

Flights for Christ brings Christmas to children of Haiti

Last week, Mt. Vernon based non-profit transported donations to the remote village of Pouille

BY EMILY ROTH

SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — This Christmas, children in Haiti are receiving Christmas gifts and supplies through the efforts of a Mt. Vernon based organization, Flights for Christ.

Flights for Christ was formed after the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti which reached a seven on the Richter Scale. The earthquake killed 316,000 people and left 1.6 million homeless. This caught the attention of organizer Rodney Mullinax who wanted to help.

"We have some missionary friends down there, and the horror stories coming out of there was tremendously terrible," said Mullinax. "Words just can't describe the conditions down there. They were bad before the

earthquake, but then after the earthquake it was just so much worse."

Flights for Christ was established as a corporation on Jan. 5, 2011, and officially became a not-for-profit organization on Aug. 21, 2011.

"[My wife and I] were lead in the direction of at that time I was working as a private pilot, just for a hobby, and we realized that I had been blessed with the gift and ability to fly," stated Mullinax. "So I thought, well, maybe we can utilize this gift... I thought well, we can just load some supplies up and take just the essentials — food, water, and take them down there to start off with."

According to Mullinax, Flights for Christ makes two trips a year to deliver supplies to Haiti, and their first international flight took place in May 2012. Supplies included a water purification unit and baby formula. The trip to Jacmel, Haiti, took place over a three day period, logging nearly 23 hours of flight time.

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NEW CLOTHES —
An orphan boy from Jacmel, Haiti, shows off his new shirt from the donations flown in to the country by Flights for Christ, a Mt. Vernon not-for-profit organization. Donations of shoe boxes filled with supplies are collected from churches across Illinois.

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In addition to trips to Haiti, Flights for Christ also completes charitable flights within the United States, such as transporting those who need medical care.

CHRISTMAS SHOES

November 2013 saw the first delivery of Christmas shoe boxes through Flights for Christ during their second trip of the year to Haiti. Over the Thanksgiving holiday, a single plane was filled with shoe boxes for children of the village of Pouille. The effort was made in conjunction with Christ's Freedom for Haiti, a missionary program who bases their operations out of Pouille.

Inside the shoe boxes were donations from Illinois churches. "The churches went to their members and said if you'd like to participate in this, here's the list of items that you can put in the shoe boxes, and have them at the church on a certain date," explained Mullinax. "And then after that date, all the shoe boxes were collected and brought to Meadowbrook Christian Church in Mt. Vernon because Meadowbrook is a sponsor for Christ's Freedom for Haiti."

The shoe boxes contain items such as personal hygiene items, soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes, combs, socks, clothing, books, crayons, or a small toy.

To bring these to Pouille, the shoe boxes were delivered to Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital, then transferred to a truck which then drove approximately four hours north to a river. Gifts were then transferred to what Mullinax described as "makeshift canoes" to cross the river, and finally loaded on donkeys or carried for an hour hike to the village. Over



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UNLOADING CHRISTMAS BOXES — David Parks unloads donated items flown in by Flights for Christ on Dec. 8. Due to a limited budget, the nonprofit organization could not make the trip to Haiti to deliver Christmas shoe boxes, and instead met with representatives from Missionary Flights International in Fort Pierce, Fla., who were then able to transport the supplies to children in Haiti.

300 Christmas presents for the children were provided through the donations.

Mullinax stated that 90 percent of funds for the flights come from the personal budgets of those involved in the organization. After completing their last flight to Haiti for the year in September of this year, Flights for Christ did not have the budget to fly to Haiti again. This did not stop them from once again delivering the Christmas shoe boxes last Sunday.

"The missionary that asked us to take the Christmas shoe boxes down last year got a hold of us, and was apologizing to us up and down for getting a hold of us so late, because he knows we can only do two a year," informed Mullinax. "I told him 'We cannot make the trip to Haiti, but would it be of any benefit to you if we were able to transport these down to Florida?' and he said yes. He said, 'If you can get them to Fort Pierce, Fla.' then he would

have them transported with MFI, Missionary Flights International."

This year around 180 Christmas shoe boxes filled with gifts were transported in addition to other items and larger boxes of supplies for the children of Pouille.

"It's a very remote village," said Mullinax. "Up to ten years ago these people have never even heard of Christmas. That is where these boxes are going." 12-14-14
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CROSS THE RIVER — Haitian volunteers prepare canoes for crossing the river to the village of Pouille. From there donated supplies are loaded onto donkeys or carried in a hike to the village.