

**Spotlight on Volunteer**

*By Marnie Hughes, Communication Artistry*



**Bona Lea Allard – Ricon Consulting**

**B**ona Lea Allard has volunteered with the Chamber since becoming a member in 2003. Her volunteer efforts began with the membership committee and she soon found her niche with the Women in Business Committee. Bona Lea eventually became chair of that committee and has just recently completed her one year term.

Bona Lea's volunteer efforts extend beyond the Chamber to include working with her children's school council and participating in field trips. Bona Lea has also worked closely with the yearbook committee in a technical capacity to assist in the creation of a beautifully designed yearbook. The Brampton Teachers Curling League has benefited from Bona Lea's website development skills as she has helped set them up and continues to maintain their Internet presence. She has also worked on the annual bonspiel committee, the ladies golf day committee and has participated in strategic planning with the Board of Directors at the Brampton Curling Club.

Bona Lea has lent her business and leadership skills to other corporate ventures such as the local BNI (Business Network International) Chapter, as their education coordinator. In this capacity, she was responsible for a weekly 2-5 minute presentation to train the other business members

about the BNI program and how to improve their networking skills.

When asked why she volunteers, Bona Lea replies, "I get to help people and I also have the opportunity to do things I wouldn't ordinarily have been able to do." She also says that there is great satisfaction in helping someone move in the right direction by teaching them something. While there are several benefits to volunteering that help others, it has been beneficial to her business as well. The networking opportunities that have presented themselves as Bona Lea has volunteered have proven to strengthen her business. "Sometimes we forget how important networking can be. You never know who you'll meet."

**Lessons of a volunteer in Haiti**

**G**iving, in whatever form – money, time, energy, goods and services – often has payback. The payback may be a tax deduction, opportunity, recognition or good feelings. Recently I discovered an unexpected benefit of generosity – learning. When the experience is bigger than you are, the learning curve is steep and the personal payback is huge.

It's my third mission volunteering in Haiti with Team Canada Healing Hands, part of Healing Hands for Haiti Foundation, an international NGO specializing in rehabilitation medicine and training programs. I'm at an orphanage for disabled, abandoned children on the edge of the capital, Port au Prince. Haiti is only five and a half hours from my house, an hour and a half off the coasts of Miami or Cuba. It shares the island with the Dominican Republic. Haiti is number 146 of 177 countries on the 2006 UN Human Development Index, while Canada is # 4.

The woman in front of me is patiently feeding beautiful two and a half year-old Martine, who has no feet but is otherwise normal and very happy running around in her new prosthetic boots. Around her are twenty or more other children, also clean, dressed, fed, and looked after, rescued from the city's General Hospital, all abandoned by overwhelmed parents for whom their child's physical or mental disability is too big a burden and a taboo.

A few nights ago this childcare worker was raped by bandits who invaded the small one storey, cement block house at night. She worked the next day; today, nothing about her complains although her pain must be immense.

The woman sitting beside me is a retired New York City school bus driver, Madame Blaise, founder of the orphanage. She is using her pension to help these kids in her homeland who have no guardians or advocates. She despairs that her other helpers were abused and may not return to work and that everything of value was stolen. We spend a day helping them clean up, take stock, look after the children and provide the medical assessments and care we came to deliver.

At the end of the day Madame Blaise shows us a "miracle." Proudly she takes us to town for



**Martine, at Home for Handicapped Children, Port au Prince, Haiti, November 2007.**

a tour of the orphanage's future home, a recent donation. It's a large, modern, secure building in a better district and it will properly house three times the number of children. Her mother's helpers will be safe there. Now she is smiling, not for the money we collected for a new generator, but for a future that looks better than today.

Back home, these lessons occur to me. Some people, like these three - a baby girl, a woman and an older lady - are tough, resilient, and can experience some small happiness with what they have, rather than just misery with the rest of it. Many of the things we know how to do, as individuals or as organizations, can be of value in helping others, not just in sustaining ourselves in our lives or businesses. The gulf between those able to give and those in need is growing like the gaping hole in the ozone layer above our global village. It's dangerous.

And, as employees, businesses, and families, as individuals or communities, there is opportunity in giving, some of it bigger than a tax receipt - and learning is one the most unexpected.

\* <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>

*Eric Doubt  
President, Communication Associates  
eric@commassoc.ca  
www.commassoc.ca  
Member, Board of Directors  
Healing Hands for Haiti Foundation  
www.healinghandsforhaiti.org*

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