



Local humanitarian receives YMCA Peace Medal for helping Haiti

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BY HOLLIE PRATT-CAMPBELL

EMC News - For two-and-a-half years now, Tammy Babcock has worked tirelessly to improve the quality of life for people living in one of the poorest, most dangerous regions of Haiti.

In 2008, she founded the organization Help Tammy Help Haiti, and has since returned to the impoverished country every two months to treat those suffering from conditions such as scabies and tape worm, and oversee development projects like the construction of a water tower and a self-contained medical clinic.

Last Thursday, Babcock was awarded the YMCA Peace Medal for her work. The award is bestowed annually upon an individual or group who, without any special resources, demonstrates a commitment to peace by making charitable contributions either within their own community or overseas.

The medal presentation was part of Peace Week, which is celebrated each year on the third week of November at YMCAs and YWCAs across Canada. The purpose of the event is to inspire community members to become actively engaged in peace-promoting activities.

"I'm just so happy to be able to speak at an event like this, and bring more awareness about the dire need in Haiti," said Babcock. "This is where the public eye needs to stay for a while. Our attention needs to be on making a plan and helping Haiti out of the extreme rut they've found themselves in."

Kingston Family YMCA Communications and Marketing Co-ordinator, Trevor Cornelius, nominated Babcock for the award. Though he had never met her personally prior to the ceremony, Cornelius was inspired by Babcock's work when he saw her receive an honorary diploma from St. Lawrence College.

"I became interested in what Tammy was doing, and started reading some of the articles written about her and looking up information on her website," he explained. "I was really inspired by what she was doing and thought she was a suitable candidate."

Tammy was chosen from a number of other candidates by the YMCA Board of Directors.

"It wasn't a simple decision," says International Committee Chair Thornley Stoker. "There were several people who were very, very deserving but we had to pick one."

Stoker said that it was Babcock's compassion that made her stand out.

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*Hollie Pratt-Campbell,
Kingston EMC*
Help Tammy Help Haiti's
Tammy Babcock with her
YMCA Peace Medal.

"The breadth of the project Tammy's been working on and how it affects children and families and communities is what was important to us," he added.

Babcock first heard about the devastating poverty in Haiti from a firefighter acquaintance after she returned from helping to rebuild in South East Asia following the tsunami.

Several timely twists of fate let her to meet a Haitian man named Robinson, who was trying to bring some relief to the people of Cite Soleil, one of Haiti's most poverty-stricken regions. The two joined forces, and the non-profit organization Help Tammy Help Haiti was formed.

Together, Babcock and Robinson co-ordinated the building of a water tower in Cite Soleil. Their latest project, a medical clinic, is expected to be completed in January.

Babcock said that it is Robinson who inspires her to remain strong and keep working in the face of the dangers she and the organization's director, Cari Wolsey, face when in Haiti. Among other things, the two have been robbed at gun-point, and have narrowly escaped being kidnapped.

"Robinson is my brother, my hero," she said. "Having him at my side with that smile and that encouragement keeps me strong (whenever I'm feeling afraid). We face a lot together and are there to lean on each other."

Wilda Babcock, Tammy's mother, said that though it is extremely difficult to think of her daughter in such a dangerous area of the world, she is extremely proud of the work she is accomplishing.

"Tammy is doing something that the majority of people in the world cannot do, and I hand it to her for doing that," she said. "I've had some crashes, of course. It's a mother's instinct to worry about her children. I just (pray for her safety) every time she's there."

Babcock noted that the hard work has paid off in a big way in recent months, as the clean water supplied by the water tower has contributed to controlling the recent cholera outbreak Haiti.

She added, however, that Cite Soleil is still among the worst regions in the country for the disease:

"It's in the food as well, and people who are using other water towers are still at risk."

Babcock will be returning to Haiti in January to help provide treatment for those suffering from cholera and other conditions, and over-see the completion of the new medical clinic.

For more information about Help Tammy Help Haiti, please visit www.helptammyhelphaiti.com.



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