From Devastation to Development: How Cincinnati is Working to Change the Haiti Conversation

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There are certain times and events throughout history that can be described with one word or phrase and require no further explanation. These words instantly evoke a deep sense of meaning, knowledge and even emotion. Words and phrases like: Challenger space shuttle, 9/11 and Columbine all bring to mind catastrophic events that have unfolded right before our eyes. Another word that stirs the emotions of many is Haiti.

As you know, two years ago this month, Haiti was ravaged by a magnitude 7.0 earthquake 25 miles west of Port Au Prince. This earthquake left in its wake more than 300,000 dead and one million homeless. There are reports that more than 250,000 residences and 30,000 commercial buildings were destroyed by the earthquake and numerous after-shocks in the days and weeks following. This single event has taken so much from this small Caribbean country and left greater amounts of poverty and despair.

When USGBC launched Project Haiti, the USGBC Cincinnati Regional Chapter, led by our emerging professionals, pledged to raise $50,000 to help with the rebuilding of this orphanage. Their dedication has led to a collaboration with former NFL player, Dhani Jones, and his organization, Bowtie for a Cause. Bowtie for a Cause provides an avenue for others to support a cause they believe in, and a unique bowtie has been created for Project Haiti that our chapter is selling with all proceeds going toward Project Haiti.

In addition, there is a local healthcare construction summit that attracts more than 500 attendees annually, and the organizers of the summit have agreed to charge a donation fee of $10 from this normally free event to benefit Project Haiti. This project has fostered the creativity of our Emerging Professionals who volunteered their time to wrap gifts over the holidays at a retail outlet to raise additional funds. These are just a few ways that the members of our chapter are reaching out and getting the larger community involved in our efforts.

Our hope is that Project Haiti will have transformative value in Port-au-Prince AND Cincinnati! Our energies have already attracted the help of many supporters, from professional athletes and local politicians to friends and family. For the first time, we are having conversations not only about the good that will come from Project Haiti, but how we can implement LEED in greater practice in our own city. LEED is a great tool in lessening our negative impact on the environment, and those of us in the industry understand the life-long benefits that sustainable buildings have on people and our communities. For those outside of the green building community, these conversations are not regularly found and at times harder to convey.

We don't want to go at this alone. We are encouraging the green building community across the country to consider ways to get involved to raise money For Project Haiti. If you haven't already, I urge you learn more about the project and follow that knowledge up with action.

If we all act and do our part, it's not too late to change the feelings and meaning surrounding the word Haiti from devastation to development and from impossible to triumphant. We have the ability to make Haiti the face of sustainable design and green buildings and to forever change the way our communities and the world look at LEED.

Do your part AND someone else's. GET INVOLVED TODAY!

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