



# The Haitian Connection Newsletter

Lorraine Antieau, Editor

Volume 12 Issue 2 May 2023

## Notes from Renate



Earth Day greetings from the Laudato Si movement in Haiti under the dynamic leadership of Marjorie Louis-Mard. Despite Haiti's innumerable problems, the Laudato Si movement is alive and well in Haiti, promoting care of creation especially with young people. Also, I'm happy to share that the University of the Grand'Anse is now integrating Creation Care into their curriculum.



Not all the news coming out of Haiti is bad. Enjoy these photos of mangoes from the mango tree in my yard in Haiti. Mangoes are very plentiful this year, and we give many of them away. They can help still some of the hunger pangs. The photos show what was harvested just 2 days apart.



Renate is also happy to let you know that she passed her Thesis Project Proposal presentation. Four members were on the jury, two faculty members and two peers. Her thesis will be on Building a Community Mental Health Program from the Bottom Up. Of course, it features Haitian Connection's mental health work in Haiti. Once the thesis is completed, Renate will graduate with a Doctor of Ministry degree from Catholic Theological Union.

Trees That Feed Foundation (TTF) and Haitian Connection have collaborated for many years in the Jérémie area. Mary and Mike, Founders of TTF, introduced us to the value of breadfruit and its transformation into flour. They facilitated the introduction of the necessary equipment, and even brought a solar dryer to us. Jérémie Breadfruit Flour and Nursery, with the help of TTF, has developed into a successful business under the leadership of Pierre Moise Louis. Together with Haitian Connection TTF has implanted a Women's Empowerment project in the Jérémie area, training women as an effective sales force to sell konparets, a local sweet roll. Haitian Connection is deeply grateful to TTF's continued support. Mike and Mary were recently featured in the local paper North Shore Weekend, and we have included the piece in its entirety on page 5 with permission.

With hope,

Renate

## Cash Without Condition Making a Difference



My name is Nadrelle Phylipe. Cash Without Condition is not a small project. I felt like I could not do anything with my life. But the money I receive from Cash Without Condition allows me to pay the school fees for my child. Every month I put money aside for the school fees. This small project means a lot to me. Thank you Madame Renate along with all the other people who support this program.



My name is Guerda Michel. I feel very fortunate to be part of the program Cash Without Condition. This program allows me to purchase food every month for my family. The way life is now in Haiti, if it was not for the program I would not be able to purchase on credit, but people know that I will pay them at the end of each month.



My name is Carole Albery. Friends, it is thanks to this program that I am able to send my three children to school in Jérémie. Now two of them are Seniors in high school. The way life is now, what would I have done without this project?



My name is Guilene Etienne. With the money I receive every month from Cash Without Condition, I spent the money very wisely and carefully. Right now, I contribute something every month to a small house that is being built for me. If it was not for this program, I would not have a house, because I could not pay anything towards the house. I also sell bread in my community with some of the money I receive. Thank you very much, Madame Renate.



My name is Danite Exavier. The project Cash without Condition does a lot for me. I buy some things and sell them and make a little money extra that way. Right now, I am buying some sand and gravel to start a foundation for a small house. I hope this project continues until the small house is finished. I do not have a husband who could help me, it is only this program that helps me with this very difficult life.

## After-School Program Teachers and Students Keep Striving

We have mentioned Haitian Connection's after school program in the last few newsletters. We want to show our readers group photos of all the participants, including our dedicated teachers. The teachers are very devoted to the success of the program, and the students stay involved.



The gentleman on the left is Eliasme Jean Silfin, our coordinator for the after-school program. He does all of the recruiting and designs the curriculum which he adapts to the children's needs. The gentleman on the right is Carfka Degraf our math and science teacher for the upper grades.



The person on the left is Flore Eliasme, she is our other competent teacher and often works one on one with the younger grades.

## Pastor Addresses Mental Health Issues in Des Champs



Pastor Erik, the Baptist pastor in Des Champs, is a real dynamo when it comes to visiting groups and always talks about mental health issues. We are pleased that he is inviting men who often will not admit they have mental health issues. They do need to be educated in basic mental health so they can be aware of what is going on their community.



People are registering for a session with Pastor Erik. It helps us to keep track of the work our mental health agents are doing.

## Higher Education Students on the Road to Success



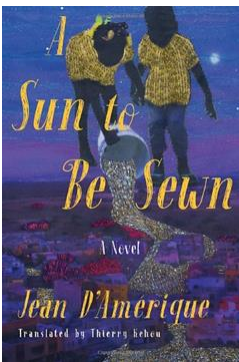
Stacy is one of Haitian Connection's scholarship students. Currently she is preparing for her state exam in Office management and Computer competence, a program for which Haitian Connection sponsored Stacy. In the photo she is holding her diploma from Culinary School which she took last year, and which Haitian connection also sponsored her. Congratulations Stacy, on all you have accomplished so far!



