

On January 12, 2010, an earthquake with a 7.0 magnitude on the Richter scale rocked the small nation of Haiti. The news stories started to pour out over the world about the devastation and the need for help. One of those news casts reached the eyes of a nine year old boy named Kaleb Bartlett. He saw the devastation that was created by the earthquake and felt a deep desire to help. Kaleb was no stranger to assisting people in need. He had attended a Kids Against Hunger effort to help fill bags of food to go to those in need. From the news cast, he recognized the boxes and bags of food and associated them with the ones he had filled with his own hands. Kaleb approached his parents, Ray and Shannon Bartlett, funeral directors with Johnson-Hagglund Funeral Home, and asked them to help him help the children of Haiti. After some brain storming, the idea of "Hands of Hope for Haiti" was born. Shannon came up with the idea to sell bottle cap magnets to help raise money for the children. The bottle caps were simple enough that their children and a few of their friends could assemble them with their own hands. At this point, Ray got involved and sought to make the project an opportunity for all of the children of the community to get involved. Ray approached the leaders of a local church to see if they would be interested in helping to promote the idea and provide a facility large enough to handle the event.

The relationship with the church proved to be a very good one. The Cornerstone Church had been implementing a children's weekly event and thought this idea would be in line with the type of message they were trying to convey to their young people. Not wanting to limit the opportunity to just one group of children, Ray approached other churches and the local schools to see if they would support the project as well. It was a resounding "yes".

The restlessness of a community that wanted to help, forced quick action by the Bartlett family and the staff of Johnson-Hagglund Funeral Home. A date had to be picked and supplies needed to be ordered. Shannon scoured the internet and found a company to purchase the bottle caps from. She was soon delighted by a magnet company, ProMag, with an offer to donate their product for the campaign. Soon, a graphic designer took the ideas the funeral home staff had and created the four designs for the caps. She added her personal touch to the caps by including a photo of her newly adopted Haitian niece in one of the designs. This addition gave Ray the idea to contact the specific orphanage that the little girl came from to work directly with them. By doing this, he ascertained that the entire amount raised would go directly to the good of the children of the orphanage. "From the hands of the children in Litchfield to the hands of the orphans in Haiti", would be the idea. The funds would not be lost in a "donation never-land".

February 3, 2010 was the date selected to hold the assembly project at the church. With much anticipation, the staff at JFH organized the supplies and plotted out the chain of events that were to occur that night. There would be an opening prayer and welcome for all of the groups that would participate. A video showing the need for help as a result of the earthquake would be shown. The intent of the video would be to show the difference between what the children of Meeker County are used to having and what the children of Haiti are faced with. It would also help the attendees have a better understanding of the need that they were there to help fill. The children would be split into two groups in order to help control the production process. One group would go to a different area to start assembling half of the bottle caps while the other group would stay and listen to more facts about

Haitian children. Then the groups would switch to assemble the other half of the caps. At the conclusion of the night, the pastor of Cornerstone Church would bless the workers and refreshments would be provided and served by the funeral home staff. To promote the event, Ray Bartlett spoke on a local radio program with his son, Kaleb. They talked about the event and extended an invitation for people to join in.

As the evening neared, we found out that more groups would participate and more volunteers were stepping forward. Our initial estimate of 150 helpers started to climb. The schools started to announce the event during their morning announcements. Students that came forward wanting to help were directed to call the funeral home. Notes were sent home with the students giving all of the information. Confirmation classes indicated that they wanted to be a part of the event as well. This was particularly beneficial because the older confirmation students could help the younger children.

We created a system that would accommodate a large number of volunteers - without knowing exactly how many would turn out. As the children arrived at the church, we would tag them with a sticker indicating which group they would be in. At some point in the evening, we would rotate the activities so that every child had an opportunity to take part.

The night of the event was upon us. Early in the evening, our initial estimation of attendance was pretty close. That would soon change as the start time neared. By the time we welcomed everyone and started the program, nearly 350 children were in attendance and another 50 adults were there to help. The program began with video of the conditions in Haiti, music to sing that would get the attendees in the mood, and information about the place our efforts would help. As we dispersed to start the assembly, the staff of Johnson-Hagglund guided the adults and confirmation students, helped the children with the assembly and even assembled a bottle cap or two of their own. As you can imagine, 350 children could create a mass of confusion. With all of the help and meticulous planning, we were able to keep this to a minimum. The assembly went very well. The only thing we hadn't planned for is how fast that many kids could assemble 3000 bottle caps. Many hands make light work, and they were finished in what seemed like no time at all. The evening ended with the sale of bottle caps. The kids were very generous, as were their parents. About half of the caps were sold that evening. The rest of the caps were made available to people in the community. Some of the confirmation students took some back to their churches and had a great response.

Our goal in the beginning was to simply raise at least \$ 500.00 for some children in Haiti. In the end, we had raised just over \$2100.00 from the sale of the bottle caps. 24 baby quilts were also donated to be sent to God's Littlest Angels orphanage in Haiti. The children in our community had the opportunity to be a part of a bigger world and do something they could feel good about. We created some new friendships and strengthened relationships between the funeral home, the churches and community. Most important to this dad, we put a great big smile on our 9 year old son who just wanted to help.