

## THE HAITIAN TIMES

A publication of the  
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### WE'RE JUST A CLICK AWAY

*We've upgraded our web site so you can learn more about the work of the Haitian Ministries and how your support is helping Haitians. You can also make online donations to the ministry. Please visit us at [www.haitianministries.org](http://www.haitianministries.org).*

### New Board Officers

New officers of the Haitian Ministries' executive board were recently appointed for a two-year tenure.

Peter Loden, a longtime board member and New Haven resident, is the new chairman, replacing Peter Harding, who remains on the board.

Fr. Michael P. Jones, of St Patrick-St. Anthony Church in Hartford, is the vice-chairman. Delores Delvecchio, of Killingworth, remains the treasurer, and Barbara Wysocki, of Rocky Hill, is the secretary.

The board welcomes its newest members: Fr. Frank Rouleau, of Norwich, and Jean M. D'Aquila, a Portland resident and lawyer in Middletown.

## From A Visitor's Eyes...

*continued from page 1*

Norwich office of Fr. Frank Rouleau to be interviewed by The Norwich Bulletin for a story. From there he was whisked away to the home of Dr. Tom Gorin, a Mansfield pediatrician who has sponsored Wilkens' education for the last six years. For two days, Dr. Gorin, along with Dr. Michael Borque, showed Wilkens the Connecticut Children Medical Center and took him on rounds at St. Francis Hospital.

At the gala, Wilkens spoke to more than 200 supporters about his dream of becoming a doctor and how the generosity of Dr. Gorin and Haitian Ministries helped to make that dream a reality. He was presented with a portrait of his mother, Mme Samson, who has been a part of Haitian Ministries for over 14 years, leading a nutrition program in the Port-au-Prince neighborhood where Wilkens was raised.

On his return to Haiti, Wilkens first went to see his mother and gave her the framed drawing.

Reflecting on his trip, he said the gala was one of the most memorable moments of his life. He said, "I was so proud to be there as the token beneficiary of Haitian Ministries and to see all those people at the event to help Haiti. Seeing this has motivated me even more to return to Haiti to help people."

He remembered his visits to the hospitals with Dr. Gorin and Dr. Borque and how they were so accommodating. He remem-



*Wilkens Gilbert, right, receives drawing of his mother, Mme. Samson, from artist Eileen McCarthy, left. Matthew Marek (center) looks on.*

bered observing how Maggie Lavassuer, a nurse in Hartford and Coventry resident who has frequently traveled to Haiti, treated her patients with so much care.

"I was impressed with how much love you have for helping Haiti after observing that there are grave health problems in the U.S. as well," he said.

Wilkens also remembered all the people he met at the gala who warmly received him.

I find it comforting that he experienced the same thing most visitors to Norwich Mission House in Haiti experience when they visit – great hospitality.



*Livingston Taylor and Alva Greenberg.*

"The (gala) was truly a great day for Haiti, and these funds will go directly to help children in the orphanages and meal programs that Haitian Ministries supports. Money will go, too, for tuitions so that children can attend school. Indeed, since our gala, many people have taken on sponsoring specific children."

## Haiti Trip Makes The Third World Real

BY THOMAS SLINEY

I can't say that I always wanted to go to Haiti. It was a place I had heard about, but mostly in connection with boat people desperately trying to reach U.S. shores and escape terrible conditions at home, usually without success.

It was through my church, St. Patrick-St. Anthony in downtown Hartford, that I learned more. St. P&A, as it is known, began "twinning" with St. Genevieve, a Catholic church in a rural mountain village outside Port-au-Prince in December 2004.

"Why Haiti?" I asked. "Because it's the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and a lot closer than countries in Africa that are worse off," was the answer. Good reasons, I thought.

St. P&A has sent annual delegations four times since then, in addition to providing regular financial support. I was one of eight parishioners who visited Haiti, in February of this year, to participate in a 10-day "immersion" trip that provided a glimpse into the lives and culture of Haiti and its people.

With the mission of "Helping Haitians Help Haitians," the Office of Haitian Ministries, through its Norwich Mission House in Port-au-Prince, provides financial and other support to organizations in and around the city to help those most in need. This assistance covers a broad range of programs including agricultural projects, business development programs, schools, and meal programs for children.

It's hard to prepare for a trip to Haiti. One can hear the statistics – life expectancy of 52, literacy around 50 percent, 80 percent of the population living below the poverty level – and still be caught off guard when you see it first-hand.

