Theresa Guentzel Reichert ’05 had seen the Third World and treated its sick. As a nursing student at Saint Ben’s, she had studied abroad in South Africa. After graduation, she spent six months working in Calcutta, India. They were nothing like Haiti.

Two weeks after the January earthquake rendered much of that country a wasteland, Reichert read an e-mail from a colleague asking for volunteer nurses. She responded immediately. Less than 24 hours later, she was on a plane.

“As we left the airport compound, there were people everywhere, just standing along the road. I didn’t see a ton of completely damaged buildings, but even seeing one totally collapsed building is very surreal and the thought that someone could be in there is heart-wrenching. Everywhere there was devastation: buildings in rubble, people sleeping outside or in tent cities.

... Shortly after arriving we heard that a truck had dropped off 22 patients at the clinic and they needed our help sooner than we could get there. We walked in and I hardly even had a chance to take in my surroundings, it was unreal. So many people.”

Reichert volunteered with an organization that had operated an orphanage and women’s clinic in Port-au-Prince.

When the earthquake hit, its mission changed overnight. The orphans were sent to their adoptive homes, and the orphanage became a make-shift hospital. The clinic began treating the injured, as many as 80 a day.

Reichert and the other volunteers began treating patients almost immediately. Most of the injuries were from what the Haitians called “the blocks.” Head injuries, crushed limbs and skulls, broken bones, torn skin.

Many of the injured had suffered nearly two weeks with little or no medical treatment.

The first patient she treated was a little boy whose mother had been cooking dinner when the earthquake hit. His face was scalded with boiling water.

The conditions at the clinic and hospital were much better. Patients were given three meals a day, medical care and clean sheets. Thanks to donations, the staff had adequate medical supplies and worked to keep everything clean and sterile. Still, by American standards, conditions were primitive. There was no air conditioning, despite the 90-degree heat. Surgeries were performed on folding tables. The staff worked 12-hour shifts that often stretched into 24 hours. They slept on cots at the hospital. They rode a truck into poor areas where people had no access to medical care, treating those they could and bringing people back to the hospital if necessary.

One little boy with a burn on his stomach was put on the truck by his older brother, who rode with him to the hospital and then returned home to tell their parents. When the boy awoke late at night, scared because his family wasn’t there, the nurses comforted him. He fell asleep on a cot next to Reichert, arms sprawled out, totally relaxed. He just wanted to be close to someone. This is why she became a nurse.

Reichert was amazed at the Haitians’ perseverance despite the circumstances. They joked with the staff and taught them some Creole words. The nurses taught them some medical terms and began to learn the details of some of patients’ stories.

Reichert bonded with a 15-year-old girl whose feet had been pierced with rebar. Later, she would learn that instead of running outside when the earthquake struck the girl ran back in to help her grandmother.

See “Reichert”, continued on inside
Let's face it.
In May, Saint Ben’s will graduate over 500 young women. The Class of 2010 is ready to put their passions to work to address the world’s greatest needs. At the same time, the Minnesota legislature is scheduled to vote to cut the Minnesota State Grant program as it faces a $42 million shortfall. Total losses in Minnesota State Grant aid are estimated to be greater than a half million dollars at Saint Ben’s – directly affecting 595 Bennies. The students facing the greatest impact are Minnesota students with average family incomes of less than $57,000 a year.

Together.
With 95% of Bennies receiving some sort of financial aid, the Saint Ben’s experience is only possible because of the investment in scholarships by members of the Saint Ben’s community like you. Thank you to the more than 4,600 alumnae, parents and friends who have already made a gift this year!

595 Bennies. 95 Days.
Now more than ever, Bennies depend on your support. Your gift has the power to change the life of a current Saint Ben’s student who will go on to make a difference in the world we live in. Financial Aid decisions for next year need to be made before the end of this fiscal year, June 30th, which means we have 95 days to help our Bennies face this new challenge.

