

THE DAILY TIMES

FARMINGTON NEW MEXICO

San Juan County nurse delivers aid to Haiti

By Alysa Landry The Daily Times

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FARMINGTON — The smell of death pressed against Danaman Begay when he arrived in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti, last month.

The Farmington resident, a licensed practical nurse, decided the day of the magnitude-7 earthquake that he wanted to contribute to medical efforts in the devastated country. Twelve days later, he was working in a make-shift hospital near the ruined Presidential Palace.

"I felt a sense of duty," he said of his decision to go to Haiti. "We are so fortunate here. That country was in definite need and I wanted to contribute."

Begay, 21, paid for a flight to the Dominican Republic, then boarded a bus to Barahona, a town near the Haitian border. He joined a medical team organized by Relief Ministries at Calvary Chapel in Sarasota, Fla., and arrived in Port-Au-Prince on Jan. 25.

The magnitude of the destruction and despair floored him, said Begay, who grew up in Bluff, Utah, and works at Life Care Center and San Juan Care and Rehabilitation in Farmington.

"It was just kind of shocking," he said. "The buildings were collapsed. No one had homes to go to. They were living on the streets and putting up tents that weren't really tents, but just sheets. The filth was amazing."

Then there was the smell. An estimated 150,000 people were killed in the quake. Some were buried in mass graves; others lie in piles on the sides of the roads.

"There are lots of dead bodies," Begay said. "I've been an EMS for three years, but I've never smelled anything like that."

Begay helped staff a clinic in a section of three-story hospital in partial ruins. Medical teams from the United States, including doctors, surgeons, nurses and radiologists treated people from dawn until dusk, Begay said. Patients lined up for a chance inside the hospital or the 71-bed tented unit set up in the adjacent parking lot.

Begay was assigned to the wound clinic, said Curtis Hencye, who leads Relief Ministries at Calvary Chapel. But the Farmington resident went above and beyond his duties.

"He was a real go-getter," Hencye said of Begay. "He ended up being our best person down there on the medical team."

Begay did everything from changing the sheets on the cots to streamlining the processes and procedures doctors were using.

"He got things done properly that were neglected because people just didn't really know what to do," said Hencye, who has taken five teams to Haiti since the earthquake and plans another trip this week. "He was an instigator, in a good way."

Begay exhibits the same characteristics at his local jobs, said Cyndie Harrelson, assistant director of nursing at Life Care Center of Farmington. Harrelson gave Begay the OK to take 10 days away from work

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to travel to Haiti.

"I had

Multimedia

Click here for more of Danaman Begay's photos from Haiti.

Below are videos Danaman Begay took during his time volunteering in Haiti



to keep asking him where he was going," she said of Begay. "He said he had to go help down there. My original thoughts were, OK, that's kind of cool.' But we missed him. He's an asset to us, and the residents and families here adore him."

Challenges that met the medical teams in Haiti included language barriers, lack of electricity, sanitation issues and shortage of blood to give patients, Begay said.

Doctors and nurses also endured unsafe working conditions, he said. The team drove into Port-au-Prince by 7 a.m. every day and left before dusk. Begay estimated he helped treat about 100 patients per day.

Among the greatest challenges was lack of education and documentation, he said.

"This was 14 days after the earthquake, and people were coming in with infections because they hadn't changed their bandages since then," he said. "We were seeing people who had been seen before and developed infections. We were also seeing people with broken bones, with the bones sticking out, who hadn't been seen yet."

Days into the mission, the clinic finally formed a method of documentation, Begay said. Patients carried their medical charts with them when they returned to the clinic, cutting down on redundant diagnostic work.

Because of looting and other dangers, the medical team bunked near an orphanage outside of town, where they tried to stay positive amid the rubble. The attitude was something they worked on even during the busy work days.

"We tried to find things to laugh about," Begay said. "There were lots of state health violations we committed. But most of it was just sad: seeing children whose parents had died. Everything was definitely against them. Most of them were already malnourished so their bodies couldn't heal the wounds. We treated them and they still went home

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and died."

Begay returned to Farmington on Thursday.

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