Port-au-Prince, the capital with its 2 million peo-

ple, can fairly, if uncharitably, be described as more of a refugee camp than a city.

While it has some beautiful places, the poverty and pollution are widespread. The water is undrinkable; the sewage is visible; and garbage is strewn between buildings, in alleys, or in the middle of intersections. There were only a handful of working traffic signals, and traffic was either terribly snarled or moved with frightening speed as drivers weaved their way through city streets crowded with vehicles, street vendors, and streams of pedestrians constantly on the go.

The Norwich Mission House is in the hills just south of the main city. Like many of the nicer homes, this one is surrounded by a brick wall, topped with barbed wire, and patrolled by a 24-hour guard. These are precautionary and intended as deterrents – I can't say I ever felt unsafe while we were there.

The house also provides a great vantage point. Unfortunately, the city is blanketed with a visible layer of smog from car exhaust and the smoke from charcoal fires that are used for cooking. By the second day, my throat was raw from breathing it in.

The city is loud and chaotic. Roosters crow throughout the day, especially in the early morning. Dogs bark in chorus. Car horns toot constantly - to signal they are passing, to scare pedestrians out of the way, to warn possible oncoming cars turning corners that can't be seen. The mosquitoes are small, fast, and hardy, seemingly able to withstand much more abuse than their Connecticut cousins. They are also carriers of the malaria virus, which afflicts Haiti more than any other Caribbean country.

During our six days in Port-au-Prince, we visited a



*Thomas Sliney and friend*

number of the programs that the mission house supports. One morning it was Wynne-Farm, which works on reforestation, soil conservation, and environmental education projects. One afternoon it was Madame Samson's Neighborhood Meal Program, where 60 children, some of them homeless, receive what may be their only meal of the day. Another time we went to Rainbow House, an orphanage specifically for children who have lost parents to AIDS, and who may or may not have HIV themselves.

We also went to St. Damien's Children's Hospital, established and run by a Greater Hartford native, the Rev. Richard Frechette, C.P., to serve Cite Soleil, one

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## FAREWELLS AND WELCOMES

Matthew Marek, who has been director of the Norwich Mission House for the last two years, left his position with Haitian Ministries on June 1 but will remain in Haiti in his new job with the American Red Cross.

Nicholas Kocmich, who has been working at a boys' orphanage in Haiti for more than two years, has taken over as the interim NMH director.

As the ministries' NMH director, Matt continued the fine work begun by his predecessor, Amber Walsh. During his tenure, he strengthened the connections between Haitian Ministries and the people and programs it supports in Haiti. The many guests at the mission house can attest to Matt's energy, organization, and dedication to and keen interest in the Haitian people. The Haitian Ministries is grateful for his hard work and many accomplishments.

Matt wrote in a farewell message: "Over the past two years ... I have had the joy of hosting many of you at the house, sharing our programs and activities with you and forming life-long relationships with so many. But the time has come for me to move on.

"At the end of May, I will be joining the American Red Cross in Haiti and continuing to serve our brethren in Haiti. I will leave behind a great family at the Mission House, who will continue to welcome you all for years to come, and also a great number of children, beneficiaries, program directors, communities and friends that have had a great impact on my life here.

"I wish you all the best and hope you continue to support the good work of Haitian Ministries."

Nick, a native of Omaha, Nebraska, has been in Haiti since January 2005, when he began volunteering at Pwoje Espwa (Project Hope), an orphanage for boys in the southwestern city of Les Cayes.

Nick is a 2004 graduate of Loyola University Chicago, where he focused his studies on business



*Nick Kocmich, NMH Interim Director*

and photography. He was introduced to the mission house while working as a freelance photographer with Amber Walsh on project evaluations throughout Haiti for Cross International. Nick wrote, "While traveling through Port-au-Prince Amber introduced me to the NMH family. During my times here, I fell in love with the staff, house, and, of course, the dogs. I was also very impressed with the projects sponsored by the mission."

Nick said he is excited by the opportunity to direct NMH but is a bit awed by following in the footsteps of Matt and Amber, who also held that position before becoming the ministry's director of development. He added, "Leaving Les Cayes was difficult. I had some reservations about moving to Port-au-Prince. In 2½ years, I'd developed many great friends who I consider family. I also found great joy living with and working for the betterment of the children of Espwa. I can't express the relief I've found during my (first days at the NMH). ... Visits to various projects have truly put my mind and heart at ease, knowing that I'll still be working to improve the lives of the children, and for that matter, the people of Haiti."

