

July 14, 2013

Dear Friends of The Tree of Life,

We have planted a new orphanage in Haiti! As soon as my school year was completed in early June, I returned to Haiti, eager to see a dream that Bebe and I have been developing for five years.

On June 16, Ken Bernhard (a Hackley classmate of mine ) and his nephew, Bobby, joined me on a flight to Port-au-Prince. Ken is a lawyer who has a keen sense of organization and was a great help in sorting out legal matters. Bobby, a sophomore at Indiana University, dove right in working side-by-side with Haitians, setting up equipment for the orphanage and playing with the kids.

Bebe took us to Source Mattelas, the location of our new orphanage. As we walked up a hill from the main road to the top of a ridge, we viewed mountains to the east, and the ocean to the west. Nestled between the two is the new location of The Tree of Life Orphanage. The doors to the orphanage would be opening in four days. The dormitory had been completed for almost half a year and had recently been painted. Bunk beds were installed before the children arrived. The dining room/kitchen had just been erected (thanks to a grant from the Dorothea Ross Foundation). Finally, the new bathroom with two toilets and two showers was in the last stages of being built.

On Monday, Ken and I helped clean up around the property while Bobby sorted out boxes of soccer clothes and equipment that were donated by the Tuchman family and soccer teams in Blue Bell, PA area and by The Joe Palumbo Soccer Academy in

Putnam Valley, NY. A local artist, Poussant, put finishing touches on the welcoming artwork on the outside wall of the dormitory, and a construction crew installed the toilets and doors. Later that afternoon, we went to pick up Cyndy Jean, a colleague of mine at Hackley School, who is Haitian-American and fluent in Creole. What energy, excitement, and creative ideas she brought to our program. She has a heart for children and a special way of interacting with people she meets. She was/is eager to help others in her native country.

The next day, we went to Port-au-Prince to buy 18 mattresses for the orphanage. When we returned, we made each bed with fresh, new sheets. Bobby worked with Mario, a local man who is in charge of a summer soccer program, to complete the final touches on a tournament that would begin in three days and last for a month. Since we have not been able to drill for water, we also arranged for water delivery every week. We are hoping to raise money for a well that would help the orphanage become self-sufficient.

One day before the opening, Bebe, Ken, and I met with the new staff. These included the orphanage superintendent in charge of daily events, the secretary/women's ministry organizer, three mothers, a cleaning lady, a guard, and two young men and a young woman who would be the children's big brothers and sister. In the afternoon, we went to the airport to pick up a Canadian lady named Shiela Gibbons, who would be teaching the children English each morning for three weeks. She is so kind to donate faithfully her time and materials.

On June 20, the orphanage opened. All the children and their caretakers arrived at 8:30. After a prayer, each child was called and welcomed into the orphanage. They received a gift and nameplate. We then brought them into the dormitory area

where they now had their own bed, for the first time in their lives. Some carried small bags with belongings; some carried nothing. It was quite moving to see these children enter into a new life. Not one of them seemed reluctant. Similarly, the people who brought them did not show any sadness, for they knew that these children would receive love, a place to sleep, three meals a day, and an education. For lunch, they had their first meal: chicken with rice. Around noon, we took Ken and Bobby to the airport and picked up Nick Cannell, who is cofounder of Kombit Musik. He is an American who works in the USA, but travels to Haiti to find, record, and publish vocal and instrumental talent. Later that evening, he made it possible to have one of his well-known artists, Amos, play the guitar and sing for the children. The children responded with gleeful voices and playful dance.

On my next-to-the-last day, we had to wake early and be ready to receive the local judge who inspected the orphanage. Bebe does a great job making sure all of the paperwork, construction, and educational curriculum are legal and according to Haitian regulations. The inspection went well. After that, the children had no problems playing soccer, making necklaces with Cyndy, or flying kites. In the afternoon, Bebe and I went to the local dirt soccer field and watched the first contest of the summer tournament for 15 and under boys. There were 15+ players on each team, one referee, two linesmen, and 500+ spectators. The game was cleanly played. What a sight to see the enthusiasm a simple game can generate in a community! If it weren't for this competition, both the children and adults would be sitting and talking like any other day.

The people in The Tree of Life Orphanage are blessed to have the opportunity to help children make changes in their lives.

All those at our new site work together to help the 15 orphans entrusted to us and to spread some of that help to the nearby community.

Sincerely,

Roger Garrison

P.S. If you wish to make a donation or have a question, send it to Tree of Life Orphanage, PO Box 324, Katonah, NY 10536. Children can always be sponsored. (\$25 a month or \$300 a year). Please visit our Facebook page or the “Media” tab on our website for pictures of recent events.

- website ([www.treeoflifeorphanage.org](http://www.treeoflifeorphanage.org))
- e-mail address ([info@treeoflifeorphanage.org](mailto:info@treeoflifeorphanage.org))
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