

YOUNG ACHIEVERS



Contact and donation info is available at [handsforhaiti.org](http://handsforhaiti.org). Mr. Dwight can be reached at 704-962-0020 or [ernestdwight@carolina.rr.com](mailto:ernestdwight@carolina.rr.com).

# YOUNG ACHIEVERS IN HAITI LED BY RETIRED CHARLOTTEANS

BY BCC NEIGHBOR ERNEST DWIGHT

Young scholars and achievers, no matter where they live, need one thing more than any other — opportunity! For those born into abject poverty in Haiti, opportunity is a rare gift, but when it comes along, it can drastically change lives. That is exactly what is happening now due to the involvement of a Charlotte-based charity and its leaders.

For two residents of Ballantyne Country Club, their passion is serving and supporting the impoverished children of Haiti. As board members of Hands for Haiti, Executive Director Steve Favory and Chairman Ernest Dwight are actively involved in supporting and operating St. Marc School, which is educating over 350 students in rural Northern Haiti.

Hands for Haiti is a Charlotte-based nonprofit founded in 2009 to start a small school in the countryside, about 10 miles south of Cap-Haitien, Haiti's second-largest city. At its founding, about 30 students in grades one and two attended class in a tin roof temporary facility. Each year, as the students aged up to the next level, the school added another grade and, periodically, permanent classrooms. By

2021, St. Marc School had expanded to pre-K through grade 13, the final year of secondary (high) school, and in 2022 its first students graduated. Plans are now underway to add a trade school with six classrooms, initially offering classes in sewing, but with future plans to expand to teaching trades such as masonry, agriculture, woodworking and welding.

All students and staff (approximately 50 Haitians as teachers, cooks, security and maintenance personnel) are served a hot lunch daily, which for many is their best (or only!) meal of the day. In a country where 80% of the population survives on less than \$3 per day, this meal is a lifesaver and helps ensure students' minds and bodies are equipped for learning. Sadly, Haiti is a country where one out of 16 children die before the age of 6, and less than 5% of the population lives to the age of 65, so improving health and nutrition is vital.

Hands for Haiti is run by an all-volunteer board of directors who typically visit the school at least once a year, paying for their own travel expenses. Additionally, this nonprofit organization operates with zero U.S.-based

overhead, meaning 100% of the personal and church-sponsored donations go directly to its operations in Haiti. All expenses associated with promotion, marketing, fundraising and banking are paid by board members, and as a result, Hands for Haiti has earned a Platinum Transparency rating from Guide Star/Candid, the charity rating organization.

In 2017, as St. Marc added secondary (high) school grades and needed better and more proven educational leadership, the board approached the Catholic Archdiocese of Cap-Haitien seeking candidate recommendations. In response, Fr. Leon Sejour, a native Haitian Catholic priest, was hired to bring not only administrative skills but also to teach Christian values and the Catholic faith so students who chose to could prepare to receive the sacraments. With virtually no public education system in Haiti, almost all schools are run by, or sponsored by, religious denominations. St. Marc is one of the few in the area offering an optional Catholic education, although Catholicism is the most predominant religion in the country.

At the time of its founding, when the school was small and operating costs were low, Hands for Haiti was blessed to have a half-dozen benefactors who contributed the bulk of its support. As a result, there was little need for promotion and fundraising. However, in recent years, as operating costs climbed to about \$200,000 a year, it became necessary to generate awareness, begin a marketing campaign and promote the existence of the Hands for Haiti organization. In the past few years, a new website was created; radio, TV and print media exposure were pursued; a quarterly newsletter was developed; and a social media campaign was launched. Given the organization's track record over the past 12 years, the tremendous impact it is having upon hundreds of students and their families and the high level of transparency Hands for Haiti provides potential donors, the hope is that fundraising will grow to meet the needs of the expanding school. What started over a decade ago as an opportunity for a few dozen children has, today, blossomed into an even bigger opportunity for hundreds of students and young adults. Finally, they have the rare chance to grow from young achievers to tomorrow's success stories in a country that desperately needs success!

Both Mr. Favory and Mr. Dwight are recently retired, having sold their respective businesses. Mr. Favory and his wife, Patty, have three adult children, all living in North Carolina. Mr. Dwight and his late wife, Vicky (both Charlotte natives), have four children in the Charlotte area, Maine and Germany, plus eight grandchildren. However, for all the Favory and Dwight family members, Ballantyne Country Club remains what they all consider "home"!

To recommend a young person to be featured, please submit to Delia at [clteditor@strollmag.com](mailto:clteditor@strollmag.com).



Hands for Haiti's Steve Favory (executive director) and Ernest Dwight (chairman)

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