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Bringing clean water to earthquake-torn country

By Katherine Hamilton '10

It's not everyday you get to help change the world. But, Melissa G. Burns '99 is busy doing just that. As vice president of marketing and project management for WorldWater Solar Technologies, Inc., she works to help provide developing, rural and disaster-ridden communities with electricity and clean water.



Burns, 31, graduated from Binghamton with a degree in political science and earned a master's degree from Cornell University in city and regional planning in 2003. She says the two degrees complement one another well and serve both her career and personal goals.

"Combining the two interests led me to a place with a convergence of community, public policy and the environment," said Burns.

That place is WorldWater Solar Technologies Inc., a small but far-reaching company located in Princeton, N.J. Burns began working there two years ago, she said, after meeting the company's founder and CEO at an event. His story fell in well with what she, too, felt was important.

"To bring lifesaving power and water to other people is very compelling," said Burns. She and WorldWater Solar work together for "development, community and helping people," Burns said.

According to its mission statement, the company's goal is to "make clean water and power available everywhere in the world through its proprietary solar technology." The Mobile MaxPure® Water Filtration System can work virtually anywhere; it uses solar power to produce the electricity needed to convert contaminated water into safe drinking water. The system is operational within 30 minutes after arriving on site and the energy it produces can run lights and power tools, and operate command center equipment and satellite phones, in addition to pumping and purifying water.



There are nearly 60 systems working around the world, said Burns, providing

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greatly needed, clean drinking water in places like the Darfur region of Sudan, Ethiopia, the Philippines and Afghanistan, where the system was brought in by the U.S. government. Burns said she hopes a system will make it to Chile soon as well, to assist in the efforts following the recent earthquake.

The Mobile MaxPure® system's most recent implementation has occurred in the devastated island country of Haiti. The system was, said Burns, the first source of clean water in Port-au-Prince following the devastation.

"We had two systems in Haiti prior to the earthquake," said Burns. "Haiti is oftentimes battered by hurricanes and we were fortunate to have systems pre-deployed."

The people of Haiti, said Burns, have a resilient spirit. But, she said, there is no doubt they still need help. That's why WorldWater Solar has expanded its reach and formed a non-for-profit branch. The "WorldWater for Haiti" campaign is a newly-minted charity that will provide donated funds for the post-disaster relief efforts in Haiti. And that's just what Burns continues to work for.

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