

## Seacrest students help donate for Haiti

By KATHERINE LEWIS

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NAPLES — When Joseph Vanes Datus saw the devastation in Haiti, he knew he couldn't just sit by and watch.

He wanted to help and he wanted the community to help. And he knew where his first stop would be — Seacrest Country Day School.

Datus, the pastor at the Goshen Church of God in Naples, delivered pizza to Seacrest Country Day School in East Naples for years as a delivery driver for Little Caesars Pizza.

"I stopped by and spoke about my people and the hurricanes. I said that I was here to see what they could do," said Datus, who fled Haiti 11 years ago. "I can't just sit and do nothing because I am here. Knowing what happened, I knew I needed help."

The death toll in Haiti from recent tropical storms and hurricanes has risen to more than 600, and much of the country's populous areas were under water.

Seacrest students were also looking for someone to help. Sophomore Catherine Beckett had suggested that Seacrest students raise supplies for St. Leo Catholic Church in Bonita Springs, which opened a private temporary shelter for residents of two trailer parks who were forced to evacuate after substantial flooding.

St. Leo's had the supplies they needed, said Seacrest literature teacher Mary Zoe Bowden.

"I thought, 'We need to get that stuff down to Haiti. There is a great need in Haiti,'" she said. "It just so happened that Marty (Durham, head administrative assistant) said Joseph had come in to talk about Haiti."

The high school started to collect clothing and canned goods, and soon the younger students joined in. The high school student lounge was half filled with plastic bags of clothes, food and even small cots for children.

"We had a lot of stuff," said junior Alex Lubin. "We had three cars full of things to send to Haiti."

Students also helped load the supplies into Datus' car when he picked them up.

"It is great," Datus said. "We have beds we didn't expect. We are very happy."

The supplies will be taken to Haiti, where they will be distributed to the Church of God In Christ, who will then distribute the goods to smaller churches in 10 towns, including Anse Rouge and Mauger.

"They will be distributed to the most needy ones. Every Haitian is in need, but if two people get wet in the rain and one can go home and change and one cannot, the one who cannot needs help more."

Datus, who is working to become a citizen, said he hopes to have photos of children in Haiti wearing the clothes provided by Seacrest families to show students.

Bowden said students have already received a lesson from Datus' work.

"At our school, we talk about what it means to be a community and what is expected of you," she said. "No one here thinks what we did is heroic. People are giving from their excess. But they are responding. The worst thing you can do is not notice what is going on in your world."

Datus said his dream is to start a hospital in Haiti that would provide free health care to all citizens. He said he doesn't have the money yet, but said he has faith that one day, God will provide.

"I am going to do what I have to do to help as long as I have breath," he said.

Seacrest is looking to expand its mission as well. The school has made some inquiries to dioceses in Texas and Louisiana and is looking to partner with a school devastated by the storms.

"We want to keep the momentum going," Bowden said. "The kids can contribute very little — a packet of pencils or notebooks — but if we collect 400 or 500, we have a great deal to offer people."

For the students, it is just the Seacrest way.

"We are a very giving school," said junior Brunos Charles.