

## Neil McNeil doing its part for Haiti



**Neil McNeil doing its part for Haiti.** Students attend class at the 1,700-student strong College St. Martial in Port-au-Prince, Haiti prior to the earthquake that hit the nation Jan. 12. The school is run by the Spiritan Fathers, which founded Neil McNeil Catholic High School in 1959. *Courtesy/SPIRITANS*  
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Students and teachers at Neil McNeil Catholic Secondary School were hit especially hard by the news that a 7.0 earthquake had devastated much of Haiti last month.

Founded in 1959 by the Spiritan Fathers, the all-boys high school at the south end of Victoria Park Avenue has a special connection to the impoverished island nation as the congregation runs College St. Martial, a 1,700-student strong school in the capital city of Port-au-Prince.

On the same site is the Spiritans' headquarters in Haiti as well as a seminary.

"When the news came out, almost immediately students and teachers met and began discussing what could be done (to help Haiti)," said Neil McNeil's vice-principal, Mike Fellin, adding his students can relate to the crisis because it affects youth their age.

"It's a great opportunity for the boys at the school to do a hands-on effort. It's a multi-year commitment from Neil McNeil."

Within just a few days of the Jan. 12 earthquake, Neil McNeil students raised \$2,400 by donning their street clothes for a day instead of wearing their uniforms and making a donation to Haiti.

Grade 10 student Nebyu Taddese is a member of the school's Young Spiritans, a social justice group that advocates for human rights and runs local fundraisers and awareness campaigns to help global causes. The 30-member club has taken the lead on coordinating the Haitian fundraising efforts at the school.

"It affects us as a school. We feel endeared more to help and to do more," said Nebyu, a junior representative on school council.

"A lot of the students took (the earthquake news) personally. A lot of the priests and students in Haiti were unaccounted for."

Father Paul McAuley, a Spiritan priest who serves as the bursar for the congregation's TransCanada arm, said he's tried reaching his Haitian brothers to no avail.

He reported he heard one seminarian died as a result of the disaster.

"It's still a day-by-day survival situation there," he said, adding he's encouraged by the generosity of Canadians who have approached the Spiritans with financial donations and offers of help.

McAuley, who works out of the congregation's Canada English headquarters near Neil McNeil Catholic High School, travelled to Haiti about two years ago. While there, he saw first-hand the inspiring things being done at College St. Martial.

"It was a really good place. I was very, very, very positive about College St. Martial," he said.

"It was a clean, well-kept school. The kids were just so eager to learn."

Over at Neil McNeil, Nebyu said last year a student travelled to Africa to work at a Spiritan mission and sold cookies to raise funds for the trip. The Young Spiritans plan on running a similar fundraiser to raise money for Haiti.

They're also calling on students and teachers to contribute what they can during the school's annual "Make a Dent in Lent", which kicks off early next week. The focus of this year's campaign is Haiti.

Members of the school community can also purchase a "Spiritans Symbol" for \$20 and in turn will get their name on a poster at the school to thank them for their contribution.

Nebyu said students at the school intend to help Haiti both in the short and long term.

He added a group of students, which he would love to be a part of, is hoping to travel to Haiti sometime in the 2010 to 2011 school year to help rebuild College St. Martial and other Spiritan-run projects.

The school, which welcomes students from kindergarten to Grade 12, was heavily damaged as a result of the quake.

The building that houses the Spiritans' headquarters also completely collapsed.

With no official fundraising goal, Nebyu said Neil McNeil's school community just wants to do as much as it can to help the people of Haiti.

"Everyone seems really passionate to help out. Students, parents and faculty have been very generous," he said.

Fellin also expressed his gratitude to several local elementary schools that have raised funds to help the Spiritan mission in Haiti, adding teachers at the school are also in the process of coming up with ways they can help.

This April, McAuley will travel to Puerto Rico for the annual Spiritan Superiors North America/Caribbean conference. He said helping Haiti for the long term would likely be at the forefront of their discussions.