

Program raises funds for CHS alumna, d

By Natalie Levy
Correspondent

Ever since she arrived in Haiti in 2010, Columbia High School alumna Dr. Megan Coffee has lived out of a tent or small concrete bunker, working 12 hours each day without pay to provide free medical care to tuberculosis and HIV patients in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Ti Kay, which means "Little House" in Haitian Creole, is the name of the medical nonprofit organization Coffee started; it has served more than 1,000 patients since the earthquake in 2010.

But, thanks to the fundraising efforts of Project HOPE Art, or PHA, Coffee will soon have a "kay," or home, of her own.

"Kay for Dokte Koffee" is the name of an ongoing Indiegogo campaign started by PHA to raise the \$2,000 necessary to rent a small house near the clinic for Coffee for the coming year. Indiegogo is an international crowd-funding platform that enables collective fundraising for a cause or a project. This fundraising initiative, which closes Monday, Sept. 2, asserts that if 200 people each give \$10 — "the cost of two lattes" — PHA will be able to rent a house for the doctor.

PHA, a humanitarian group that provides art programming and training to Haitian youth, was launched in 2010, following what was intended to be a one-time trip. But, when San Franciscan co-founders Jenni Ward and Melissa Schilling went to Haiti after the earthquake in order to "share the opportunity of creative expression with kids and their communities," Ward knew they would return.

"The need for art and creative expression was way greater than we had ever expected," Ward, who went on to become PHA'S arts-education director, told the *News-Record*.

"The project evolved from that need and we've grown to the point that we now have an art center on the Haiti Communitere campus, we've held teacher trainings for Haitian teachers, and we are now coordinating Haitian artists from Atis Rezistans to work with our project partners so we have Haitians teaching Haitians," she continued.

It was Beth Dalzell, Ward's mother and a current CHS teacher, who put the two organizations in touch. After Coffee was inducted into the CHS Hall of Fame in 2011, the CHS Student Council, which Dalzell co-advises, was inspired to follow up on its Haitian fundraising effort from the previous year by establishing the Jimmy Fund, which sponsors at least one Haitian young adult to go to school for a year.

"My daughter connected with Dr. Coffee when our Student Council asked Project HOPE Art to deliver Student Council shirts to Dr. Coffee on their next trip to Haiti," Dalzell told the *News-Record*. "Since that time, a relationship has developed between the ladies and the two organizations."

Ward and Schilling make it a point to go to the clinic whenever they visit Haiti, working with the more mobile patients and adding to the wall displays for the sake of the bed-bound patients' viewing pleasure.

"Our time working in the clinic is limited, partly because most of the patients are not strong enough to stay at an activity for more than an hour or so, and partly because there is a lot going on at the clinic and it's a very crowded space," Ward explained. "We usually create a drawing project that patients can easily do in their beds or on the ground



Above, Dr. Megan Coffee, a CHS alumna, meets with President Bill Clinton. Below, Dr. Coffee ends a long day at the clinic, where she works seven days a week as a volunteer work in Haiti in 2010 after the earthquake.

outside the clinic; we play music and in general create a big distraction from the routines of the day. Family members of patients are generally at the clinic as well and like to join in on the activities."

Coffee herself remarked on the transformative power of the art activities orchestrated by PHA.

"Project HOPE Art really brings joy to our patients," Coffee told the *News-Record*. "Our patients often have been ill with tuberculosis for months, growing thin and ill, and it gets anyone down. I remember one patient who would refuse most food, but suddenly picked up a marker and started coloring a whale green when they handed him a coloring book. He made incredible progress afterwards."

As Ward mentioned, PHA also supports Ti Kay in more conventional ways, such as "bringing donated medical supplies into the country whenever possible and arranging fundraiser events on behalf of the clinic."

But "Kay for Dokte Koffee" is more of a personal endeavor for Coffee's sake, falling under the category of "Intentional Whimsy." PHA has five focus areas — Art for Art's Sake, Art & Literacy, Art & Nutrition, Art & Science and, finally, Intentional Whimsy.

As Schilling, the "Kay for Dokte Koffee" campaign manager and PHA creative director, describes it, Intentional Whimsy is about doing things "purely for the joy it will bring" based on the idea that "things can be unnecessary for survival and yet totally necessary for living."

Working long hours every day of the week without pay, and handling everything from patient care and sourcing medical supplies to grant writing and managing volunteers, shows Coffee's dedication to her patients cause and to her cause. Schilling noted in her call for contributions, however, that Coffee is perhaps not so attentive to herself.

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Photos Courtesy of TI Key

Above, Dr. Megan Coffee, a CHS alumna, meets with President Bill Clinton at her clinic in Haiti. Below, Coffee ends a long day at the clinic, where she works seven days a week without pay. Coffee began her volunteer work in Haiti in 2010 after the earthquake.

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As Coffee works to help Haiti, Ward works to help Coffee

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Just four days into the campaign, the original \$2,000 goal had already been met. "Friday night (July 26) at 10 p.m. Pacific the campaign went live, and when I woke up the next morning it was almost at a \$1,000," Schilling said. "People were donating much, much more than \$10."

In fact, though it was already 1 a.m. in Coffee's "home base" of New Jersey, \$500 was raised in the first 30 minutes alone.

Schilling hopes to finish the campaign with a total of \$5,000, guaranteeing two years of rent money and perhaps afford Coffee a "real vacation," though she admitted this would be a very hard sell to Coffee herself.

"Megan hates frivolity, she's really hardcore," Schilling said. At the very least, any surplus funds would go toward medical supplies.

"She has touched so many lives through her intern and volunteer programs and her public speaking engagements, and she's just a really impressive human being," Schilling said. "We wanted to reward Megan for all her hard work, and what better way than a house of your own?"

For more information about Ti Kay, visit www.tikayhaiti.org; for more information about PHA, visit projecthopeart.org; and to contribute to "Kay for Dokte Koffee," visit igg.me/at/kay.

Natalie Levy can be reached at news-record@thelocalsource.com.



Photo Courtesy of Ti Kay

Megan Coffee, center, walks with Haitian children near her clinic in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Coffee, a CHS graduate, moved to Haiti in 2010 to help Haitians suffering from tuberculosis and HIV.



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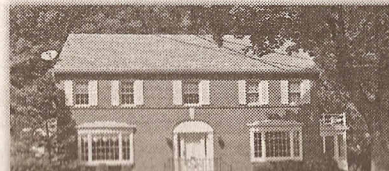
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