*See NOREEN GIBSON RETIRES on back page*

## Memorials

The Haitian and American staff and Board of Haitian Ministries would like to honor the memory of the following people on behalf of our donors and the people of Haiti.

Elaine Berto; Joseph Coderre; Ruth C. Devane; Peggy Drew; John Habert; Aurora Jepeway; Donald Jones; John (Jack) Kirby; John Limato; William Murphy; William Nash, Jr.; and Dorothy Smack.

If you would like to honor the memory of a loved one through a gift to Haiti, please contact us at [info@haitianministries.org](mailto:info@haitianministries.org) or 860-848-2237 ext 206. We can send a special acknowledgement of this gift to a family member or friend at your request.

## Trip Leads To New Insight

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of Port-au-Prince's poorest and most dangerous slums. There are many people doing a lot of great work.

One of the more difficult experiences was our visit to Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity. This hospital cares for children, some of whom are orphaned and some simply abandoned. There were five rooms with children of varying ages, from infants to toddlers. Many look younger than they are until a smile reveals a full set of teeth, evidence that their small body is due to malnutrition, not age.

I was sent to a room with 16 infants, all in cribs. Some sat up, curious and hopeful for some attention; others seemed anxious, wondering who the tall stranger was. I approached one small girl who was sitting up, an intravenous needle in her arm, and obviously not feeling well. Although she initially seemed uninterested, I offered her my hand and she held it. Since I couldn't lift her, I just stood by her crib, gently rubbing her back as she seemed to overcome her initial reticence.

The other three days were spent at our sister parish, which is about 20 miles outside Port-au-Prince. Although not a long distance the trip took three hours, with about half the time spent snaking through-Port-au-Prince's morning traffic, and the other half spent winding up the 7-mile mountain road to Zoranje. Actually, to call it a road is misleading. With its boulders and pot-holes, it was more like a dry riverbed.

As we were carried up the mountain, we shared the road with pedestrians – mostly women and children, many of them barefoot – as they walked to or from the market at the base of the mountain, carrying things on their heads and shoulders – like laundry or potable water for homes that lack indoor plumbing.

In Zoranje, we saw the direct result of our support. The parish school has doubled in size over the past four years and all 400 students participate in the lunch program. The children were wearing spotless school uniforms, cleaned by hand in nearby rivers. I was amazed how well the children shared the water we gave them. No greedy gulps; just a small sip and the water was passed along to the next child.

And then I came home. There has been a lot to process. I witnessed such widespread suffering. While the people always smiled and greeted us with a "Bonjou" there also seemed to be resignation in their faces and voices – an acceptance of circumstances that don't seem to improve. I struggled with the decision to go to Haiti. I was unsure what I could really contribute.

In hindsight, it was one of the best things I've ever done. It was a gift. The plight of the poor is real to me now. The complexity of their problems is more apparent. Their suffering is concrete. The "Third World" is no longer an abstraction.

Unfortunately, the "solutions" seem elusive with a government that is more self-interested than benevolent. I continue to try to make something of the experience. At a minimum, I share it when I can and try to convey a sense of the suffering; I take steps, however small, to alleviate some of that suffering, and try to convince others to do the same.

Toward the end of my time in Haiti I wondered with a fellow traveler just how to explain all that we had experienced. He replied, "Just say, 'It was an amazing trip. You should go.'" I think that's a great answer.

*Thomas Sliney is a vice president with the Trust Company of Connecticut, a division of New Alliance Bank. He lives in Hartford. This article appeared in the Journal Inquirer, Monday, June 11, 2007.*



Fr. Frixner Jean Francois, with Alan & Margaret Aleia and their daughter Madden at the Taste of Haiti in Hartford.

## 'Taste of Haiti' Builds Communities

BY ALLISON KEETON

Rice and red beans. Pork griot. Sweet potato cake.

These were just a few of the dishes served in Hartford at St. Patrick-St. Anthony's 3rd Annual Taste of Haiti in June. Initially started as a vehicle to build both awareness and funds for our sister parish, St. Genevieve, Zoranje, this event has become an annual parish staple. More than 200 people attended this year.

