

A MISSION TO PROVIDE EDUCATION, MEDICINE & HOPE TO THE VILLAGERS OF GATTIRA, ETHIOPIA

By Derek Cheatham, PE
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Neel-Schaffer employees are always looking for ways to make a difference with their clients and in their communities. Derek Cheatham, PE, the Engineer Manager of our Arlington (TX) office, found a way to give back through Engineering Ministries International (www.emiusa.org), a Christian non-profit organization that puts design professionals in a position to help partnering organizations realize their visions through the design and construction of facilities. Here is Derek's story of how he is able to use his talents and abilities to bring hope to the people of Ethiopia.

After we adopted a son from Ethiopia, I was looking for an opportunity to give back to his country. A few years ago, I discovered the website for Engineering Ministries International (www.emiusa.org), a Christian non-profit organization that puts design professionals in a position to help partnering organizations realize their visions through the design and construction of their facilities.

When EMI advertised a project trip in Ethiopia this past February, I felt called to go and serve. The overall purpose for our trip was to assist the Joy of Heaven Ministry (lead by Pastor Sissay) with creating a site master plan, with design documents for a new school facility, and a medical clinic to serve the village of Gattira. Our design team included the project leader, the project co-leader, an EMI intern, a civil engineer, an agricultural specialist, an electrical engineer, a surveyor, an architect, and a hydro-geologist. The civil engineering position was already filled when I

inquired, so the project leader encouraged me to fill the surveying position, since I had previous experience in that field as well.

The first few days of the trip, we visited a community known as Project Mercy, which was south of the capital City of Addis Ababa. This community now has a regional hospital and a multi-campus school facility, including grade school through high school. Project Mercy was started about 20 years ago with a similar vision as the vision for Gattira and has been extremely successful. We toured the facilities, met with administrators, and visited the primary water source to learn about what has been successful in developing this community. We then traveled to the town of Ambo and spent the next six days working in Gattira, which was about a six-mile commute each day. The project team would disperse each day, with each discipline working by themselves or with an intern to gather data, run

tests, document conditions, etc. After dinner each night, the team met for several hours to collaborate on the design and identify remaining assignments.

The final task while in-country was to make a presentation to the community about our recommendations. Many of the community understood that we were designing the first phase of a school and a clinic. Community leaders donated three large tracts of land and we made recommendations on how to master plan these properties and where these facilities would be located. The final presentation was attended by the community chairman and approximately 1,000 people. The presentation was a celebration with a meal for the team, a parting gift, and recognition of the team by the community chairman. Upon leaving Gattira, our work as a team was not complete. For the past two months, the team has continued to work on the final design report documents and drawings. These documents are scheduled to be





delivered to the partnering ministry in early May and will be used as the construction documents for completing the first phase of improvements.

I have been asked about our trip many times since I returned. I have struggled with words to adequately describe the experience. Like the photograph of a great scenic view, pictures never truly represent the view that one sees by actually being in a third-world country. When our marketing department asked if I would share some of my thoughts from the trip, I immediately thought of an email I had received from our project leader, Travis Smith, and asked him for permission to share his thoughts in the e-News.

With his recount of the story of a boy that touched the entire team, Travis does a great job of capturing the emotions of the trip. Here is his story:

There are memories that remain with us our entire lives and they often have a mental picture attached. Our first day of school ... the home we grew up in ... the funeral of a loved one ... your wedding day ... the moment you first held your child ... I imagine that the occasions for these memories vary widely, but I have no doubt

that we each carry many with us. These moments left a mark on us that touched something deep in our emotional psyche. For good or bad these 'moments' can come back in an instant, reminding us of sights, smells, tastes, and, most significantly, the emotions that we felt on that day.

I experienced one such moment on my recent project trip to Ethiopia, and, as I heard from several of my teammates, the same moment left a significant mark on them as well.

