



## **RAYJON NEWSLETTER January (2019 # 1)**

### **Introducing Renaud**

Last September, Rayjon invited Renaud Thomas to join our team as the Community Coordinator & RSCH Program Manager (St. Marc, Haiti). 36- year old Renaud is a highly qualified Engineer-Agronomist with a specialty in 'permaculture', i.e., the development of agricultural ecosystems intended to be sustainable and self-sufficient. He also teaches at the university level, often mentoring junior students in the science of soil management and crop production (agronomy). Renaud has a strong history of leadership in a rural development context and has worked for several non-profit organizations in Haiti. He speaks fluent English, French, and Haitian Creole.



Renaud checking out the onions planted in a community garden in Bertrand, Haiti (a Rotary - Rayjon partnership)

One of the things that impressed us most about Renaud was his very obvious genuine desire to work with rural communities to foster independence, sustainability and positive change. He believes that knowledge is a key to breaking the cycle of poverty as people learn to care for the land, and invest in sustainable outcomes. He says, “people need to live with dignity and respect. What they need is education and not food or cash-for-work.” Renaud is also passionate about teamwork and collaboration, believing that they are the foundation to achieving success in development. He says, “The priority is now to create a favourable atmosphere where we all look at the same page.”

In just four months we have been very impressed with the progress he has made: fostering positive relationships with staff and community leaders (especially with the Women’s Federations in the St. Marc area); increasing communication with Rayjon Canada; and seeking solutions to project setbacks.

Renaud’s role will be challenging! He will act as a prime point of contact between the beneficiary communities, RSCH, and Rayjon Canada and he will work with community leaders to develop plans to achieve their goals, advocating to ensure their voice takes priority in setting project direction and activities. He is responsible for coordination and oversight of all Rayjon-supported activities in the Haut de St. Marc region, including: Microcredit, Alpha Adult Literacy, and the Pinson School. Renaud is supported by Rayjon’s Haiti Field Director Andre Jean-Pierre and Canadian Project Manager and Executive Director, Heather Smith.

Renaud, welcome to the team! We are excited to be working with you and can’t wait to see the good things you’ll help us accomplish together in 2019!

### **Meet Mirlande**

December 2018 capped off a successful 4-month relationship between Rayjon and **Mirlande Dickinson**, an International Development Program student with the Humber Institute of Technology & Advanced Learning. The internship program aims to prepare students with skills for the International Development arena, providing the practical experience that complements each student’s academic achievement.

Mirlande became our “Assistant Program and Resource Developer,” fulfilling several duties:

- Exploring grant and other funding opportunities;
- Supporting the implementation of long-term project planning in Haiti and the Dominican Republic (DR);
- Participating in a monitoring trip to DR/Haiti;
- Creating training material for Haitian and Dominican staff and community leaders; and
- Developing monitoring and evaluation tools for use by Rayjon and partner staff in Canada, Haiti and the DR

A couple of her very significant accomplishments included: creating training

material that will benefit community leaders in Haiti and the DR for many years to come; and designing surveys that will help us to better understand the beneficiary communities we work in.



[Above] Mirlande at work and at play: on the left she is actively taking part in constructing a partition at the Consuelo Community Development Project; and on the right she is having an “intense” game of dominoes with a resident of a retirement home.

The official evaluation of Mirlande’s personality and work performance included many positive comments: She was described as incredible, motivated, knowledgeable and eager to learn and contribute, well-prepared, flexible, and a personable individual who bonded easily with the people she interacted with.

Here are a few comments that Mirlande has shared about herself:

*I hope to go back to university to get my masters in social work. I know that in the society we live today, having an education gives you the privilege to do certain things and go certain places. If I want to intersect the disciplines of International Development (ID) and social work, then I need to increase my social work skills and become certified to be truly effective in reaching that goal.*

*Why do we ask kids what they want to be when they grow up? I agree with Michelle Obama when she says a question like this makes children finite, as if you become something and that is all there is. We are always continuing to learn. I have an operational plan to get my masters, and the strategic long-term plan I am still trying to figure out.*

*When you asked us the question “What does International Development mean to you?” Here is what I wrote:*

*“International Development must be about two or more parties collectively working together. We should not think of these parties as one who is ‘doing’ the developing and the other as the one who the developing is for. It must be about the expansion and production of all things that will provide an effective and*

*sustainable environment for all bodies involved in the development process. It should also involve a collective participatory analysis to incorporate the perspectives and inputs of those living in the places we visit. It is fundamental that we acknowledge and give voices to the people whose lives we 'believe' are in need. What are the differences between how we see their problem and how they may see it? Is there even a problem at all? We must be willing to learn about each other's ways of being in an attempt to move away from the idea that one way is best. In order to properly internationally develop, we must internalize that we are not doing something for someone, but rather, doing something with someone"*

Rayjon is grateful and couldn't be more pleased with Mirlande's performance, attitude, demeanor, and the accomplishments she achieved during her internship. In summary, this has been an incredibly positive experience for our organization, and we feel we were also able to support Mirlande's professional development. A great learning experience on both sides!

### **Haitian Art - Atizani**

Atizani is artwork made in Haiti that is purchased by Rayjon members visiting the country at fair value. It is brought back to Canada to be sold – and consequently, when you buy Atizani you are supporting Haitian artists. The crafts include metal art, inlaid wood art, acrylic paintings, card sets, pieces of jewellery, and purses/pouches/pillow cases.

In the last year, displays and sales of Atizani were made at the Fall Fair, Pasta Fest, two Women Helping Women events, the Forest Health Fair, the Pickle Ball event, the Cabin Sale, and the Wyoming Christmas show.

Total sales from March to November, 2018 were \$2,550. Thank you for supporting this aspect of Rayjon's partnership with the people of Haiti.



### **2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Family Curling Event Report**

Rayjon's second annual curling event back in November was another big success. Participants included a full house of 65 curlers, both experienced and novice, made up of 9 young curlers and 56 adults from a wide variety of Rayjon connections. There was also a great team of volunteers and a great deal of good support from family and friends who stopped by.

The event was joined by a team of 5 OCIC (Ontario Council for International Cooperation) representatives who were doing interviews of a number of Rayjon “members” for their photojournalism project to be aired publicly in February 2019 (see the announcement below).



The winner of the event was the Rural Education program (elementary/ secondary & adult literacy) in Haiti. The goal was to raise \$10k but by the time the final take-out occurred the event had a draw of over \$14k from pledges, sponsor donations and the prize table.

Main thanks go out to event organizer John Barnfield and his team, to the host Sarnia Golf & Curling Club, and to the event sponsors, donors, and participants (curlers, volunteers, supporters), with a special shout-out to the Sarnia Construction Association for covering the cost of the ice rental.

### **UPCOMING EVENTS:**

Transformations – a Photojournalism Exhibit



When: Feb 1 - 23, 2019 at the Lawrence House Centre for the Arts, 127 Christina St. S.

Presented by Rayjon, in partnership with the Ontario Council for International Cooperation: the exhibit will highlight inter generational stories of change makers (from Sarnia and throughout Ontario) that make transformational change possible – helping us inspire a wave of Canadians to join the movement for people, planet & prosperity.

### **Thank you!**

To our many donors, we must say again a tremendous thank you. With your donation you make a lasting change to the lives of people in Haiti and the Dominican Republic

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Rayjon Share Care  
P.O. Box 2482  
Sarnia, On N7T 7T1  
Canada