All of the food was prepared by parish volunteers, who were supervised by Dr. Joseph Horton. He researched authentic recipes, and the meal included fruit skewers, chicken in creole sauce, macaroni au gratin, pumpkin soup, and Haitian rum cake. There was a raffle, and Haiti's Back Porch – the artisans store in Middletown - set up a shop.

This year, Fr. Frixner, pastor of St. Genevieve parish, came for the event, accompanied by Fr. Gerry Kirby. With his attendance, our parishioners could again put a face to our efforts. Also, Fr. Frixner could see our efforts firsthand; he said he looked forward to telling his parishioners how much we care and how hard we work to assist them.

When our steering committee had a debriefing of the event, Jane Gallagher, a two-time visitor to Haiti, said, "It's hard to imagine that four years ago, we didn't have a sister parish, and we didn't have an annual Taste of Haiti."

We have discovered that, by building a community with the people of Zorange, we have enriched our own community in Hartford as well.

## Bishop Lafontant Visits Connecticut

Again this spring, Bishop Joseph Lafontant visited the Diocese of Norwich to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation for youth and adults in several parishes. He also met and dined with Bishop Cote, several priests and leaders of our faith communities, and the Haitian Ministries board of directors.

He celebrated the Feast of the Ascension and the final Mass for the graduating seniors at Mercy High School in Middletown, which is twinned with the orphanage Foyer des Fils de Dieu. While preaching at confirmations and Mercy High, the bishop spoke of the similarities and differences between students here and in Haiti, while emphasizing the faith we all share.

## Connecticut Parishioners Visit Haiti

In March, Fr. Gerry accompanied a delegation from Sacred Heart Church in Vernon to St. Joseph's parish in Fon Parisien. While in Port-au-Prince, the Sacred Heart contingent met briefly with Archbishop Miot.

Also this spring, a group from St. Mark in Westbrook visited their twin - the Immaculate Conception in Cite Militaire. Fr. Gheto, pastor there, plans to visit Westbrook in the fall.

In April, parishioners from Sacred Heart in Southbury visited Haiti for the first time to explore the possibilities of a twinning relationship. They visited the young parish of St. Therese in Darbonne.



Noreen Gibson (right) and Pam McKinnon, a Haitian Ministries supporter.

## Noreen Gibson Retires As Travelers' Liaison

Noreen Gibson, who has volunteered at Norwich Mission House since 1998, stepped down this spring as the ministry's first travelers' liaison there, a responsibility she officially took on in the spring of 2003.

Noreen lives in Westbrook, Conn., but has spent much of her time in the last nine years in Port-au-Prince, where she helped to manage the mission house and worked closely with staff there. Along with the mission house directors, she planned immersion and educational activities for visitors and usually escorted them on their daily outings.

Noreen is well-known to house guests and Haitians alike for her humor, resiliency and deep love of the Haitian people. Haitian Ministries and those involved in our programs deeply appreciate all that Noreen has shared and given. We will miss her unflagging dedication, hard work, and spirit.

"Noreen has shared her gifts with our travelers, bringing them closer to their God and to the Haitian people," said Emily Smack, executive director of Haitian Ministries.

## Helping Wilkens Help Others

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I had also heard that Wilkens was a good student who frequently helped his mother feed daily lunch to more than 60 poor children in the neighborhood. He had thought about a career in medicine, but the cost of medical school, about \$2,000 a year in Haiti, was well beyond his means.

Wilkens joined the police force instead. Soon, disillusioned by the widespread corruption, he decided to leave his police job to pursue his dream. Aware that Norwich Mission House was helping young people with their tuitions to primary and secondary schools, Wilkens approached Fr. Gerry for help.

As a practicing pediatrician in Mansfield who also works with students at the University of Connecticut, I was excited by the opportunity to sponsor someone to become a doctor. It also seemed to fit perfectly with the mission statement of Haitian Ministries, "Helping Haitians help Haitians," because it

was something that not only would help Wilkens, but the many people of his country he would ultimately care for as a doctor.

Over the past six years, I traveled back to Haiti several times on medical missions. Wilkens, who taught himself English, would take a week off from school to be one of our interpreters. As his years in medical school continued, he became more than just an interpreter. He also became a consultant to our medical team on some conditions common in Haiti, such as typhoid.

If you go to Haiti, you quickly see how little its people have and how much we have. You come away wanting to do something but not knowing what will make a difference. I feel lucky that I was there that day when Fr. Gerry needed help with a young man wanting to go to medical school. It gives me hope that, with good people like Wilkens and by working together, things will change.

