

# Lending Haiti healing hands

By **MICHELLE WILLARD**  
Post Content Editor

Before a 7.0-magnitude earthquake hit the nation of Haiti on Jan. 12, a few Murfreesboro natives chose to spend their free time there giving out free medical care.

Dr. Elliott Tenpenny, a 2001 Riverdale graduate, has been traveling down to the Caribbean nation since 2008 with Aid for Haiti, a Middle Tennessee-based medical mission charity.

"Never before in my travels have I seen a people that are more poor, without even basic needs like food, but more hopeful, in my life," Tenpenny said. "Haiti is a country that scrapes by with rice and beans, just basic subsistence living."

And the situation has gotten much worse since the earthquake rocked the island nation.

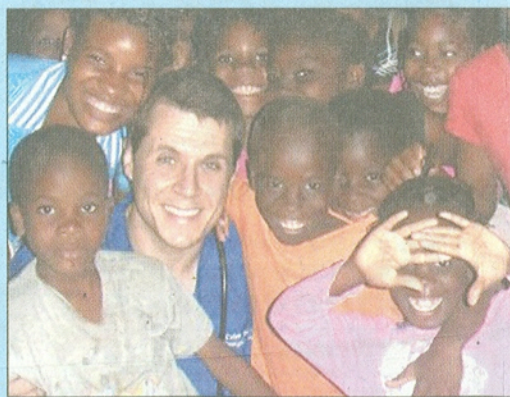
The devastating quake has left an estimated 200,000 dead and more than 1 million homeless with nearly 800,000 people living in makeshift camps.

As most of the aid and international focus has been on its capital of Port-Au-Prince, Tenpenny's colleagues have taken to the back roads and set up a medical clinic at Petit-Goave, near the epicenter of the quake.

Tenpenny and his fellow University of Tennessee College of Medicine alumni, Manchester's Philip Sutherland and 'Boro native Caleb Trent, originally formed Aid for Haiti in 2008.

While med students, the three initially decided to visit Haiti to research iodine deficiency in the mountains of southern Haiti.

The three doctors traveled by truck, mule and foot to reach a remote village, where no for-



**Dr. Caleb Trent tells a patient how to use her medication, top, and poses with a group of youngsters at Petit-Goave, a town of 50,000 that was near the center of the 7.0-magnitude quake.**



eign doctors had been before, and uncovered an epidemic of iodine deficiency.

"This has been the most important thing that I have been

involved in while in medical school," Tenpenny said.

Since their initial trip, the doctors have visited remote villages throughout the island nation.

Their desire to reach the unreachable led a team of six from Aid for Haiti to Petit-Goave, a town of roughly 50,000 near the epicenter of the earthquake.

Until the medical team arrived, almost no aid had made its way from the capital to the demolished town.

Since the city's hospital was

badly damaged by the earthquake, the team set up in the home base of the National Wesleyan Mission, which had been converted into a field hospital by U.S. Marines and a small contingent of doctors.

After Aid for Haiti arrived, Trent became the only doctor in a city of thousands. Working overnight with only a few hours sleep, the doctor delivered babies, treated asthma attacks and "a never ending line of new trauma sustained during the earthquake," he said.

"God has blessed us though, it seems that every time we turn around there is a new critical patient with a problem out of our scope," he said. "But, we seem to have just the right medicine at just the right time. You can tell God is doing a wonderful thing here."

The Aid for Haiti team is also doing a wonderful thing by treating around 300 patients daily with help from local nurses who have lost everything and the international aid organization Samaritan's Purse who can transport the most critical patients to hospitals.

The team has even enlisted the help of local churches to help the Marines distribute food to communities surrounding the town.

Most of these areas have not yet received anything since the earthquake, Trent explained.

Since food distribution has been scarce since the earthquake, prices have skyrocketed to more than double, meaning distributing aid is critical in these impoverished communities.

But the group ran into trouble earlier this week when the town's mayor confiscated the tents it was using as a makeshift hospital.

Later in the day the area's U.S. Marine commander called the

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medical team to his office, and they nervously made their way there.

"The Marine detail had just given us these tents to us at the hospital, and we had allowed a corrupt government official to march in and take them," Trent said.

But to their surprise the officer offered more help and supplied men and goods to build a

permanent building.

Within a day, the marines had built a clinic, complete with private exam rooms, adjacent inpatient space, and pavilions for patients waiting. It even has running water.

"With this major blessing, we have been given a place to directly care for this city and the surrounding areas throughout the next few months of earthquake relief and years to come,"

Aid for Haiti's blog said.

In the coming weeks, Trent has convinced some of his colleagues from Washington University in St. Louis to help. Tenpenny will also spend time in Petit-Goave.

"It will be a real amazing thing," Tenpenny said.

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