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Anxious families wait outside the hospital for news of their loved ones inside.

A Mission of Health and Hope

A Haitian hospital with roots in Pittsburgh's East End is on the front line of earthquake relief efforts.

BY MARY S. GILBERT

When the catastrophic 7.0-magnitude earthquake struck Haiti on January 12, Squirrel Hill resident Ian Rawson was driving to Hôpital Albert Schweitzer in the town of Deschapelles in the country's Artibonite Valley.

The rumbling earth tossed his vehicle across the road. His first thought, according to his wife, Lucy Rawson, who was in Pittsburgh at the time, was that something was wrong with the car. He quickly amended that notion when he saw people fleeing in terror from shaking buildings.

His volunteer role as managing director of a hospital in one of the world's poorest nations was about to take on an even greater sense of urgency.

The hospital—which was spared any structural damage—is 40 miles away (a three-hour drive) from the devastated capital city of Port-au-Prince, where hundreds of thousands of people were killed by the quake. It was opened in 1956 by Ian's mother and stepfather, Gwen Grant Mellon and Dr. William Larimer Mellon Jr., who were inspired by Dr. Albert



The founders of Hôpital Albert Schweitzer Haiti—Gwen Grant Mellon and Dr. William Larimer Mellon Jr.

Schweitzer's compassionate medical work in Africa. Schweitzer's motto became theirs—*reverence for life*.

Today, Hôpital Albert Schweitzer Haiti continues to abide by that principle—and maintains its strong Pittsburgh connections. The hospital's U.S. headquarters are located in Point Breeze, along with the office of its fundraising arm, The Friends of Hôpital Albert Schweitzer Haiti (known as The Friends). Many benefactors live in the area, as do board members, local physicians, and others who have volunteered on-site in Haiti.

Shadyside's Tom Succop is a retired landscape architect and board member of both organizations who designed a memorial garden for the hospital campus. "I was so taken by my first trip there, with the hospital's beautiful architecture, its open-air environment, and the amazing work being done," Succop explains. "It's marvelous and historic to have so much support from Pittsburghers."

That support has perhaps never been more critical.

After the earthquake, more than 150,000 displaced people migrated into the rural valley where the hospital is located, most lacking shelter, jobs, and food. Many suffered from major traumatic injuries, and the 120-bed medical center was soon coping with 800 patients a day. The sick and injured slept outdoors on mattresses and cardboard. The operating room that usually runs one daily shift was going around the clock.

"It took us days to catch up," recounts Lucy, president of The Friends. "People didn't have simple injuries. They had multiple limbs broken in multiple places, which meant many amputations. Pharmacies were destroyed, so we had to amputate without anesthesia. The airport was closed so our usual supplies were cut off. We organized teams of trauma surgeons, and they brought in medicine and anesthesia."

For more years than Lucy can recall, she and her husband have dedicated their lives to serving Haiti, spearheading the development of the hospital his family built on the site of a decommissioned banana plantation. There, visiting medical professionals from overseas work alongside a permanent Haitian staff of 500 employees.

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before after



Lucy and Ian Rawson



A medical ward at Hôpital Albert Schweitzer Haiti.



Ian Rawson at the hospital with a patient.

"It's work that Ian was born to do and studied all his life without knowing it," she says. "He's been involved since the hospital's beginning. He speaks their language, understands their culture, knows the medical community, and knows their politics."

Inveterate travelers, the couple met while teaching school in the Philippines. They lived in Lebanon, Greece, and Costa Rica prior to settling in Pittsburgh. Ian then earned a Ph.D. in medical anthropology and taught at the Graduate School of Public Health at University of Pittsburgh. He also worked in hospital administration at Allegheny General Hospital and served as president of the Hospital Council of Western Pennsylvania. Throughout his successful career, he continued to be involved with Hôpital Albert Schweitzer in various capacities. He began working for the hospi-

tal as a full-time volunteer after retirement, and until recently, served as chairman of the board.

Over the years, Lucy began selling Haitian artwork to generate donations for the hospital, and in 1999, she incorporated the fundraising initiative as a separate non-profit entity. The organization's Reynolds Street office doubles as a gallery for the exhibition and sale of Haitian art that is also available online at www.friendsofhas.org.

The Friends also designs and conducts sustainable projects together with the hospital to improve quality of life in the poor island nation. For instance, once boasting a lush landscape, Haiti is now virtually deforested, and the Haiti Timber Re-Introduction Project assists local farmers to plant tree plots in remote mountain communities to create small nurseries for financial opportunities.

The Rehabilitation Technician Training Program is building a professional infrastructure for rehabilitation services such as physical, occupational, and speech therapies.

Extending its focus beyond healthcare has been the organization's modus operandi since its inception. "We're a model in that we're not just a hospital, but we treat the whole community medically and economically," Lucy emphasizes.

To that end, Hôpital Albert Schweitzer operates as an integrated health system, including the main hospital, surgery suites, laboratories, and satellite clinics. Dedicated to both prevention and cure through a combination of medical care and community services, it works to change lives, instill health, and foster self-reliance.

But as much as the hospital has accomplished, the aftermath of the earthquake has

generated new, long-term problems due to the huge influx of population that will undoubtedly cause strain for years to come. Those fleeing quake-ravaged areas will need ongoing medical care, shelter, jobs, and food to prevent malnutrition and starvation.

"It's a huge disruption of the infrastructure that was minimal to start with," Lucy worries, acknowledging that the hospital itself will never be the same.

"We're reacting, and it's hard to know how we'll form a direction for the future," she continues. "It will depend on funding and our ability to manage. We'll have to expand with the expanded population and continue to help them economically, as well as with their health problems. We have to do so much—educate to prevent disease, vaccinate, clean up stagnant water, offer prenatal care, and deal with AIDS."

The Rawsons are hopeful that ongoing aid from the Pittsburgh region—and especially the East End—will make it possible to face these problems in much the same way they were prepared to treat patients after the earthquake.

"We are very grateful that so many friends sent special funds to help us through this difficult period," she says. "Now, more than ever, we are relying on the continued support of our organization as we rise to our greatest challenge yet."

For more information about Hôpital Albert Schweitzer Haiti or how to donate to relief and rebuilding efforts in Haiti, visit www.friendsofhas.org or call 412-361-4884.



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