

Southwest resident Rich Ireland to speak on education for Haitians

By Erik Vidstrand
The Southwest Portland Post

A talk and slide show about the Education for Haiti project will be presented next month by long-time Southwest resident Rich Ireland.

The presentation is scheduled for Monday, May 5, from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. at the Oregon School of Massage located at 9500 SW Barbur Blvd #100. (Ireland is an instructor at the school.)

Admission is free and those attending are invited to bring their questions and curiosity.

"We see in the media many examples of the immense problems facing Haiti," Ireland said in a recent interview. "One of the problems is access to education."

According to statistics, less than 50 percent of children in Haiti graduate from the 6th grade.

"Less than 20 percent go to high school," Ireland continued, "and only about nine percent graduate

from high school."

So Ireland created a non-profit called Education for Haiti which addresses this need by working with families in the Haitian town of Aquin. It provides tuition through high school and beyond.

"Tuition?" the *Post* asked.

"Eighty-five percent of the schools in Haiti are private. Even the public schools cost money," Ireland replied.

This is a program that has been operating since 2001, when Ireland returned from the Peace Corps to Southwest Portland.

Over that time he and a handful of friends have donated money to six families to assist their children's access to school. These families represent 33 children.

The investment has had wonderful success. Five have graduated from high school and three of those are pursuing professions in nursing, law and engineering. The other two would like to start nursing school.

Seventeen are still attending school. Most of them want to go into a profession. There are two others who have established viable businesses.

Education for Haiti is working to continue the legacy of this work by providing support for those in school and those who wish to continue. Once they commit to a family, the commitment is to continue that support until the individuals have finished their education.

Economic development is essential for Haiti to address its needs. Teaching is one profession where educated Haitians can find work.

"Through supporting students



Rich Ireland (left) visits his one employee, Marlen Bontemps, who helps distribute tuition donations in Aquin, Haiti. (Photo courtesy of Rich Ireland)

we not only support their potential," Ireland said. "In a very real way we contribute to the economy of Aquin."

Ireland served in Haiti as a Peace Corps volunteer, not right out of college like many do. He was 52. He went from 1998-2001 and returned for a visit ten years later.

"It was the right time," he said. I had wanted to do this as a young man but never found the time for it."

"After working in the private world for many years it was time to get out doing some good," he reflected.

What he didn't know was that it would alter his life course and the lives of many Haitians for years to come, providing opportunities where there were none before.

Find out more about the non-profit at www.educationforhaiti.org.

Community forum on child sex trafficking to be held April 12

Little Sisters Foundation and First Unitarian Church will host a community forum on Portland's child sex trade on Saturday, April 12, from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. at the church sanctuary, 1211 SW Main Street.

US Attorney Amanda Marshall and Oregon Rep. Carolyn Tomei will open the event with briefings on this modern-day form of slavery.

Long a hidden crime in Portland, child sex trafficking was docu-

mented in a study commissioned by Marshall and carried out by researchers at Portland State University last year.

Almost 500 underage victims of sexual trafficking were referred to the Multnomah County Department of Human Services and the Sexual Assault Resource Center between 2009 and 2013, with a total of 159 active cases at the time of the study.

Over 96 percent were girls and the average age was just 15. African Americans accounted for more than 27 percent of victims though

they make up less than 6 percent of Multnomah County's population.

Local efforts to end child sex trafficking are broad-based and involve the Department of Justice, law enforcement agencies, social welfare services, NGOs and faith-based organizations.

The April 12 event will profile these efforts in a panel discussion and reception. The community and media are invited. More information may be available at www.firstunitarianportland.org.

— Don Snedecor

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