## A Final Note

It is encouraging to have so many people and groups once again visiting us at Norwich Mission House. Certainly it is a sign of the gradual improvement taking place in Haiti.

I am very grateful to all of you who supported my family and me in so many ways during the illness and death of my father. Your prayers and support, your memorial gifts and Masses are very much appreciated.

During these days of transition, I take this opportunity to thank Matt Marek and Noreen

Gibson for their dedicated service to HMM and the people of Haiti. It has been a pleasure working with them and sharing with them in our ministry among the Haitian people. Together we pray that God will continue to bless them.

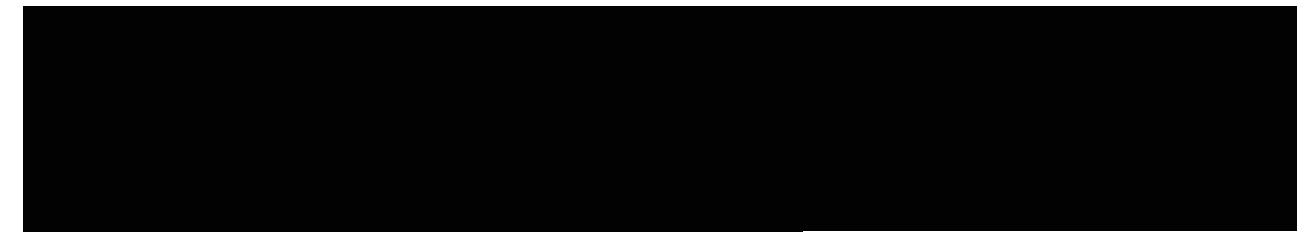
At the same time I would like to welcome Nick Kocmich as the interim director of NMH. May we continue to hold the people of Haiti in our prayer and to pray for one another as well.

— Peace, Fr. Gerry

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# THE HAITIAN TIMES



Radio Deejay Gary Craig starts the auction at the gala at New London's Crocker House.

## 'For the Love of a Child' Gala Wins Many Hearts

The Haitian Ministries' "For the Love of a Child" gala, held in April in New London, was a resounding success that brought in significant support for the needy children of Haiti and spread awareness of the ministry's work in the Caribbean country.

The proposal for the fund-raiser came from Anthony Collins, a North Branford businessman and Chester resident who visited Haiti and

Norwich Mission House for the first time last fall. He chaired the committee that organized the event.

More than 220 people attended the evening gala at the Crocker House ballroom.

Director of Development Amber Walsh, who also led the

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## Getting To Know Wilkens Gilbert

BY DR. TOM GORIN

About six years ago on a trip to Haiti, Fr. Gerry Kirby asked me if I could help one of Mme Samson's children, Wilkens Gilbert. I knew of Wilkens, because I had visited Mme Samson's feeding program on an immersion trip and had subsequently joined the Haitian Ministries' board of directors. I knew that the feeding program was a long-standing recipient of our support.

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## FROM THE EYES OF A HAITIAN VISITOR

BY MATTHEW MAREK  
DIRECTOR OF NORWICH MISSION HOUSE

The first morning in the United States for Wilkens Gilbert began in Harlem, where he stayed after arriving in New York by jetliner the night before. He started his day with a quick, light breakfast, then rolled his suitcase to the curb outside, hailed a taxi, and rode past Central Park, through the Upper West Side, and past the chaos and glitter of Times Square to finally arrive at Pennsylvania Station.

Always quiet, but with his neck twisting side to side to take in all the sights, he entered the train station, got his ticket from the electronic kiosk, and went to the boarding area. There he watched the board scroll noisily until it displayed the gate number for the Amtrak train headed to Connecticut. Then began the rush – first to the line for the escalator, then down to the platform and onto the train. He found a seat, sat down, and sighed.

"That was amazing," he said.

Wilkens' words, though brief, encapsulated the impressions of his first time outside of Haiti. His impressions became even more profound when he arrived to a warm welcome in New London for the Haitian Ministries' gala.

Wilkens, who is Haitian Ministries' first university graduate, is only weeks away from becoming a doctor and just a few years away from becoming a general surgeon. He had come to Connecticut to tell the guests at the fund-raiser a little bit about his life and to thank them for the support that enabled him to become a physician.

Just off the train in Connecticut on that mid-April afternoon, he went to the

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PARTNERS  
FOR HAITI