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MAKING AN IMPACT

Detroit-area engineers pitch in to aid developing nations

Volunteers build water line in Honduras

BY MARGARITA BAUZA • FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER • AUGUST 9, 2008

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As Michigan sank into an economic downturn, some young engineers directed their attention to problems farther away from home.



They worried that developing countries did not have access to clean drinking water, sound bridges and working septic systems.

In 2007, they started the Detroit chapter of Engineers Without Borders, a nonprofit humanitarian organization that has attracted more than 65

volunteers in the area to raise money and plan and execute sustainable engineering projects around the world.

Zach Keifer, 29, of Hazel Park, signed on. The environmental engineer for the NTH Consultants of Detroit, studied in Ecuador for a semester and said his time there inspired him to use his engineering skills for the greater good.

"Compared to what's going on in Michigan day to day, it makes it look like nothing's happening here," he said. "There are people out there who spend eight hours a day just getting water."



STEVE COOK/Engineers Without Borders

Engineers Without Borders members Michelle Zirngibl, left, Meghan Wahlstrom, Matt Simonini, Mary Warren and Nate Dennis dig a trench to bury a water line under a road in Las Glorias, Honduras.



MICHELLE ZIRNGIBL/Special to the Free Press

Volunteers build a water tank in Las Glorias, Honduras. Projects are funded by company sponsorships, grants and fund-raisers.

The chapter is an offshoot of a Colorado-based organization founded in 2000 by a Boulder, Colo., professor who led students who assembled a pump in a village in Belize.

That was the beginning of Engineers Without Borders USA, similar to Doctors Without Borders, which deploys medical personnel around the world.

Detroit's chapter is wrapping up its first project in Honduras, a \$20,000 1.7-mile water distribution line in Las Glorias. The group is also raising money for its next project. Possibilities for projects include a medical facility in the Dominican Republic or several projects in Honduras, including building two bridges that were destroyed during Hurricane Mitch in 1998.

Scott Powell, 34, an environmental engineer with Soil and Materials Engineers Inc. in Shelby Township, says he joined because he wanted his work to have more of an impact on the world.

He participates by translating documents from English to Spanish, raising money for projects and reviewing plans for current and future projects.

Projects are funded by company sponsorships, grants and fund-raisers, such as a 5K walk/run this weekend.

Mary Warren, 26, vice president of the Detroit chapter of Engineers Without Borders and an engineer at GZA GeoEnvironmental Inc. in Livonia, said she was involved in her student chapter at Michigan Tech and continued her involvement in Detroit.

"Once you get involved it kind of grows on you," Warren said. "I just like working with people and learning about other cultures. I like building things that directly impact people."

Contact **MARGARITA BAUZA** at 313-222-6823 or mbauza@freepress.com.

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MICHELLE ZIRNGIBL/Special to the Free Press

The completed water tank. Detroit's chapter is wrapping up its first project in Honduras, a \$20,000 1.7-mile water distribution line.

RUNNING FOR WATER

Engineers Without Borders' Detroit chapter will hold the fund-raising Running For Water 5-kilometer run at 8 a.m. Sunday starting at 203 Mt. Elliott in Detroit.

Registration is 7 a.m. to 7:45 a.m.

Register with \$30 check or money order made payable to Engineers Without Borders. Cash is not accepted.

For more information, visit www.ewb-detroit.org/index_files/Page454.htm Or e-mail Amelia Letvin at ailletvin@yahoo.com.

For more information and to donate to Engineers Without Borders, go to www.ewb-usa.org

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