While the photo to the right is from Kendy's recent visit to Richmond University, in the end, he decided to accept a full scholarship offer at Northwestern. He was offered a place in eight US universities, an amazing accomplishment for a young person from Haiti. Renate has known Kendy since before he turned 5 years old. He was the valedictorian in his kindergarten class and has excelled ever since. He is a talented singer, got his diploma in theology and is a certified pastor. Kendy graduated from Robert Bosch School in Freiburg, Germany which he

attended for the last two years of high school on a full all-inclusive scholarship. Classes were held in English. He went to Paris as a Youth Ambassador for the United Nations. While still in Jérémie he founded the Youth Empowerment Program where he gathered a group of young people from Jérémie and all over Haiti to develop a vision for Haiti. Haitian Connection was one of the main sponsors for that youth conference. Kendy is holding fast to his dream to help his country of Haiti once he completes his studies at Northwestern. We wish him all the success he merits, and you will hear more about all the amazing things he will do.

## Book Corner



**A Sun to Be Sewn: A Novel** by Jean D'Amérique (Author), Thierry Kehou (Translator)

In this modern fable full of poetry, desire, and blood, a creative young Haitian girl struggles against seemingly impossible odds to escape the cruel reality of her Port-au-Prince slum.

“Being Haitian means to be born in blood,” Jean D’Amérique has written. *A Sun to Be Sewn*, like D’Amérique’s other novels, poetry, and theatrical works, immerses us in that blood, but he refuses to let his characters be silenced. His words haunt us with the subtlety, nuance, and lyricism that our beautiful and aching country not only inspires, but demands. Jean D’Amérique is a very talented writer and *A Sun to Be Sewn* is an unforgettable novel.” —Edwidge Danticat, author of *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

March 24, 2023

Download PDF

Northwestern University

Dear Love-Kendy:

Congratulations and welcome to the Class of 2027 at Northwestern University! On Behalf of Northwestern's faculty, staff, students, and alumni, it gives us great pleasure to inform you that you have been admitted to the Judd A. and Marjorie Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences.

The admission committee evaluates tens of thousands of applications each year, and your considerable academic achievements, extracurricular accomplishments, and impressive character stood out as truly exceptional. You will be joining a vibrant community of engaged faculty and staff, students with diverse talents and backgrounds, and spirited alumni.

# Trees of Life

Winnetka residents Mary and Mike McLaughlin lift communities in 20 different countries through their Trees That Feed Foundation.

BY MITCH HURST  
THE NORTH SHORE WEEKEND

Most people who retire think about golf or tennis or other leisurely pursuits. After all, they've earned their time in the sun. When Mike and Mary McLaughlin retired, they thought about breadfruit.

Natives of Jamaica and high school sweethearts who now reside in Winnetka, the McLaughlins wanted to use their time in retirement—and a chunk of their savings—to help communities in Jamaica and other tropical countries become self-sustaining through the planting of breadfruit trees.

In 2008, they started the Trees That Feed Foundation, a nonprofit organization that supports the growing, processing, and distribution of breadfruit in countries where breadfruit trees thrive. The trees are good for the environment, provide a local and sustainable source of nutrition, and can boost community-based economies.

"Mary had been concerned about the environment and she said, 'Let's plant trees,'" Mike says.



"That's a step in the right direction. That's not going to solve the whole problem all by itself, but we need to do that. My contribution was to suggest we plant fruit trees because you get the benefit to the environment but you're feeding hungry people as well."

Mike says the environmental value of breadfruit trees is mainly a side benefit. What the McLaughlins are really trying to do is feed hungry people—a problem that, globally, is getting worse. Breadfruit trees can also have a positive economic impact.

"The farmer can sell his fruit, and somebody can process it and make money doing that and then nourish people who are malnourished," Mike says. "We see examples of that in Haiti where kids don't get proper nutrition. Everybody wins and even our donors win because they are able to feel good about doing the right thing."

Mary grew up on a dairy and sugar can farm in Jamaica. Her father also developed a five-acre food forest that was covered in fruit trees. As a child, she loved going there because it was always significantly cooler.

"My parents were rural pioneers; they grew up in the city and then became farmers," she says.



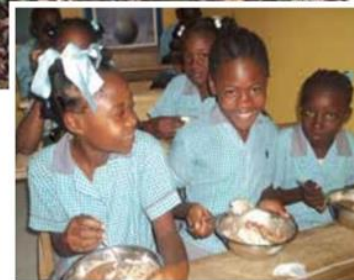
Mike and Mary McLaughlin and their Trees That Feed Foundation support efforts to bring nutritional food to 20 countries throughout the world.



"I always had this in the back of my mind that you could make money by reforesting the planet especially in tropical countries with fruit trees as long as there was a market for the fruit."

Mary sold her business and she and Mike used the proceeds to start Trees That Feed. She says before they knew anything about philanthropy, they wanted to make sure they had a concept that worked. They also had to sort out the legal regulations involved in shipping plants to foreign countries.

"When we started Mike said, 'We'd better find out as much as possible because we want to do this right'. We gathered the knowledge, and Mike's role is to make sure everything is done legally and by the book," she says. "When we ship plants across countries it's all done legally, and we follow all in-



ternational standards. This week we got trees to the Minister of Agriculture in Barbados, the Minister of Agriculture in Trinidad & Tobago, and to the First Lady of the Bahamas, who is championing our cause."

