Haiti Disaster Relief Effort Update

Last week marked two months since the Foundation partnered with Ocean Reef Club for a timely and efficient response to the havoc wreaked on southwestern Haiti by Hurricane Matthew on October 4th. The Haiti Disaster Relief Fund created after the earthquake in 2010 was rebooted and within the week the Club sent an appeal to the membership to respond to the crisis the storm created for Haitian-American employees’ families.

Thanks to the community’s swift and generous response, within a few days we were able to make our first grant and before mid-November we had distributed $138,000 in emergency aid (see details in the adjacent chart). While expedi- tious, decisions were based on a great deal of research and the feedback of dozens of experts and organizations well versed in both the specifics of Haiti and international disaster relief. All, the Foundation included, are very conscious of Haiti’s already tenuous state and avoiding pitfalls realized in the wake of the earthquake.

A key concern of both South Florida and Haitian leaders and related charities has been to encourage giving cash over supplies. While well meaning, we know now that the containers of donated goods that flooded the country after the earthquake played a major role in devastat- ing the Haitian economy. Those in the know had an overwhelm- ingly positive reaction to the Club’s strategy of distributing the non-tax deductible funds they collected to employees to give directly to help their families, who are now in turn spending locally to meet their needs and contributing to the health of the economy.

While the majority of the tax-deductible donations made through the Foundation went to address the tremendous needs as prioritized by the United Nations Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, we were also particularly pleased to send aid to rarely reached rural areas and islands where the Club identified the three highest concentrations of employee families. Through our grant to Operation USA to distribute supplies procured in Haiti to Petest, Nippes and Les Cayemites, the families of 78 of the 140 employees who requested help received assistance along with hundreds of their neighbors.

According to Operation USA Haiti Director Steeve Texas, a native of Haiti who led the effort personally, “These communities took a very hard hit from the storm and their road to recovery is a tough one. The families were very grateful to receive the supplies and it meant a lot to everyone to know that the Ocean Reef community sincerely cares.”

While our collaboration has undoubtedly helped tens of thousands avoid cholera and starvation in the near term, Haiti’s road to recovery has just begun yet has all but disappeared from the news. With the vast majority of crops and livestock wiped out in the largely agricultural affected region, experts are predicting famine in the coming months. As we continue to monitor the situation, sustainable agriculture and rebuilding infrastructure projects will likely to be the focus of our remaining grants.

To learn more about helping in Haiti, please stop by our office in Ocean Reef Business Center or call (305) 367-4707.