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Madison woman puts her heart into Hearts for Haiti

By JAKE REMALY • STAFF WRITER • February 15, 2010

MADISON — Lauren Cantor hopes a project involving 17 artists and 100,000 note cards will continue raising money for disaster relief in Haiti in the months to come.

Professional artists from Madison, Morristown and other towns created and donated designs for note cards that are being sold by a non-profit Cantor started to raise money for the American Red Cross's Haiti relief efforts.

Called Hearts for Haiti, the program was launched by Cantor after talking with her 8-year-old daughter about ways to help the victims of the earthquake that devastated Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, on Jan. 12. Haiti's government estimates 230,000 people were killed in the 7.0-magnitude quake.

Cantor said she hopes to spread the model to other communities, where local artists can contribute designs to be sold through schools and stores in those towns as they're being sold in Madison. She also is considering expanding the program to include prints, T-shirts and jewelry.

Cantor and her daughter, Elle, initially talked about having children at Torey J. Sabatini school, where Elle is a student, participate in an art sale. But when the entire school district signed on, and after Cantor spoke with professional artists who wanted to get involved, the project quickly grew to involve Madison and Morristown arts councils and a Morristown art gallery.

"It was just the images on television," Cantor said. "Knowing that it was such an impoverished country to begin with. Seeing the frustration of people trying to help, the lack of supplies."

The note cards feature 20 designs by 17 artists, with some artists submitting more than one design. The works include paintings, photographs and illustrations. Local businesses sponsored the printing of the cards and there are 5,000 prints of each of the designs. A box with one of each of the designs costs \$15. Individual note cards are \$1

each.

"They're absolutely beautiful," Cantor said. "They are beyond my wildest expectations. These people are so talented."

Because local businesses sponsored the printing of the 4-inch by 6-inch cards, all money people spend on the cards goes to the Red Cross, Cantor said.

Alexis Egan, who co-owns Gallery MacEgan in Morristown with her uncle, Greg Egan, contributed a photograph of a heart etched in the ground. She said Hearts for Haiti was "a good way the artists could give right away, and in a different, creative way."

"It was cool to see each different artist come up with something that is kind of a representation of them, and then also of Hearts for Haiti," Egan said.

Greg Egan and other artists in their gallery also contributed designs.

Cantor worked with her friend Melanie Tomaszewski, a graphic designer and owner of Tivoli Creative Design Studios in Madison, to start the project, and Web developer Scott Farbman designed and launched the project's Web site at no cost. More than 40 businesses signed on as sponsors.

Christy Hodde, executive director of the Colonial Crossroads Chapter of the American Red Cross, said

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the Red Cross is delighted it was chosen as the recipient of Hearts for Haiti's fundraising effort.

"The American Red Cross has already spent or committed nearly \$78 million to meet the most urgent needs of Haiti earthquake victims," Hodde said in a news release. "During this phase of the relief operation we are focusing on food, clean drinking water, shelter and relief items such as hygiene kits, blankets, tarps, sleeping mats, tents and water containers. The relief items have helped more than 50,000 people to date and that number is climbing."

Hearts for Haiti has received the support from the Madison Public Schools, Madison Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Development Commission, Madison Arts & Culture Alliance, Arts Council of the Morris Area, Events Plus Entertainment of Whippany and St. Vincent Martyr School, according to the news release.

A kick-off event with artists on-hand took place Thursday, Feb. 11, at The Chocolate Rose Shoppe at 7 Waverly Place in Madison from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

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