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## **Durham rescue volunteers go global and head to Haiti**

*by Tracey Coveart/The Scugog Standard*

A year after a devastating and deadly earthquake and in the throes of a cholera outbreak that has killed tens of thousands of people, Haiti may not be in the media spotlight but it has not been forgotten here in North Durham. Members of the newly formed CANISAR - Canadian International Search and Rescue branch of OVERT (Ontario Volunteer Emergency Response Team) are getting ready to make their first official deployment to the tiny Caribbean nation.

"The need is incredible," said OVERT coordinator Glen Turpin, who will join the team that hopes to leave the last week of January to bring water purification technology and paramedic relief to a medical clinic and an orphanage in the town of St. Marc, the epicentre of the cholera outbreak. "The water is still contaminated and the clinics are overwhelmed."

Thirty to 40 of OVERT's 100 volunteer members have received special CANISAR training and five of those - including two paramedics and specialty technicians who have been trained in water purification - will be going to Haiti for at least a week to work alongside doctors and to train clinic and orphanage staff on how to use the water purification units the team will be bringing.

"Each unit costs about \$1,500," said Glen, "and we're hoping to bring at least one for the clinic and one for the orphanage. It all depends on how much money we can raise for the mission."

The team will also be taking a supply of aqua tabs - \$2,500 for a box of 50,000. One tab will purify one litre of water.

"Right now, they're drinking whatever they can get their hands on," said Glen, "but the lake, which is their main water source, is feared contaminated."

The CANISAR members will also be taking a supply of antibiotics and as much medical equipment as they can afford - IV bags and tubing and syringes for administering anticholeric drugs.

The goal of the mission, said Glen, is to take pressure off the existing water systems. "Systems that are in place are overwhelmed. We're hoping to provide an interim source of water until they get their supply stabilized."

Throughout Haiti, there are close to a million children living in orphanages and parents who can't provide for their kids are dropping more children off every day. In St. Marc, the orphanage is caring for several hundred abandoned or orphaned kids.

The medical clinic is treating several hundred outpatients a day in addition to providing care for those in treatment and chronic care patients.

People who have contracted cholera have to be admitted for IV antibiotic treatment, said Glen.

"You have to beat the cholera and then you can release them."

The severity of the disease - and the course of treatment - depends on how long the person has been infected.

"If you catch it early you can treat it quickly, but it's amazing how fast it affects people."

Just as amazing is the resilience of the Haitian people, said Glen a founding member of OVERT (1992) who was on the ground in Haiti

after Hurricane Gustav struck the island in 2008.

"They will do whatever they have to do to survive," he said recalling a dish the Haitians call 'The.'

"They mix dirt with a little bit of flour and make it into a cookie. Then they sun-bake the cookie and eat it. What little minerals are in the soil fills their bellies and takes off some of the growl."

The CANISAR team will take with them as much in the way of medical supplies and water purification equipment as they can afford to purchase.

"A lot of the money and supplies that have been donated to Haiti haven't made it to the people," said Glen. "If you ship anything, it sits for seven months on the docks. We are carrying everything with us. We are literally taking our gear and our money right to the spot - it's not going into an ambiguous coffer."

And the more money the group can raise, the more they can take and put to immediate good use.

They team is flying by commercial airline and "we'd love to have our flights donated. The less it costs us to get there the more equipment we can buy."

The CANISAR team has a few thousand dollars put aside for the mission, "from a hodge podge of donations, but we're hoping to raise enough money at a special event on Jan. 7 to go. This is our first real kick at fundraising."

'One Night for Haiti,' is the first monthly bar night OVERT has planned to raise money for its ongoing search and rescue and disaster relief efforts around the globe.

Each month, "we are going to host a night of entertainment, great company and fun to support our brothers and sisters in less fortunate parts of the world," said Glen.

Musical guests this month, fantastic local band 'Two for the Show' have donated their appearance and the owner of Heat Nightclub (129 Brock St. N., Whitby) is donating the venue and all the proceeds from the bar. There are no tickets for the event, which starts at 10 p.m. this Friday, but a minimum \$10 donation is required at the door. And 100 per cent of the proceeds will go towards the Haiti mission.

CANISAR has been in development for the past year, but OVERT, a registered charity (#8928 78560 RR0001) has been around, flying under the radar, for more than 15 years. A unique concept in community based emergency response, OVERT provides timely assistance during major incidents such as abductions, missing persons, natural disasters and other community emergencies. OVERT's ability to adapt to different situations with a team of highly skilled and trained community volunteers provides its partners - primary response agencies (police, fire, EMS) - with a valuable resource without adding logistic or financial burden.

"We've been there for all the major child abduction cases, assisting police and providing closure to families," said Glen, "and we provide local emergency management teams with disaster relief. We're a second tier response, augmenting frontline emergency services and we're a unique agency in this country.

With CANISAR, OVERT's worldwide response team, "our main mission will be emergency response overseas, with an emphasis on search and rescue. Our members include technical rescue personnel and paramedics, and we have eight K9 S&R teams that are specially trained in collapsed structure searches.

"CANISAR teams will be on the ground around the world," said Glen. "Whenever there is a disaster, we'll be ready to go."

And the team plans to provide ongoing support to "high probability areas - critical parts of the world that tend to get hit a lot" - such as Haiti.

"It won't be a one-off thing," said Glen. "In Haiti, we'll be sending

replacement filters for their water purification units and we will get paramedics down there again to help out.”

Between training and deployment, OVERT members, both men and women, dedicate 12,000 person hours each year to help others in their time of need, in the local community and now, through CANISAR, they will reach their helping hands around the world.

If you would like to make a donation to OVERT, cheques and money orders can be mailed to PO Box 54062, 8 King St. E., Oshawa, Ontario L1H 1A9. Donations can be made on-line at [www.overt.ca](http://www.overt.ca) ('Make a donation') through [canadahelps.org](http://canadahelps.org) and donors can designate funds for either OVERT or CANISAR. If you would like to make a donation to the Haiti mission, come to Heat Nightclub this Friday, Jan. 7, or contact Glen Turpin at [turp.g@sympatico.ca](mailto:turp.g@sympatico.ca). Cash donations can also be made at The Standard Newspapers at 94A Water St., Port Perry.

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