Make your gift today at www.giveCSB.com.
Reichert continued from cover

Another girl had been at school when the quake hit. She and her best friend ran to the door. The ceiling and walls collapsed and fell. Her hand was caught under block for three days, and the knee of her dead best friend was pressed against her skin and nerves, causing paralysis.

Still, amid the devastating loss, there was hope. One night, a baby was born, bringing a much-needed lift for those who had faced so much death. A promise of renewal in the midst of tragedy.

The two weeks flew by, and Reichert prepared to return home. She would bring stories and photos, as well as lessons learned from her patients.

“From the baby who is malnourished, I have learned that strength can come from those around us when we may not have our own, and that a community of those who love you can revive you and strengthen you if you are brave enough to place your trust in another.

From the boy with the burns on his face, I learned that sometimes, we just have to take joy in the small moments, and to take the time to let life soak in. He doesn’t realize his face is burned and bandaged, nor does he realize that other people are feeling pity toward him. He just lives life with joy, day by day.

From another boy, I realized that sometimes all we need is to be held. Another boy lost all of his family except his grandmother in the earthquake. From him I learned that we all have a strength inside of us that we never knew we had. We have the strength to serve, the strength to care for others, and we have the strength to move forward in our lives, despite the tragedies that may befall us.”

After two weeks in Haiti, Theresa returned with photos of gauze-wrapped children with beaming smiles, with stories of unbearable loss and of new babies born amid the devastation. Theresa wants to go back to Haiti – to stay longer – to help more people.

(Editor’s note: Portions of this report that are in italics are excerpts from e-mails Theresa Reichert sent to family and friends while she was in Haiti.)

By Kirsti Marohn  •  kmarohn@stcloudtimes.com  •  February 23, 2010

Special note:
At the time this publication went to print, Theresa had returned to Haiti.

Alumae in the News

Jodi Montgomery Mayers ’98 was recently hired as Global Sales and Marketing Program Lead for all Learning & Development Initiatives for Cargill. Cargill is an international producer and marketer of food, agricultural, financial and industrial products and services. She has provided consulting services for the past 12 years in the areas of organization alignment, leadership and coaching, change management, strategy and talent management.

Ann Lynch Ruschy ’81 brings a combined 25+ years of experience in leadership, human resources, sales, staffing, and consulting to her Oberon Managing Director role. Her professional track record proves she is well-skilled in building effective relationships and producing incredible results. Prior to managing the Oberon team, Ann worked as an Executive Coach & Consultant for The Bailey Group, where she coached executives on how to maximize their leadership efforts. She also spent 10+ years with a national staffing company, where she served as Executive Vice President and Human Resources Vice President.

Dr. Suzette Sutherland ’84 named one of the Best Doctors for Women in Urology by Minnesota Monthly Magazine. Sutherland is a member of Metro Urology’s Center for Continence Care and Female Urology in Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN. She completed her medical degree and urologic training at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine / University Hospital of Cleveland in Cleveland, Ohio. Dr. Sutherland has gained further specialty training in female urology to include urinary incontinence and voiding dysfunction, urodynamics, neuromodulation, pelvic prolapse and reconstructive surgery, pelvic floor disorders and female sexual dysfunction from the Center for Continence Care and Female Urology in Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN, and from the Institute for Sexual Medicine in Boston. Serving as a consultant for pharmaceutical and medical device companies, she provides her expertise and innovative ideas for the future development of female urology.

Kathy Persian ’88 recently joined SUPERVALU as the Group Vice President of Retail Systems at the Corporate Headquarters in Eden Prairie, Minnesota. Prior to joining the team at SUPERVALU, Kathy was Senior Vice President of Business Process at Best Buy, Inc. which followed a five year tenure as Vice President of Supply Chain and Merchant Systems at Best Buy, Inc. Kathy was also a partner with the Retail Service Division at Accenture for 16 years, having joined Accenture immediately after graduating from the College of Saint Benedict.

Kathy was Senior Vice President of Business Process at Best Buy, Inc. which followed a five year tenure as Vice President of Supply Chain and Merchant Systems at Best Buy, Inc.
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