

Physician gives his time and services to Haiti



By Alice Owens Special to News & Record

Changing a country comes slowly, but Steven Landau, a family practice physician in Greensboro, believes it can be done because he is seeing it with his own eyes.

Landau volunteers with AMURT (Ananda Marga Universal Relief Team), whose mission is to improve the quality of life for the poor and disadvantaged people of the world affected by conflict and disaster. Landau is involved with the work in Haiti.

In May, he traveled to Haiti with a threefold purpose — to help smooth relations between AMURT here in the states and AMURT Haiti, supervise a new school that AMURT is building and serve in a medical capacity.

While he was there, Landau also visited the salt flats and saw firsthand the beginnings of a salt reclamation project of AMURT. Landau said that this new way of reclaiming salt will revolutionize the psychology of manufacturing and help empower women.

The project will free Haiti from dependence on salt importation and provide co-ops among women and men who own competing methods of salt reclamation.

One objective for Landau while in Haiti was to mediate differences and conflicts between the U.S. AMURT workers and the AMURT Haiti workers. It wasn't until he arrived in Haiti and could clarify the projects that the two sides were able to

understand each other. Because of his work with AMURT in both the United States and Haiti, both sides trust him, and he was able to help ease the conflict.

He said that one night an impromptu gathering happened after dinner, and the dissatisfied Haitian AMURT workers started asking questions. After listening, Landau facilitated an understanding between the two, and now those relationships are much better.

“Listening is more important than talking, and acting makes the listening powerful,” Landau said.

Landau also spoke to the teacher training staff of The Center for Innovative Continuing Education (InnovED) at the University of Quisqueya. He listened to concerns and then visited a school that AMURT runs and to which he personally donates.

A conflict between two teaching styles had arisen after a merger between the pre-existing AMURT school and the post-earthquake school. The pre-existing school used the old style of teaching, while the post-quake school used the Neo-Humanism style of teaching, which aims to empower men, women and children, eliminate racism and teach respect for plants, animals and even inanimate objects through education and cooperative efforts with adults.

Conflicts between the students from the two schools was also a problem. Landau was called upon to help sort it out and find a solution.

“The solution is to separate the schools again and make sure that the new methods of Neo-Humanism are adapted at the pre-existing school,” Landau said.

He also said that AMURT has plans to buy land and build a new building for the post-quake school.

This school will serve as a model demonstration lab allowing workshop participants to experience first-hand the process of student-centered learning.

“Hundreds of new teachers will be trained and will go to private schools and will incorporate new methods, which are better than just rote learning,” Landau said.

But like all intense trips, not everything goes smoothly. Landau had his own “freak out.” He had initially planned on only doing eyeglass fittings. He had few

medical supplies or instruments with him, but one of the nuns who runs three schools, Didi, asked him to provide medical relief and he agreed.

Landau went the day before he was to leave for these medical trips to a wholesale medical supply and went shopping, but he didn't know exactly what he would need.

"I didn't know what I needed and they didn't have what I would have needed," he said.

Nonetheless, he traveled five hours up bumpy back Haitian roads to arrive at medical events organized by other people. The first event had 150 people and the second had 100. The one man who had initially been there to help him had mysteriously been sent away. Hungry and exhausted, Landau "freaked out."

"People were coming in with problems I couldn't diagnosis," he said.

But, he couldn't send them away with nothing, so he gave them medicine that he knew would be safe regardless of what their actual condition was.

"I did a lot of mechanical medicine instead of imparting love, and that made me very angry," he said.

Finally, Didi and another lady arrived and helped to triage the patients, which made the process easier.

When one is a servant of the people, no matter how hard the situation or how demanding the circumstances, it's impossible to say no when asked to be a part of changing the world.

He said he was never going back; this experience had pushed him over the limit.

"But, then I was invited to come back in the fall for the opening of the salt flats," Landau said.

He returns to Haiti this October.

Alice Owens is a freelance writer and photographer who lives in High Point. Contact her at mexialice@gmail.com.