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Local Company Protects Haiti missionaries

Brotherhood Mutual helped them escape post-quake chaos.

By Kevin Leininger of The News-Sentinel | January 10, 2010

While Christian groups worldwide were sending relief teams into Haiti after the recent earthquake, a faith-based Fort Wayne insurance company was helping 14 Lutheran missionaries from Pennsylvania escape the ensuing chaos - with the help of an armed escort.

Founded in 1998 primarily to provide travel assistance and health and liability coverage to ministry workers outside the United States, Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Co.'s "Passport to Ministry" program also provides security services when necessary. And when the team from Christ (Mertz) Lutheran Church in Fleetwood, Pa., were endangered by looters and escaped inmates from a prison northeast of Port-au-Prince destroyed by the earthquake, it definitely was necessary.

The 14 missionaries had been in Haiti barely a week when the earthquake hit Jan. 12.

With conditions around them deteriorating rapidly, ACE USA, the Philadelphia company that provides reinsurance for Passport to Ministry, called in a team from Boston-based Global Rescue, and the armed former Navy SEALs and Army Green Berets had them safely on a plane bound for the United States.

Their return means all 98 of the people in Haiti at the time

of the earthquake covered by Brotherhood Mutual's program are safe and accounted for, with all but 10 back in the U.S., said Mike Ummel, sales manager of the company's special markets division and the child of missionaries himself.

"I was so relieved. At one point, I thought there were still 30 people unaccounted for. I was afraid they were dead," he said. None of the 98 people in Haiti covered by the program was from the Fort Wayne area.

Ummel said some would-be customers have resisted participating in Passport to Ministry in the past, believing that God would take care of them. "But it rains on the just and the unjust," he added.

The Passport to Ministry program, which currently covers about 1,000 customers, has suspended coverage for new trips to Haiti until things there stabilize.

"But by spring, I imagine we'll be sending a lot of teams to Haiti," he said.

Brotherhood Mutual, founded by evangelical Mennonites in 1917, insures more than 30,000 churches in 31 states and has about \$194 million in annual premium income. For more information on Passport for Ministry, visit www.brotherhoodmutual.com.