SouthPark mall hosts rally for Haiti

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Flore Petty had a good reason to be happy and hopeful at the Haitian Relief Rally on Saturday, Jan. 23, at SouthPark mall Center Court, 4400 Sharon Road. After 11 days of waiting, Petty had heard from her sisters in Haiti.

"My sister finally called," she said. "They are separated, but they are OK. They got hurt, but (their injuries) aren't life-threatening. It was the best news that I could have ever hoped for."

Petty is the vice president of the Haitian-American Association of the Carolinas and was one of the people who organized the rally to raise money and awareness about Haiti and the disaster that took place there.

"My stomach was turning, I was lifeless," Petty said, about the wait to hear from her family. "You can't cry. You don't know if you should cry yet or if you should cry later because it could still be good news. Eleven days of not knowing if they're alive or dead was devastating."

Petty said she and HAAC have been gathering funds and goods that can be shipped to the island.

"I'm thankful for all of the support that we're getting from America as a whole, not just in Charlotte," Petty said. "It's a blessing."

Amid the fundraising, the spirit of the rally celebrated all things Haitian, with traditional dances, songs and artwork. It was a celebration of Haitian culture that coincided with a plea for help.

Erick Desir, a member of HAAC, appreciated the outpour of support.

Haiti rally

"It's so good, you know. It shows that so many people think about us … and what happened

to Haiti. It gives us more strength."

Desir is originally from Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital and largest city, but moved to the United States 20 years ago. He's heard from most of his family, however, Desir lost his nephews and little sister in the earthquake. He said it took about seven days before they recovered his sister's body.

"I want to see every country, every person help Haiti," Desir said. "That way Haiti can be much better for the people who live there."

The Salvation Army was at the Jan. 23 rally with its iconic, red bucket filled to the brim by the rally's end. The two-hour rally raised more than $1,900.

"The Salvation Army has been (in Haiti) since 1950," Major Todd Hawks, the Salvation Army area commander, explained. "The Salvation Army is sending water and food, we're sending medical teams down to the island as well as disaster personnel to do some initial assessments."

Hawks explained that basic human needs must be met first and then the organization will assess how long recovery efforts will take.

The Salvation Army has more than 60 sites throughout the island; many of the larger sites were damaged during the earthquake.

"One of the stories I've heard was that immediately after the earthquake, within a couple of days, one of our clinics was still operational and they were still giving birth to babies and things like that," Hawks said. "So even in the midst of all the tragedy, life in some ways has had to go on."

Hawks said that The Salvation Army was able to use private and some cargo planes to get supplies and personnel to Haiti. Currently the organization is assembling more than 2 million meals to deliver to the island. ❑