteers said a prayer over the container before it was sent on its voyage to Haiti.

"When you go in with love and compassion, it speaks God," Price said. "The bottom line is touching the hand that's within your reach."

Triola nodded in agreement.

"It's a kingdom thing," he said.