



A mission trip with his church to Haiti in March made such an impression on Michael Volk, PE, that he returned in April, and plans to make another trip to the earthquake-torn Caribbean island nation next spring.

"I'm almost 50, and it struck me, 'What's my purpose, what am I really here for?'" asks Volk, the President of SoilTech Consultants, Neel-Schaffer's Mississippi-based geotechnical engineering subsidiary. "We're all here for a purpose, so this struck me: 'What is our life's purpose?'"

For Volk, helping the Haitians rebuild has become a passion.

"I probably won't go back until next spring, but it's going to be on my mind until then," said Volk. "I've told them I will help with the water issue and any other aspects of construction and engineering they need."

Haiti was rocked by a catastrophic magnitude 7.0 earthquake on Jan. 12, 2010, centered near the capital city of Port-au-Prince. In the following two weeks, 24 aftershocks of 4.5 magnitude or greater were recorded. The death toll ranged from 150,000 to 250,000. The Haitian government has said some 250,000 homes and 30,000 commercial buildings were destroyed or damaged. The poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, plagued by poverty and poor housing conditions, Haiti has been fighting to rebuild and recover ever since.

Inspired by Stan Buckley with But God Ministries (BGM) of Jackson (MS), who is also one of Volk's life group leaders (Sunday School for us old timers) at Broadmoor, Volk and his two youngest sons, Matt, 17, and Wilson, 15, joined 152 other members of Broadmoor Baptist Church

of Madison (MS) for a week-long spring break trip to Haiti in March.

Since the earthquake, Broadmoor members have helped rebuild two churches in Port-au-Prince, Cote Plage, and the Church at Mariani.

During their spring break trip, the Broadmoor members broke into four groups that worked on a variety of projects. Three of the groups stayed in the Port-au-Prince area and worked at several orphanages, the Church of Mariani, and the Church at Cote Plage.

The Volks were part of the 35-member youth group, which included seven other adults. They spent a day at the Church at Mariani (in the Port au-Prince proper),



Michael's son, Matt, with two Haitian orphans.

spending time with the youth at Mariani. They participated in arts and crafts, played soccer, and walked the streets with interpreters, inviting the locals to a church service that would include a portion of Broadmoor's choir. They spent two days working at two orphanages, helping build tables, a wooden platform, and wooden ramps. They also completed a variety of other projects for a special-needs orphanage in Port-au-Prince.

Another group went to Thoman, a mountain village of 6,000 outside Port-au-Prince, where they helped build a cement-block, two-room home for a mother and her five children who had been living in a tiny shanty made of recycled tin (more on that later).



The river below is the primary source of water for basic needs in the Thoman area. Michael's team is working on a plan that will make it easier for villagers to gather water, saving precious time and energy.

The Broadmoor group also had time for fellowship. On the fifth day, they visited a resort area some two hours from Port-au-Prince, where they relaxed, swam, and then had church services on the beach at sunset. On the sixth day, they even arranged for a basketball tournament with the children from Mississippi and Haiti playing together, and then attended church services at Cote Plage that evening. They attended services at Cote Plage again on the morning of the seventh day, and then flew back to Mississippi.

"The worship experience that we were part of at the Cote Plage Church on Sunday morning was one to remember," Volk said. Listening to the church congregation singing

worship songs in Creole was a delight. As we arrived before 7 that early Sunday morning at the church by school buses we noticed that most everyone was walking to church and dressed in their Sunday best. The church building was packed with people standing all along the room and in the balcony area."

Volk also witnessed poverty at a level he can't shake from his mind: At one of the orphanages, the children cling to their most prized possession, the spoon they use at mealtime.

"Taking my two younger sons, it really opened their eyes, that there's more in the world than what they see in Madison and in Mississippi," Volk said. "They've been to New York City. They've been to Miami and some other places. But to go to a third-world country and see that a spoon is one of the most precious things a young child can have? It really made an impact. The main lesson me and the boys came back with was the true meaning of the phrase, 'When God is all you have, God is all you need!' The Haitian people truly live that motto. They really have nothing, but their spirit and love for each other was incredible! We all picked up on that immediately."

After that trip, Volk returned in April with Buckley and But God Ministries, where they visited Galette Chambon, located in a valley about 18 miles east of Port-au-Prince, and Thoman, the mountain village that is located about an hour drive further east in the mountains near the Dominican Republic border. BGM has built a Hope Center there that includes a medical clinic, with dormi-



A view of the neighborhood surrounding the Church of Mariani.



tories to house people who volunteer their time for a week or longer at both locations. In addition, an orphanage, learning center, a church, new water well, agricultural plots, and 44 new homes for families who were living in tent cities after the earthquake have been constructed at the Hope Center in Galette Chambon.

“Because I’m a civil engineer, he wanted my thoughts on what I could do to help from an engineering aspect, including how to help get water to the communities,” said Volk. “Also, the quick trip aided me to see what future plans are needed in both of these areas. There is so much to do and I know that one person cannot do it all. But one person can start with making a difference and hopefully it will catch on with others.”

It was on that three-day trip that Volk saw the \$5,500, two-room, cement-block home his church members had helped pay for and then built in March for Marie Mene, the single mom who was raising five children in a tin shanty. He met Mene, and heard the story of how she had attended church the Sunday after her new home was finished and spoke to the congregation, thanking the Americans for building her a new home, and telling the congregation her family had gone from “living in Hell every day to living in Heaven.”



Marie Mene and her five children once called this tiny hut home.

During that trip, Volk decided he would return next spring. Between now and then, he knows what’s ahead.

“I’m going to come up with plans on how to get water to those 44 homes from the recently installed well at the Galette Chambon Hope Center and water to the village in Thoman from the nearby river valley that is located about a mile away,” said Volk. “They lack so many things that we take for granted. This is what I can do to help.”

Marie’s previous house is on the right. Her new home, funded and built by Michael’s church, is on the left.







Broadmoor minister Roland Hall (right), and Wilham Alcanat, the team's local interpreter, worked on improving handicap access at a special-needs orphanage.



Members of Broadmoor attend a service at the Church of Mariani.



Michael and Marie Mene, in front of her new home.



The Broadmoor youth group, along with local youth, enjoy a day of relaxing by the pool, playing basketball, and music on one of their final days in Haiti.



***"The worship experience that we were part of at the Cote Plage Church on Sunday morning was one to remember"***

Sunday worship at The Church Cote Plage, Port-Au-Prince. The church was so full there was standing room only ... and it was 6:30 in the morning! Most of the attendees walk to church every Sunday morning.





In Galette Chambon and Thoman many families cannot afford to send their children to school. There are very few government-run schools, so the pastors or others in the community have created schools to help educate the children.



Curious children packed into a classroom of a school in Thoman. A system has been set up to help sponsor children in the Thoman area whose families can't afford school.



The school in Thoman, with about 420 students, is a collection of many concrete block classrooms.



These recently constructed classroom buildings help provide more opportunities for children to participate in school.

For more information on sponsoring a child's education in the Thoman area, you can visit:

[www.flfc-Haiti.com](http://www.flfc-Haiti.com)