



# CALTRANS NEWS

August 2011

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## News

### Caltrans Employees and Cal Poly Students Help Rebuild Haitian Earthquake Victim's Home

By Rene T Garcia, Caltrans Homeland Security Branch Chief

*Editor's note: The March 2010 issue of CT News featured the story, "[Caltrans Employees Step up to Help Rebuild Haiti](#)." The story discussed the January 2010 earthquake that struck Haiti and how Caltrans employees volunteered their expertise to help rebuild the country. In July 2010, CT News featured a second story, "[Caltrans Employees Help Create Nonprofit Organization](#)." That story explained how Caltrans employees helped form Haiti Engineering, Inc., and their 2010 trip to Haiti to assess the earthquake's damage. This is a follow-up story about Haiti Engineering's continued work to help rebuild Haiti.*

In June, Caltrans Office of Emergency Management Chief Herby Lissade and I took vacation time to spend about a week in Haiti to help with the island nation's recovery efforts following the devastation of the January 2010 earthquake that struck the tiny country.

After the earthquake, Haitian-born Herby and fellow Caltrans employees from across the state formed [Haiti Engineering, Inc.](#), a nonprofit architecture and engineering design group. Haiti Engineering provides professional predisaster planning and postdisaster recovery engineering assistance to Haiti's earthquake victims.

Haiti Engineering volunteers first visited Haiti in March 2010 to assess the earthquake's damage. This year, we went to repair the home of Carole Oscar who lives in the small town of Leogane, which was the epicenter of the earthquake. It is estimated that about one-third of Leogane's population perished in the quake, and about 80 percent of the housing infrastructure was destroyed.

During Haiti Engineering's 2010 visit, Herby promised Carole that if she did not receive help from anyone in the next year, he would return to Haiti and repair her home. Herby kept his promise, and with the help of others, he returned and called this venture the "Carole Project."

Haiti Engineering volunteers wanted to reconstruct Carole's home with the proper engineering principles to withstand future earthquakes and hurricanes, which included reinforced masonry and proper concrete mix designs.



**Herby Lissade sits along Kaliko Beach with Carole Oscar. Carole has lived in Haiti her entire life and had never enjoyed Kaliko Beach or the beaches at Jacmel.**

Carole's modest home consists of two 10-foot-by-10-foot rooms. There are no closets or restrooms. One room is hers, and the other room is for other members of her family. Before the earthquake, the home consisted of four 10-foot-by-10-foot rooms. The other family members demolished two of the connected rooms, because a nongovernmental organization promised to give them a home to place on the cleared lot—but that organization never came through. Carole remembered Herby's promise and did not let them destroy her portion. So the funding Haiti Engineering had available went to repairing Carole's portion, including a new roof and paint. Unfortunately, funds were not available to build new homes for the other family members.



**Rene Garcia poses with two young children at the Carole Project.**

Haiti Engineering members escorted a group of nine California Polytechnic State University structural engineering students and

their alumni mentor Ken O'Dell, who is vice-president at MHP Structural Engineers. These students, who are either recent graduates or in their senior year, united to form Structural Engineering Students for Haiti (SESH). They are in the process of getting university recognition, which will allow the students to receive classroom credit for practical engineering done in the real world during subsequent trips to Haiti.



**SESH students proudly display their banner at the Carole Project.**

Former Caltrans Director Randy Iwasaki, who is also a special advisor to Haiti Engineering, referred the students to the organization because he knew they would get a rewarding, yet safe, experience. Since the students' trip was not funded or sponsored by the university, they raised money to cover the trip's costs. They also raised money to help cover the cost to repair Carole's home.

Although he wasn't able to make the trip, District 5 Deputy District Director of Maintenance and Operations Steve Price, who is also a Haiti Engineering volunteer, met with the students and spent time preparing them for their journey.

Once in Haiti, the students put their engineering skills to work by designing Carole's home, with better engineering standards than those used prior to the earthquake, and by working hand-in-hand with the local contractor. Despite their language barrier, they were able to show and explain to the contractor the reasons for their design and why it will make a difference in the future.



**Ken O'Dell, mentor to the university engineering students, draws plans on the wall and discusses them with the local contractor.**

This trip also allowed everyone to experience firsthand the devastation and suffering that occurred. And, they got to see the conditions people are living in while the country tries to rebuild itself. Much work still remains, as destroyed buildings and tent cities can be found in every direction.

Haiti was once one of the top tropical tourist destinations, and we were able to enjoy some of the island's beautiful areas as we visited the town of Jacmel and its sandy beaches. We also visited Kaliko Beach, where we stayed in the beautiful home of Herby's uncle and enjoyed his private beach.



**From left to right: SESH students Rae Arizabal and Kim Bowen pose with Nuncio Auza, Isiah Lissade, Herby Lissade, and Herby Lissade II. Pope Benedict XVI appointed Nuncio Auza to restore the Haitian churches, schools, and seminaries that were destroyed by the earthquake. Haiti Engineering volunteers and Nuncio Auza discussed the importance of the St. Rose de Lima Church to the citizens of Leogane, and the**

### historical importance of the parish.

Leogane is also home to one of the oldest Catholic parishes in the new world, the Saint Rose de Lima Parish, which was founded by Christopher Columbus. Sadly, it was completely destroyed during the earthquake. This year, St. Rose de Lima Church will celebrate its 501st anniversary. The Church is a high priority to rebuild, because it's not only a place of worship, but it also serves as a shelter for the community. Haiti Engineering and MHP Structural Engineers will provide technical assistance to Father Marat of Saint Rose De Lima in redesigning this iconic church.



**Father Marat (middle), with the help of Cal Poly student Jose Chig (right) as translator, speaks to the students in Spanish about rebuilding the iconic St. Rose De Lima church. It is one of the oldest Catholic churches in the new world. Jean Normile (left) is the primary real estate agent in the town of Leogane.**

The initial cost to repair Carole's house came from Caltrans employees' generous donations. Herby's mother, who was born in Leogane, provided most of the food for the students' trip. It was her way of thanking them for helping the people in her hometown. Because we saved money on food and lodging, we were able to apply the savings to the new roof and end wall at Carole's home. This also allowed us to hire about a half-dozen people for a week and pay them each about \$50. While \$50 doesn't sound like a lot in America, in Haiti, it can feed a family for up to a month or two.

The Haiti Engineering team includes professionals in engineering, architecture, planning, geographic information systems, and other areas of Caltrans. The Caltrans employees who volunteer time and talent to help this cause are scattered throughout the state.

Haiti Engineering's efforts not only benefit the people of Haiti, but they also help the people of California. Each time Caltrans employees volunteer their time to go to Haiti, they learn valuable lessons that they can apply to emergency management in California.

The entire trip was funded by the Cal Poly students, who also reached out to industry donors, and the Caltrans employees who donated their time and money. Haiti Engineering would like to thank the following Caltrans employees who made a donation to

help the Carole Project:

Ferdinand De La Cruz, District 8  
Rene Garcia, Headquarters  
Daniel Irvine, Headquarters  
Herby Lissade, Headquarters  
Alvin Mangindin, District 10  
Ray Patron, Headquarters  
Steve Price, District 5  
Anton Schmieder, District 8  
William Yeung, District 11

To learn more about Haiti Engineering, you can visit the [Haiti Engineering website](#).

Do you want to help Haiti Engineering achieve its mission? Haiti Engineering is an Internal Revenue Service-recognized nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, which means you can designate a monthly paycheck deduction to help support the organization's mission through the [California State Employees Charitable Campaign](#).



**The Capitol building in Port Au Prince suffered great damage and work has not yet begun to rebuild.**

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