

Greater New Bedford Voc-Tech partners with the “Be Like Brit” Foundation

The Be Like Brit Foundation was established by Cherylann and Len Gengel to honor the life of their daughter, Britney Gengel who died tragically in the 2010 earthquake in Haiti along with approximately 300,000 others. Brit's Home in Grand-Goâve, Haiti was built to honor the memory of Brit and her life and commitment to serving those less fortunate. In just two years, amidst an earthquake-ravaged country, atop a mountain overlooking the town and Gulf of Gonave, our 19,000 square foot earthquake-proof facility was built. Today, Brit's Home houses 66 children and has welcomed more than 1,800 “Britsionarys.”

SkillsUSA Advisor and Dental Assisting Instructor Mrs. Beverly Rebelo learned about the Be Like Brit Foundation through the SkillsUSA state competition. SkillsUSA Massachusetts has been in partnership with Be Like Brit for several years. As years passed, the Be Like Brit Foundation began building houses for Haitian families in need as part of their “Bristionary” trips to Haiti after Hurricane Matthew in 2016. During these Bristionary trips – groups spend 7 days building a home for a Haitian family in the mornings and working with the children at the orphanage in the evenings.

Mrs. Rebelo had the idea to take 10 students to Haiti and build a home and bring the Artisan Imprint internationally. She presented the idea to GNBVT administration and after getting approval, Mrs. Rebelo sought out the help of Mr. Henry DeGrace, a Diesel Service Technology instructor and Military Veteran with personal knowledge of Haiti and its people.

The idea was presented to the School Committee for final

approval. Then all sophomore students were provided with a flyer at the completion of their ELA MCAS testing in the spring of 2019 and an informational session was held shortly after. Over 60 students attended this meeting and 53 students applied for the opportunity to take part in this life-changing experience.

Students who were interested were asked to write an essay expressing their interest and what they've learned about the Haitian people and what helping the underserved means to them. Ten of the 53 students were chosen based on their essay, academic performance, attendance and discipline records, willingness to be a member of the SkillsUSA organization and teacher recommendations.

The following students, who are now in their senior year were chosen:

- Jaydian Cepeda – Diesel Service Technology
- Tyler Soares – Carpentry
- Madison Tavares – Legal and Protective Services
- Victoria Fernandes – Legal and Protective Services
- Chelsea Martinez – Medical Assisting
- Mackenzie Raposo – Business Technology
- Amber Conroy – Architectural Drafting
- Alexia Barboza – Early Childhood Education
- Heather Belanger – Welding Technology
- Amanda Albino – Information Support Services and Networking

Originally, the trip was supposed to take place during the week of March 29, 2020 – April 4, 2020. The cost to fund travel and lodging expenses totalled at \$23,400.00. The money was raised through the help of many sponsors, and various fundraising events

held between April 2019 and February of 2020. Unfortunately, in March 2020, the trip was postponed due to the COVID crisis per district administration and the Be Like Brit Foundation. In lieu of attending this trip, Mrs. Rebelo, Mr. DeGrace, and

the students who were to attend felt it best to postpone this trip indefinitely and donate the money raised to the foundation.

According to Ms. Gengel, the \$23,400 will be used to further advance Brit's Academy.

Although the group could not physically go to Haiti as planned, these teachers and students still leave the artisan imprint in Haiti through their hard work and dedication to Be Like Brit and the foundation's mission.

All photos by the "Be Like Brit" Foundation:



See more photos of the work Brit and the “Be Like Brit” Foundation are doing and have done here