

## Millions still pouring in for Haiti - But, needs will be great for years to come

Written by Eboni Farmer, NNPA Special Correspondent  
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WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Maryse Dejean, is in New Orleans thousands of miles away from home. Her distance from her native Haiti has only motivated her to work harder so that she can help bring relief to the country after a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck it on January 12.

DeJean, who has lived in New Orleans for 25-years, is currently pulling her resources together to get her family out of Haiti. Her concerns are not only for her family members there, but also for other Haitians who are still in the nation's capital, Port-au-Prince.

"I am deeply concerned," Dejean said.

Many Americans do not have a direct connection to Haiti like Dejean, but it has not stopped them from opening up their minds, hearts and wallets. They have created Facebook groups, donated millions of dollars by text messaging, raised their own funds, sold t-shirts and thrown relief for Haiti parties.

Major American companies have also pledged to give to Haiti. Bank of America, the Coco Cola Foundation, Goldman Sachs Group and Comcast Corp all announced that they would contribute at least \$1 million.

In addition to the international effort to deliver food, water, shelter and medical care, at least \$30 million has been given by text messaging alone and at least \$122 million by corporations. The "Hope for Haiti" telethon concert has raised more than \$60 million. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been given from the U. S. and likely more than a billion internationally has been raised by everything from piggy bank and allowance donations, to concerts, church offerings to haircuts and other creative fundraisers.

While Americans have poured from their hearts and their pocket books over the past few weeks, many people are skeptical about how long Americans will continue to contribute their time and money into helping Haiti. Others see Americans sticking with the country in the months and years to come.

The tragedy in Haiti, where there is believed to be over 150,000 deaths, comes at time when America is dealing with a number of domestic issues including health care reform and an unemployment rate of 10 percent.

Dejean can sense that despite the hard economic times for many, the people of New Orleans, where Hurricane Katrina left thousands dead and homeless four years ago, can sympathize and empathize with the people in Haiti.

"I think that having gone through a natural and a federal disaster, New Orleans natives really understand what is like to go through a tragedy and want to do whatever they can to help," Dejean said.

Dejean is leading several task forces to collect funds for relief efforts. She is also working on helping 17 doctors arrange an aircraft to get into Haiti.

Within hours after hearing about the devastation in Haiti, David Brown from Texas began

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organizing a party at an Elks club in Houston, TX. He was able to raise \$1,000.

Brown said that he believes that the momentum that Americans have to support Haiti will dwindle but it will not die.

“People say that we have our own issues here and believe me I understand that we do,” Brown said. “But how long can we ignore the fact that our neighbor is suffering so much. It would be like me turning the other cheek as my next-door neighbors house was burned down. My house would probably burn down too. All eyes are on Haiti and if we ignore the country it will rest heavy on our consciences.”

In Saos, CA, Gabriel Hanley is selling t-shirts to raise funds for Haiti. When he initially heard about the tragedy, Hanley said that his reaction to the earthquake in Haiti was the same as when he turned on the news on September 11, 2001.

“I was beside myself. Surprisingly, with the earthquake in Haiti, everything I saw on the news at first seemed to play the incident down,” Hanley said “From my point of view I could tell this could be bigger than any natural disaster the US had ever faced. My heart went out to the Haitian people instantly.”

As the news of the devastation unfolded he began to think of the ways he could help and came up with the idea of selling t-shirts. Hanley’s non-profit organization Warm Hearted Citizens is constantly donating money and other resources to people in need. He plans on helping Haiti in the months and years to come. The proceeds from the t-shirts will immediately go towards food and medical supplies.

Hanley also said that Warm Hearted Citizens would set aside money so that it can be a part of the rebuilding of Haiti, when the time comes.

“Unfortunately, I do think most Americans will lose interest in Haiti. The most disturbing thing I have seen is how fellow Americans view this tragedy,” Hanley said.

“A lot of Americans think all the money and effort should be going into helping our own country not someone else’s.”

In Washington, D.C. Howard University’s Haitian Student Association has been working around the clock to raise funds for Haiti. They have helped to organize Hands for Haiti, a concert that raised over \$15,000. In addition to the concert they helped to collect money at Howard University basketball game where \$3,000 was raised. All of the proceeds went to the Howard University Haitian Relief Fund.

Gadini Delisca’s, a member of Howard’s Haitian Student Association, said most of her family is still in Port-au-Prince.

“We’ve been handed a great responsibility,” Delisca said. “We have the responsibility to make sure that our families in Haiti aren’t forgotten here in the United States and the rest of the world.”