Efforts to Aid Haitian Associates Continue
Reef Employees Lost Homes, Family in Tragic Quake

By Kristen Burns Young
Director of Communications

Ten days after a major earthquake rocked the island nation of Haiti, Ocean Reef continues what will be a long term effort to aid its 150 Haitian Associates and their families.

Leaders of the Ocean Reef community, including the Club's Board of Directors, the Ocean Reef Foundation and Club management, have worked closely together over the past week and a half to determine the best methods of getting relief directly to the family members of Club employees, and are also determining strategies to assist Associates with the losses they have endured.

Gathering Information
On Friday, Jan. 15, an Associate meeting in Town Hall gave those affected by the quake a chance to tell Club management how Ocean Reef could best assist in supplying relief. Ocean Reef Chief Steward Max Sanon, who owns a home and has family in Haiti, translated the questions and requests of Haitian Associates, as well as the messages of support from Club President Paul Astbury and Chairman Michael Sullivan.

In addition to asking for food and water to be sent to their family members, many Associates also thanked Ocean Reef for the efforts the Club has taken to aid those in need.

"The reaction from our employees was very visible and emotionally moving to everyone in the room," Ocean Reef Chairman Michael Sullivan said. "There is much work to be done, but I believe this can be our Club's fin-

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The worst hour. Every effort will be made to assist and support our employees.

Following the meeting, a form was distributed to Haitian Associates, requesting the names and addresses of their family members in Haiti, along with the names of local churches or schools that may be assisting in the relief efforts. The form also includes a section that allows Associates to make special requests unique to their situations. Copies of the forms were emailed to Club managers along with a request to encourage and assist Associates in filling out the forms.

As of Thursday, Jan. 21, 79 forms had been returned to the Human Resources Office, with all 79 Associates reporting lost or injured family, a lost home or both. With an estimated 50 percent of Associates still waiting to hear from family members in Haiti, that number is expected to rise. Ocean Reef plans to use the forms to gain a better understanding of the precise impact on its Associates, as well as a better understanding of how to help.

On the Ground in Haiti

At 5 a.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 20, a team of four volunteers from Hands On, a non-profit disaster response organization, joined Associate Max Sanon and member Rick Link aboard Link’s plane bound for the Dominican Republic. From there, Sanon and the Hands On volunteers set out on a truck to the Haitian border, where they spent the night before crossing into Haiti on Thursday morning. Armed with a list of names and addresses, Sanon has made it his mission to seek out the family members of Ocean Reef employees and assist in supplying relief. Sanon’s home, which was in relatively good shape following the quake, and is currently equipped with a fresh water well and generators, will serve as his base as he reaches out to those in need.

The group plans to stay in Haiti for about a week to assess how they can best provide relief. Following this initial journey, they’ll return to Haiti with a larger group of about 150 volunteers to continue distributing aid.

Fundraising Efforts

Members have answered the call for help by donating generously to employees in need. Although an impressive sum has already been donated, the goal of reaching $250,000 in donations is still a long way off.

"This is an opportunity for our members to exhibit the true spirit of American generosity," Foundation President John Taylor said. "We are pleased to have already collected more than $80,000 in donations and hopeful that more members will step up to help the devastated people of Haiti."

Club Chairman Michael Sullivan said that in the short term, donations will be used to supply food, water and other resources directly to our Associates’ families. In the long term, the funds will be used to assist them in getting back on their feet and rebuilding their lives.

Congress is currently considering legislation that would allow charitable, quake-related donations made before March 1 to be deductible on 2009 tax returns.

Those who wish to donate through the Foundation can do so through their Donor Advised Accounts by writing a check to the Ocean Reef Foundation with “Haiti Relief” in the memo. Donations can be dropped off at the Cultural Center office or mailed to 200 Anchor Drive, Key Largo, FL 33037. Any questions or concerns can be directed to Foundation Administrator Yurianna Mikolay at 367-4707.

Food and Supplies

In addition to monetary donations, members and Associates have brought food, water and other supplies to collection points at the Human Resources Office and the Ocean Reef Chapel. On Monday, Jan. 18, the World, a non-profit organization that had worked with Ocean Reef to supply soap and other sanitary items to Haiti even before the quake, arrived at The Reef for the first pickup of supplies, which filled one third of a 24-foot truck. A second pickup occurred on Wednesday. All items will be delivered to a Royal Caribbean Cruise Ship, which departs for Haiti on Saturday.

The Human Resources Office continues to welcome donations between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday - Friday. Requested items include:

- Food items (must be ready to eat, as there is no electricity or means of cooking):
  - canned vegetables, fruits, soups, stews, beans and chili
  - canned meats such as spam, tuna, salmon and chicken
  - cereal, dried fruit, crackers
  - evaporated milk, dry milk, water and oatmeal
  - peanut butter, nuts, bread and jelly
  - fruit and vegetable bars, and cereal bars
  - food items that are high in protein and fiber

- Additional Supplies: calling cards, batteries, flashlights, matches, lighters, candles and lanterns

Helping Associates Here on The Reef

Ocean Reef is also doing its best to help Associates in coping with this tragedy. The Human Resources Department is working to provide a grief counselor and translator for those who request the service. The Club has also agreed to advance paid time off to those wishing to travel to Haiti.

Thanks to the generosity of Paeter, the Club’s telecommunications company, Associates are able to dial from Club phones to anywhere in Haiti free of charge.

"Our heart goes out to these Associates and their families."

Photo: By Stacey Szymanski

Bill Sand Associate Kevin Vanecko负荷 water onto a 24-foot truck outside of the Human Resources Office. The donated items will be transported to Haiti on Saturday via a Royal Caribbean Cruise Ship.