

Couple collects medical equipment for Haiti

BY ANGELA HUGHES

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It seemed like a simple question. "Where are they going to get enough crutches for all the Haitians with leg injuries?" Claire Sills asked her husband, Mike, one day.

A severe car wreck with an oil tanker on Route 101 nearly claimed Claire's life in 2008. The car accident left her with a broken neck, hip, leg and arm. She was hospitalized for five months and spent three months in rehabilitation.

"Literally, after having some of the most crushing things happen to me, I really understand how crucial it is to have proper equipment to recover, and encouragement for others is key," Claire said.

In answer to her question, Mike proposed a project to the Bedford Lions Club, in which they are both active members.

He suggested they collect crutches the same they do eye glasses and hearing aids and find some way to get them to Haiti. The Lions' Board of Directors agreed, and the project was off the ground.

The Lions Club International Foundation already had a program in place to help the Haitians rebuild living areas and provide medical treatment. The Bedford Lions contacted the Puerto Rican and Haitian Lions Clubs who were working directly with the Haitian people and confirmed the urgent need for crutches and walkers.

Earnie Henrichon, president of the Bedford Lions Club said the club is in need of the following items: crutches, folding walkers, folding wheelchairs, canes, various boots and walking casts, and other



Angela Hughes Photo

Bedford Lions Club members Mike and Claire Sills examine a variety of medical devices they are collecting for Haiti.

orthopedic devices.

The items can be used, but need to be clean and serviceable.

The Lions Club is also looking for venues where people can drop off the needed goods in the area.

"It seems like a waste to have a pair of crutches sitting in someone's closet when another in need can be using the item," Claire said.

The Lions Club also is hoping to network with people who might be able to provide methods of transporting and can help with the prepackaging of various devices to Haiti.

"We are beginning to get about a hundred devices a month and hope to be at several hundred by the end of May," Mike said. "The main reason we can supply so many to those in need is the fact that the devices are already manufactured and we have minimum red tape in dealing between the various Lions Clubs involved from Bedford to Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

"It's become a dream project for our Lions Club and for nonprofit organizations everywhere," Mike said.

Fliers and newspaper ads have been placed, nonprofit

medical groups in Haiti have been contacted and storage areas have been prepared, he said.

Bedford now has a working relationship with other nonprofits making a difference, such as Real Medicine from Los Angeles, Calif., and Friends in Health, which is another Lions Club group in Gardner, Mass.

"My wife's simple question highlighted the need for crutches for injuries and raised serious question of rehabilitation," Mike said. "We weren't sure what the response would be, but it has been incredible for each of the devices."

Pinard Waste Inc. provided a big boost to the program by donating a 4-cubic-yard covered recycling container for use at the town Transfer Station on Chubbick Road and two large totes for donations at public events.

"I was a little overwhelmed by the support around me wishing me well and literally rescuing me. I received support from so many people, you feel so much better when you are trying to overcome something and you have network support," Claire said. "I know the feeling of desperation these people must be feeling. These people, I am sure, are feeling very desperate."

Claire said many people have donated money in the past to Haitian projects, but people still want to contribute.

"People are living in the streets in Haiti, so anyway we can help will make a difference," Claire said.

The first shipment is scheduled for May 15.

For more information or to make a donation, send an e-mail to sillsnh2@comcast.net.