

Soldier provides humanitarian service to homeland of Haiti

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Monitor Staff

Growing up, many are taught it is always better to give than to receive. Staff Sgt. Errold Michel, noncommissioned officer in charge of William Beaumont Army Community Hospital's Dental Clinic, has taken giving to a new level.

Michel, a native of Haiti, who has lived in the U.S. since 1981, gives back to his homeland by donating money and time. Each year, Michel travels to Haiti to help those who are less fortunate.

"Since I have been living in the states I have been blessed," said Michel. "It's good to go there and help."



A woman carries water she received from the water purification site in Haiti.

Michel said when he lived in Haiti it was poor, but when he returned, conditions were worse, and he had to get involved.

He started by assisting the teachers with money by giving \$60 per month, and during the years, the sum has increased to giving \$12,000 per year. This money was used to help build schools, dig wells and buy equipment for water purification.

Michel said people in the village had to drink water from the same river as animals and they were getting sick.

"Most people in Haiti think this is a voodoo thing; it has nothing to do with voodoo," said Michel. "The problem is bacteria in the water."

In 2005, Michel and a pastor from Kansas bought equipment to assist the villagers with purifying their drinking water.

"I think this is going to help the community and the health of the Haitian people," said Michel.

Combating literacy is a difficult obstacle for the Haitians. Michel said more than 65 percent of the people do not know how to read, and the local government has not provided a lot of assistance to combat this problem.

"It is tough when people do not know how to read," said Michel.

After realizing there was a need for formal schools, Michel and his father, a minister in Haiti, built schools for local children. Since 2001, Michel has been instrumental with building three schools.

Some of the children are taught, but in remote areas of the country children



PHOTOS BY STAFF SGT. ERROLD MICHEL

Haitian students enter a school that Staff Sgt. Errold Michel and his father were instrumental in starting.

do not receive an education. Michel said education is a low priority. He also said when children learn how to read they sometimes rob their parents. If the parents have property their children sometimes deceive them by having them sign over their property.

Michel said the largest issue in Haiti is the belief of voodoo. He said believing in voodoo has blinded the people to their problems. Michel also said government corruption has created an unstable environment.

"When people are sick, they do not go to the doctor; they go see the voodoo priest," said Michel.

Another issue the poor combat is finding money to pay for their children to attend school. The poor pay for their children to attend school; while the more affluent attend school free.

When Michel travels to Haiti, he said he returns with the clothes on his back, because after observing the conditions

and the poverty he is inspired to give more than money.

"The people are so happy to see us when we visit," said Michel.

Homelessness is also an issue for the people of Haiti. Michel said people are jailed for stealing sugar cane.

"The people have nothing to eat; there are beggars on the street," said Michel.

Michel is hopeful that the new government will implement changes to help the people in his homeland.

"The best way to help is [to] get involved," said Michel. "Give to the Red Cross or U.S. Aid. We need doctors and nurses."

Michel said if safety or lodging is an issue, they have people who can provide protection and a place to stay.

"We have so many people in need," said Michel. "I want people to know we are fortunate and blessed and to help if they can."

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