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Joyful welcome for group returning from Haiti

KAREN BOUFFARD
The Detroit News

Romulus -- Eight Michigan and Ohio residents returned to Detroit Metro Airport on Saturday afternoon following a harrowing weeklong mission trip to Haiti, where tens of thousands have died and countless remain injured following Tuesday's earthquake.

"We're pretty relieved, but we were a little torn up to leave," said Terri Irelan Vrugink, 39, of Grand Rapids, who was part of a 17-member mission with the Findlay, Ohio-based Mission Possible, which runs six schools in Haiti and provides family education and medical services there. One of the mission's schools was demolished in the 7.0-magnitude quake.

"The people of Haiti were already needy, and now they're desperate," said Vrugink, who posted updates on her Facebook page to let friends and family at home know she was all right. "It was very hard to leave."

The group received a jubilant welcome from friends and relatives -- including Ron Rook, of Bloomdale, Ohio, whose wife, Nancy Rook, was among the missionaries. The Rooks' three children, Josiah, 9, Olivia, 5, and Rebecca, 8, leapt into their mother's arms when they saw her.

"I knew God was in control of it, and there was nothing I could do in Bloomdale, but I was certainly thankful she was OK," Ron Rook said. "It was a burden lifted."

Josiah said he saw the pictures on TV of the horrendous destruction. The Red Cross estimates 45,000 to 50,000 people were killed. While workers are burying some in mass graves, countless bodies remain unclaimed in the streets and the limbs of the dead protrude from crushed schools and homes.

"After I heard she was OK, it kind of got better," Josiah said. "I thought it was pretty sad how all those Haitian people lost their lives."

The group was safe throughout the entire ordeal. They were staying in the city of St. Mark, about 60 miles away from the quake's epicenter near Port-au-Prince. They felt the earth rumble during the quake and aftershocks. And injured people began to arrive in St. Mark to seek medical help in that city's hospital.

"Thursday afternoon, I sat down for lunch and burst into tears because I had food," said Vrugink, a photographer who joined the mission to document the work being done by Mission Possible in Haiti. "I felt so guilty for leaving."

Cindy Knape, 54, a nurse from Grand Rapids, said she didn't tell her mother she was going on the trip because she didn't want to worry the elderly woman. She planned to share the news of her trip -- and her experience in the aftermath of the disaster -- when she got back to Grand Rapids.

"I just see the need for continued blessing on the people of Haiti," Knape said.

Cynthia Derks, 46, said her parents are on a cruise, so she won't be able to see them immediately, but her prayer group in Grand Rapids is anxiously awaiting her return.

"Forty women have been praying for me this whole trip."

Many of the missionaries said they want to return to Haiti. Mission Possible, which does 15 to 20 missions trips per year with volunteers from the United States and Canada, is trying to arrange a flight for a medical team already assembled to return to Haiti.

"Getting flights into Port-au-Prince is difficult right now," said Mission Possible President Curt Bishop, 40, who arrived at Detroit Metro to pick up his wife, Julie Bishop, who led the team in Haiti. "We have a team we're trying to get in tomorrow."

Another Mission Possible team, which includes five from Michigan, remains in neighboring Dominican Republic, where they are assisting with injured Haitians who have streamed into that country seeking medical care.

"The people are leaving Haiti to find hospitals, but the hospitals don't provide food, water, soap, towels or sheets," Julie Bishop said. "So our mission is providing that to all of these people."

Additional Facts

To Help

- Mission Possible is a faith-based nonprofit 501c-3 organization based in Findlay, Ohio.
- Visit www.ourmissionispossible.org, phone toll free (800) 621-9731 or write P.O. Box 1026 Findlay, OH 45839-1026

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Christian missionaries with "Mission Possible" arrived Saturday at Detroit Metropolitan Airport from Haiti, fleeing the country hit by a massive earthquake. (John T. Greilick /The Detroit News)



Julie Bishop of Mission Possible and her husband Kurt Bishop, president of Mission Possible but was not on the trip to Haiti, greet other group members at the airport. (John T. Greilick /The Detroit News)



Mission Possible team leader Julie Bishop, left, of Finley, Ohio arrives at Detroit Metro with group members Cynthia Derks, center, and Terri Vrugnik, both of Grand Rapids. (John T. Greilick /The Detroit News)



Rebecca Rook, 8, jumps into the arms of her mother Nancy Rook, of Bloomdale, Ohio when they reunite after Nancy Rook's return from Haiti. (John T. Greilick /The Detroit News)