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Architecture Missions Group Helps Rebuild Adventist University of Haiti

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Students and faculty from the School of Architecture, Art & Design were joined by some Andrews alumni on a trip to Haiti, Jan. 15–24, where they worked on the first of several phases to help rebuild the campus of Adventist University of Haiti.

Architecture Missions Group helps rebuild Adventist University of Haiti

Michigan—A group of School of Architecture, Art & Design students, faculty and community members, including alumni, traveled to Haiti Jan. 15–24, to volunteer their time and sweat in rebuilding the campus of Adventist University of Haiti (UNAH). The campus was severely damaged in the Jan. 12, 2010, earthquake. Since then, a number of Andrews University entities have provided ongoing support to rebuild the campus, including the Department of Physical Therapy, the Department of Behavioral Sciences and the Office of Campus Safety.

This most recent trip was an endeavor of the Architecture Missions Group (AMG) in the School of Architecture, Art & Design, led by Martin Smith, assistant professor of architecture and director of AMG, and Melody Johnson, contract faculty.

This trip centered around two main projects: restoring the Seminary Chapel and developing a master campus

plan. Restoration of the chapel will be completed in a few phases, with the first being that of rebuilding the front façade. The Seminary Chapel was built in 1955 and is one of the oldest buildings on campus.

“It is a very beautiful building and houses a lot of UNAH’s memories from vespers, weddings and classes. UNAH has expressed that they would like their new buildings designed with the Seminary Chapel as a model, since it’s one of the most beloved buildings on campus,” says Johnson.

Jean Josué Pierre, president of UNAH, says this trip and the students’ work were imbued with deep symbolism. “They’re bringing life back to this historic building, keeper of several generations’ memories,” says Pierre.

In addition to getting some hands-on experience in restoring the chapel, the students also spent time researching for the development of a new master plan for UNAH. They studied the existing condition of campus, developed an understanding of the climate and natural environment, and connected with the Haitian culture.

This trip not only offered an important academic experience for the students, but also affirmed both the

professional and personal direction they are taking in their lives. “Seeing firsthand the effect natural disasters have on a society that does not have building codes reinforced the reasons for the strict laws mandated by the U.S. It reminded me of the seriousness of architecture as a profession and its effect on quality of life,” says Brianna Richards. “This outreach helped solidify my desire to help bring the kind of peace of mind we here in the U.S. enjoy in relation to the safety of our buildings. I want to bring that same peace of mind to people in developing countries. My desire to use my degree from Andrews University to help those who are less fortunate was strengthened because I went to Haiti.”

“It’s important to understand the culture and area as much as we can. We can’t expect to design for the people of Haiti by using North American standards,” says Smith.

The students will now begin work on the long-term master plan project. During the spring 2012 semester, students will focus on designing a trade school, and men’s and women’s residence halls. Future phases for the Seminary Chapel include installing a new roof and, eventually, restoring the interior.

The AMG exists to offer design and construction assistance to communities, organizations and churches around the world. It also provides mission and service opportunities for Andrews University students, faculty and alumni. During the 1993–1994 school year, the Andrews University architecture students, in collaboration with the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, started the design of a drug rehabilitation center and children’s home in Lajas, Bolivia, called “CERENID.” This project eventually led to the formal establishment of the AMG in 2006.

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