

Fifth-graders raise money to help Haitians



Ken Surritte, president of Hearts and Hands International, talks with Prairie Vale Elementary School students about water filtration devices that will be distributed in Haiti. Members of the school's Club Hope collected \$3,500 for the filters.

PHOTO BY PAUL HELLSTERN, THE OKLAHOMAN

FUNDRAISING | STUDENTS BUY WATER FILTRATION STRAWS FOR EARTHQUAKE VICTIMS

BY JESSE OLIVAREZ
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Ken Surritte, president of Hearts and Hands International, brought a special message to Prairie Vale Elementary students this week.

"Thank you; I'm thanking you on behalf of all those people that won't be able to thank you," Surritte said.

Prairie Vale students on Monday presented Surritte with a check for \$3,500. Surritte said the money will buy 300 special water filtration straws that will allow people in Haiti to drink water without fear.

The fundraising effort, done over a two week period, was spearheaded by Club Hope, a group of Prairie Vale fifth-graders whose aim is to do good for themselves and those around them.

Kathy Schweibert, a fifth-grade teacher, is the club's founder and sponsor. Schweibert said the program's main goal is to get the students to achieve personal growth through service to themselves, their families, the community and the world at large.

"What I'm trying to do is start a peer group when they're 10," she said. "When being kind and good is a good thing ... I

want to raise their awareness."

Since 2007, the club has undertaken a number of community service projects, each varying in scale. The group has collected scarves, hats and mittens for City Rescue Mission in Oklahoma City and written letters to soldiers serving abroad, all while continuing to raise money to help a small village in Kenya.

Their work was recognized in 2007 by Oprah Winfrey. The school was accepted into Winfrey's O Ambassadors Club — a program that connects schools in the United States to battle hunger,

poverty and limited access to education around the world.

All the do-gooding requires a lot of time and energy, but it's well worth it, said Colton Steele, 11.

"It's amazing to be able to help other people," Steele said.

Nellie Koebelan, 11, said she had wanted to join the club since the first grade. She now relishes getting to help others.

"It's amazing how much stuff we have," she said. "We don't even think when we go buy clothes and stuff at the mall, we don't even think about the kids in Haiti who don't have clothes and shoes."

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