

COMMUNITY

Helping Haiti heal

Local church group spends emotional week at country's Mission of Hope

By Christina Comisso
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Working on a construction site in the devastated Port-au-Prince,

Haiti, Mark Strickland found it hard to hold back tears.

"There would be a lot of Haitian workers, and a lot of children. Kids who are obviously hungry, some kids with no clothing on, right beside where you're wielding a pickaxe," the Miltonian described.

Thoughts of his own young son popped into his mind.

"One little boy didn't want to get out of my arms. He was three, the same age as my son. It was hard to hold back tears. I'd never want to leave my son roaming around a construction area."

Strickland — the youth pastor with Milton Bible Church — was one of 18 church members who recently spent a week in Haiti on a mission trip.

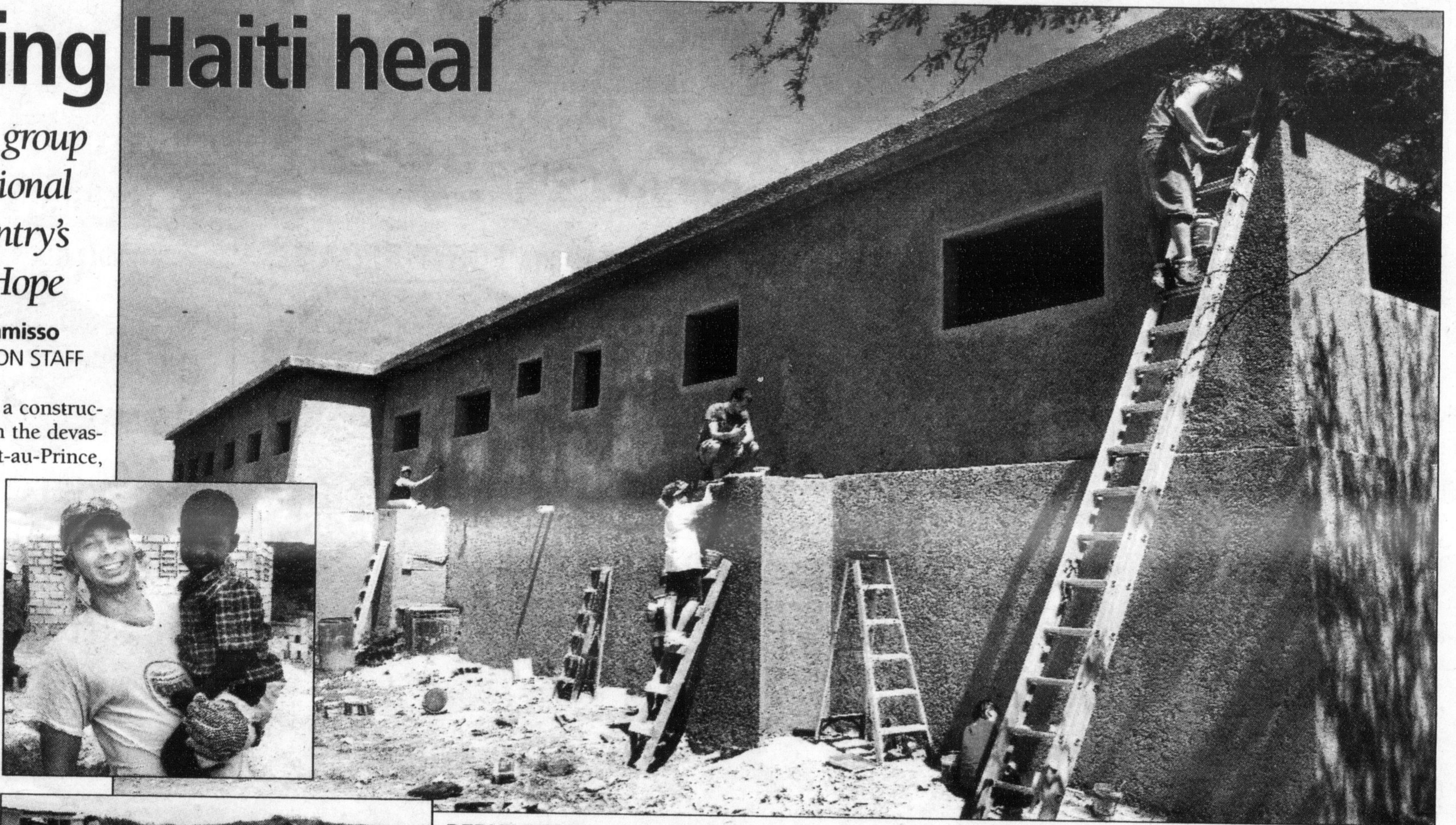
With more than 1,200 pounds of donated clothes, sports equipment and medical supplies in tow, the

Miltonians spent the last week of March at Haiti's Mission of Hope.

Their accommodations were far from what they're accustomed to — a two storey concrete dorm equipped with mosquito nets over the beds and rats scurrying around the floors.

The electricity at the mission would switch off from 6 a.m. to 6

REBUILDING: Above, members of Milton Bible Church help build a new hospital. Top left, Youth Pastor Mark Strickland holds a young Haitian boy. Bottom left, the church group takes a break from its mission work.



p.m. to conserve energy, making the living quarters extremely hot during the day.

However, Strickland said the accommodations were far nicer than the tent cities where an estimated 50,000 Haitians currently call home.

"There's an issue with people continuing to live in tents because it's free. It's hard to say, but it seems to me there hasn't been much progress other than the initial clean up," said Strickland. "The real hope lies in their educational and agricultural skills to learn how to feed themselves or figuring out how to

use foreign aid to invest for the long term, not just for the immediate term."

The Milton Bible Church team helped with the building of 500 permanent homes and a new hospital, while also working with the children in Mission of Hope's school and orphanage.

The team raised \$30,000 for the trip, \$10,000 of which was donated to the mission. Church members and several local businesses funded the trip.

Mission of Hope runs a school that educates 3,000 young Haitians,

a medical clinic that sees about 27,000 people a year and a food bank that distributes food to 1.5 million local residents.

Strickland said the impact they made on Haiti was minimal compared to the impact Haiti had on the Miltonians.

"There was a transformation in our lives. The people on our team are now life-long supporters of Haiti and we want to be able to one day go back down."

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