

Aspenites' yacht delivers food for Haiti orphans

Supplies include ton of rice, water, baby food

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ASPEN — The foundation in Haiti operated by Joe and Susie Krabacher of Aspen got supplies for one of their orphanages from an unlikely source over the weekend.

A motor yacht owned by Tom and Molly Bedell, Aspen business owners and residents of the Fryingpan Valley, dropped off a ton of rice, 250 gallons of bottled water, 27 cases of canned meat and fish, 15 cases of baby food and various other supplies at a Haitian resort Sunday. From there it was trucked a short distance to the Mercy and Sharing Foundation's Williamson campus, an orphanage, school and feeding center about 40 miles north-northwest of Port-au-Prince.

The Bedells' 160-foot yacht, Major Wager, was leaving Panama over the weekend. Weather forced it to sail a route close to Haiti, said Capt. Walter Rowan, who spoke from his satellite phone on Tuesday. "Knowing how the Bedells are, I said, 'Let's see what we could do'" to deliver supplies to the country ravaged by an earthquake, he said.

His crew rounded up supplies in Panama, then contacted several major relief organizations. They were geared to accept cash donations rather than food.

"When you come at them with something as bizarre as a private motor yacht with supplies, they don't know how to respond," Rowan said.

So he told the Bedells about his quandary, and Molly told him to sit tight. She was aware of the Krabachers' efforts in Haiti so she got in touch with the Mercy and Sharing Foundation. Joe Krabacher and Rowan worked out logistics for the supply delivery.

"We decided it made no sense to try and get the supplies in through the bottlenecked port in Port-au-Prince, or to drop them off at one of the other, more remote ports that are currently operating," Krabacher said. He guided the yacht to an area called Archaie, about 3 miles from Williamson, to check out a possible beach landing.

Rowan's crew scouted the area and found 300 homeless people living in makeshift shelters on the beach. Their meager possessions included cows and goats. It wasn't prudent to land the supplies there, Rowan said, because they never would have made it to the orphanage.

Krabacher came up with a secondary plan. His foundation contacted a nearby, gated resort, which agreed to allow the vessel to land its supplies. Rowan's crew of seven used a smaller craft to ferry supplies to shore. The resort employees helped unload the supplies, which were shipped to the Williamson campus, escorted by a security team hired by Mercy and Sharing.

The beach resort might as well have been a world away from all the suffering taking place in other parts of Haiti, Krabacher wrote in an update of the foundation's issues.

"While the rest of the island is in crisis, when they landed at the beach resort, which is fenced in, it seemed to be business as usual — people were sitting in lawn chairs around the pool, sunning and swimming, and sipping Pina Colodas," Krabacher wrote. "It never amazes us what happens in this upside-down world of the Republic of Haiti."

Rowan said several U.S. Navy and Coast Guard ships were anchored off the coast where his yacht was waiting to make the supply drop. Ships would periodically contact him to inquire about his intentions. The sight of a white yacht was obviously strange. He figured he would be told to buzz off, but when he informed them of his mission, he was always told good luck.

Helping out the kids in the orphanage was rewarding for the yacht crew.

"In the big picture, the amount of supplies we had was a drop in the bucket," Rowan said, adding that even a small tree provides some shade. "I felt like we were doing something that might save a life."

The effort might continue. Rowan was uncertain if the Major Wager will be sailing by Haiti anytime soon, but he is networking with captains of other vessels, suggesting they consider dropping off supplies.

The Mercy and Sharing Foundation continues to need cash donations. Go to www.haitichildren.org and find the link for contributions.

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