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Ocean Reef works to aid families of Haitian employees

BY ROBERT SILK
Free Press Staff

NORTH KEY LARGO — The Ocean Reef Club has teamed up with a Massachusetts-based disaster relief organization as it attempts to directly assist the earthquake stricken families of its 154 Haitian employees.

Last Wednesday Ocean Reef member Rick Link and employee Max Sanon, a Haitian who still owns a home near Port-Au-Prince, set off for the island of Hispaniola in Link's private plane. Joining them were David Campbell, executive director of the non-profit Hands on Disaster Response, based out of Carlisle, Mass., as well as two other HODR

executives. Jeremy Joslin, an HODR volunteer physician, was also on the plane.

The group flew first to the Dominican Republic, before crossing over the border into Haiti last Thursday. Their initial goal, said Howard, is to assess potential projects. HODR typically begins its relief programs a month or so after a disaster strikes and stays on the ground for several months.

Richard Weinstein, an Ocean Reef vice president, said the club convened its Haitian employees shortly after the magnitude 7.0 earthquake decimated the impoverished Caribbean nation on Jan. 12.

"We asked them what we can do to help," he said. "They

said they wanted us to help their family members. It was very moving."

How HODR and the Ocean Reef Club will work together over the longer term of their relief efforts is for now uncertain, Campbell said in an e-mail from Haiti last weekend. Since arriving in the earthquake ravaged nation, Sanon has been attempting to contact the families of Ocean Reef employees and to determine their conditions and needs. He is planning to report back to the club on a weekly basis.

In the meantime, HODR has been coordinating with the United Nations Organizing Committee for Humanitarian Affairs to determine how it could best assist in the recovery.

Should the group do a project, it would probably be related to housing those who were left homeless by the quake.

Sanon and HODR have travelled together when useful, Campbell said.

"Once Max identifies needs, and where they're clustered, we probably can identify organizations that were, or could be, of help," Campbell wrote.

Since forming in 2004, HODR has set up volunteer projects at 12 natural disaster sites, including Biloxi, Miss. in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and Thailand in the aftermath of the December 2004 tsunami. HODR already has an established network of contacts in Haiti, hav-

ing wrapped up a hurricane recovery project in the northwestern city of Gonaives last March. Gonaives was hit hard by Hurricane Hanna in 2008.


The Ocean Reef Foundation had raised \$130,000 for Haiti relief as of Monday morning, Weinstein said.

Campbell said the going has been challenging since arriving in Haiti. One night the group slept outside due to warnings of aftershocks. But he said the unexpected is basically the norm.

Death tolls in Port-au-Prince have topped 150,000, according to ABC News.

"[T]hink of the impact of one death in your own life," Campbell wrote.

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brief

Project breaks ground

SOUTH DADE — State officials were scheduled to break ground Tuesday on a \$25 million Florida Bay restoration

project.

The project, involving construction of a reservoir near the main entrance to Everglades National Park, as well as work on a series of levees, pump stations and canal modifications, is designed to redirect water from the C-111 canal to Taylor Slough, the bay's largest his-


torical freshwater tributary.

By resorting flow into the bay, water managers expect to alleviate unnaturally salty conditions believed to have led to the bay's declining health.

The C-111 canal cuts across the southern Everglades and lets out in Manatee Bay on Barnes Sound.

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