"It occurred on the morning of our first visit to our project site in Gattira, a community of about 4,000 people located two hours west of Addis Ababa. This small community lies in the foothills, about five kilometers to the north of Ambo, a moderately sized city that is home to one of the larger universities in the region. Despite all of the relative conveniences you can find in Ambo, none exist five kilometers away in Gattira. No electricity. No clean water to drink. No school less than an hour walk in either direction. No health

clinic. It is the epitome of rural, rugged living. This might seem insignificant with a city like Ambo nearby, but part of the problem lies in the circuitous, rugged route between Ambo and Gattira. The 'road' between the two communities took more than 1.5 hours to drive each way - and that was in a four-wheel drive Land Cruiser our ministry

Hope is a very po

rented to transport us. Imagine traveling to Ambo on foot or on the back of a mule if your wife is having complications with delivering your child. Or imagine you're taking your ailing father or child to the clinic for an emergency. Imagine walking for two to three hours to get basic necessities, such as clothing or metal to fashion tools. Imagine that the walk is far too long (and it's too expensive!) to get clean water. The people of



Derek Cheatham surveying under the watchful eye of the village children.



Gattira don't have to imagine this, they wake up to this reality every day.

On the morning of our first arrival, there was a buzz in the air throughout Gattira: 'The faranjii mohandessa (foreign engineers) had finally arrived!' For the past year, the people of Gattira had anticipated our arrival, knowing it was the next step towards

noticed a handsome young man, about 14 or 15 years old, 'running' alongside our vehicle. Out of the 100s of people we saw that morning, this young man stuck out. Why? Because he was 'running' up a rock-laden 20-percent slope, using crutches! His one good leg was strong, probably stronger than anyone else. His other leg however, was mangled, and through years of disuse had curled up behind him like a pretzel.

I literally am choked up right now, picturing him running with his eyes on us. He kept up with everyone. No one gave him special attention or helped him. He was 'running' on his own. He made it to the special ceremony where they

announced that we had arrived and that this group of nine foreign engineers and architects would be spending the next week in Gattira, surveying the hillsides to help design a school, clinic, and other needed facilities. But why would this young man run all this way to just hear our names announced? Why would he 'run' for several kilometers, when there is no doubt his armpits were rubbed raw, and his arms and one

good leg burned from the endeavor? Why did he run?

During a morning devotion later, our team architect, Nancy, reflected upon this scene and I think she hit it on the head. Our team represented hope to this young man. Hope for a different life, hope in the future. This young man and the rest of the people of Gattira were not satisfied with their meager existences. Not in the slightest. They desperately need the help of outsiders and they cried out for it. This handicapped boy's efforts and hope for a different future mirrored that of the rest of the community. This hope was vividly expressed one year before when the community gathered for a meeting, and more than 10 families donated significant portions of their land towards a school and clinic. These people who have nothing donated their one possession, for the hope of a better future. It was at this meeting that the land was handed over to Pastor Sisay and his organization. It was at this meeting that Pastor Sisay, whose heart is so burdened for these impoverished people, pledged his life efforts to help bring them a school, a clinic, clean water, and most importantly - true hope.

werful motivator.

having their very own school and clinic. As we traveled from the edge of Gattira to the village meeting place, the momentum increased and the crowd swelled. It was honestly quite overwhelming and extremely humbling. Scores of people, mostly men and boys, were running beside our vehicle, while women and girls gathered in the distance. It was during the beginning of this swelling mass that our team first



As we reflected on this scene and the powerful motivation that hope can bring to a person, Nancy led us to Philippians 3:7, 10-14, where Paul, a follower of Jesus Christ, reflected on his past life and his hope for the future:

Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord ... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possibly I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Hope is a very powerful motivator. Our team saw it in the eyes of that handicapped young man who strained his body beyond its limits. You can feel it in Paul's writing above, where he counts his life as nothing,

in comparison to the hope of being resurrected with Jesus Christ at His 2nd coming. We saw it in the eyes of Pastor Sisay, who is pressing on with his life to display the love of Christ to the people of Gattira so that he can share with them about the eternal hope that Jesus offers."

Trevis' story is so powerful. He captured the true purpose of the trip and the purpose for the EMI organization, which is to transform lives by providing hope to the poorest of the poor. If you have any questions or are interested in participating on a project trip, I would love to share more details about my trip with you.

Blessings to you all!

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About Engineering Ministries International

EMI is a Christian ministry that designs facilities that serve the poor in developing countries. These facilities (including hospitals, orphanages, schools, clean water projects and more) directly impact communities by meeting physical needs and communicating God's love in a practical way. We partner with Christian workers, pastors, and other non-profits who have a vision to help the poor and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. From our offices around the world, over 100 staff and interns labor to bring the Gospel to the poorest and least reached peoples on earth.

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