When Trees That Feed was first started there was a fair amount of effort involved in identifying potential partners in the communities the McLaughlins wanted to help. Now, however, the potential partners mostly come to them.

"The beneficiaries find us now because we have a reputation," Mike says. "We started in Jamaica because that's where we're from. We then went to Haiti because a couple of people suggested it and the needs in Haiti are so extreme. Little by little as we worked with trustworthy, reliable partners, they would suggest somewhere else to work—Costa

Rica, Ghana, and other points beyond."

Mike says Trees That Feed can't be everywhere at once and so they look at countries where there's a need and as importantly, a local partner with some resources that the organization trusts and can work with.

"Sometimes it's a church group, sometimes it's another nonprofit, sometimes it's a passionate individual who has knowledge of the local situation," he says. "That's how we got into Haiti with a lady we're continuing to work with who was running a small university in Haiti and we've been working with her all these years."

Right now, Trees that Feed is working in 20 countries and, Mike says, is almost too busy to add any more, although he's adding volunteers, contract staff, and employee staff to expand its work.

"The ideal situation is a farmer who already has trees in the ground and the experience keeping the trees alive. We do some screening and look for some reasons to say 'yes,'" Mike says. "If a farmer wants 500 trees but has only an acre of land, we'll give him 15 trees and ask him to send us pictures in three months or six months and see how the trees are doing and then we'll send more. We're careful to screen but also look for ways to say 'yes.'"

"We also work well with governments, especially ministries of agriculture and forestry departments, because they see the need for what we're doing and rely on the local knowledge that has emerged over the years and we are connecting people to them," Mary says.

Support for Trees That Feed comes from three primary sources—a handful of large donors, hundreds of smaller donors, and grants from foundation whose missions and goals align with Trees that Feed's works.

"In round numbers, we get about \$500,000 a year. In America that's small, but when we're working in countries like Haiti, Jamaica, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania that's big bucks to them," Mike says. "I like to say we spend money with an eyedropper. When we fund a project that's just a few thousand dollars it has a huge impact because it's focused on a local community."

Mike says he'd like Trees that Feed to become better known not because he wants to build an empire, but because he believes their sustainable approach to supporting communities could be a model for others.

"We get into local communities and our objective is to make them self-sufficient. They're going to plant trees and we'll help; they're going to build little factories and we'll help them with the equipment; we'll help them market their product and package it and sell it," he says. "Then, soon enough we hope, they'll be independent, and they won't need us anymore. If other organization saw what we did, I think it could result in better and long-lasting help."

For more information or to donate to the Trees That Feed Foundation, visit [treesthatfeed.org](http://treesthatfeed.org).

## Haitian Connection

Haitian Connection is a 501(c) (3) tax exempt organization founded in 2005, which focuses on the needs of women, children, and young adults in the Jérémie region of southwest Haiti. A variety of projects have already touched thousands of lives: houses have been built for more than 97 women and their children; a small microcredit program is providing economic opportunity for women in 2 communities; a potable water initiative is giving healthy water to one thousand families; and local school teachers have received training in the Child-to-Child method. Haitian Connection's Divergent Thinking Institute is providing Divergent Thinking seminars all over Haiti.

As a response to the earthquake in January 2010, and its psychological aftermath, Haitian Connection has established a mental health program in Jérémie to provide counseling as people resettle, tally their losses, and adjust to a new reality. 27 members of the community have been trained in psychological first aid. This served the greater Jérémie area well after Hurricane Matthew in October of 2016. Our mental health agents were able to hold community meetings to give people an opportunity to debrief and receive some training in stress reduction techniques.

## Support Us

Haitian Connection is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit corporation registered in Illinois and your gifts are tax deductible. Our projects depend on volunteers and the financial support of people who desire to help.

**The cost of building a home for a woman and her family in Jérémie is \$2,000.** The houses have three rooms and a latrine. You could contribute to a house, or even get your church/organization to sponsor a whole house. After Hurricane Matthew, this has become a priority for people in the region.

**Scholarships for needy students from elementary to secondary schools.**

**Microcredit group: contributions accepted.**

**Mental Health Program: contributions to mental health center accepted (total cost for one year \$10,000)**

**Support for training programs in Divergent Thinking, mental health, Child-to-Child, and continuing education.** For every program for 25 people, we provide a meal for all participants and give the facilitators a stipend (about \$500 per training).

To support our projects financially, donate online by visiting our website at: [www.HaitianConnection.org](http://www.HaitianConnection.org) and clicking on the PayPal button.

If you would prefer to send your donation by mail, please address checks to: **Haitian Connection**  
5300 South Shore Drive # 27  
Chicago, IL 60615

## Get Involved

We are looking for volunteers: English teachers, educators, specialists in various fields to give short conferences or seminars. To volunteer, contact **Renate Schneider** at [haitianconnection@gmail.com](mailto:haitianconnection@gmail.com) or by phone at **312/493-3719**; in Haiti: **011/509/3 463-7532**

