

Local volunteers act fast to help Haitians recover

Haiti

HURRICANE MATTHEW

By CATHY KUEHNER

The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — Hurricane Matthew made landfall on Haiti's southwestern coast Oct. 4, and although the Caribbean nation is more than 1,400 miles away, the effects from the storm's damage extend to the Winchester community.

Last week's hurricane, a Category 4 storm, killed at least 900 people in Haiti and destroyed tens of thousands of homes as well as crops, including livestock. It was the strongest storm to hit the country in a decade.

Haiti, the poorest country in Latin America, is still rebuilding after a 2010 earthquake. Now, as after the earthquake, cholera is again killing people in Haiti, raising fears of an epidemic.

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A child carries a container of water Monday as he walks past homes destroyed by Hurricane Matthew in Jeremie, Haiti. Almost a week after Matthew's assault, power is still out, water and food are scarce, and officials say that young men in villages along the road between the hardhit cities of Les Cayes and Jeremie are putting up blockades of rocks and broken branches to halt convoys of vehicles bringing relief supplies.

DIEU NALIO CHERY/ The Associated Press

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Shenandoah University, which has been supporting one Haitian community since the earthquake, is on fall break until Wednesday. Assistant Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Spiritual Life Justin Allen said a group of students is meeting Wednesday to determine how best to aid Haiti.

“We believe in mission work that is mutual, relational and sustainable,” Allen said. “We want to work with agencies and individuals over the long run. We also don’t want to do something too fast and do harm to those aiding in Haiti.

“ We want to work with people in Haiti to provide them with what they need, not simply what we want to give,” he said.

Project HOPE, headquartered in Millwood, reports its disaster relief team is in Haiti, addressing the needs of people affected by Hurricane Matthew.

According to its website, Project HOPE is deploying medical volunteers to help prevent the spread of cholera and other diseases that are on the rise.

“ HOPE’s team will continue to coordinate with the [Haitian] Ministry of Health to identify areas of greatest need and is prepared to shift its response to ensure all donated supplies reach those in need and that volunteers are deployed where they are needed most,” the site says.

Boyce resident Larry Thompson is leaving Oct. 30 for an eightday mission in Port de Bonheur on a tiny island off Haiti’s west coast. After traveling to Haiti a number of times to help after the earthquake, Thompson, a professional firefighter, in 2014 founded a nonprofit foundation, Least of These Haiti.

The foundation specifically supports a K-6 school in Port de Bonheur, although Thompson and other volunteers also build and repair whatever they can.

Least of These Haiti put a new roof on the school two years ago, and Thompson said it reportedly held up well in the hurricane. Still, he knows there will be a lot to do when he gets there.

“A lot of people go to Haiti, build a building and leave,” Thompson said. “ I decided to focus on one mission. Let’s get all the kids in school, and make sure they have a hot lunch every day throughout the year.”

Thompson and Least of These Haiti volunteers pay for their own airfare, lodging and meals. Thompson is adamant that every dollar donated to the foundation goes directly toward tuition, supplies and hot lunches for the children, pays the teachers’ salaries and purchases building supplies in Haiti.

The fee to process online credit card donations to the foundation comes out of Thompson’s pocket, as well.

“It’s important for donated money to be spent in Haiti to support its people and its economy,” he said.

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Learn more about Least of These Haiti at www.leastofthesehaiti.com.

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