

Rahway donates high-tech purifier to Haitian earthquake victims

By Eliot Caroom/For the Star-Ledger

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A solar-powered water purifier, donated by Rahway to a town in Haiti, sits on a boat off the coast of the earthquake-stricken country.

RAHWAY -- Rahway mayor James Kennedy was watching television news coverage of the Haiti earthquake's aftermath in January when he saw something in the background that caught his eye.

"I had been watching TV, and I noticed the graffiti on a wall, and it said, 'Water is currency,'" Kennedy said last month. "It was just a powerful statement."

So Kennedy and Rahway's city council decided to donate a water purifier to a town in Haiti to help meet one of the people's most pressing needs: potable water.

With the help of a donation from United Water, Rahway's utility, Kennedy is in the Haitian city of Bon Repos this weekend to deliver and install a solar-powered water purifier invented and built by a Princeton-based firm.

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Bon Repos, a city of 105,000 about 10 miles north of Port-au-Prince, is a good site for the purifier, Kennedy said, because there is a well in a church courtyard that can supply a steady source of water.

The machine was paid for with funds from Rahway's capital budget for its

water plant, according to city officials. The purifier was purchased for a discounted price of \$50,000 from Princeton's Worldwater & Solar Technologies. The one-year-old company has sold purifiers to the U.S. military and humanitarian organizations in Iraq, Sudan, Tamil and Haiti.

The machines, which ship folded up in cubes, have solar panels that can produce energy even on cloudy days. The power can clean 30,000 gallons of water a day by filtering it and bathing it in ultraviolet radiation.

"This is the same as a 747 arriving on site fully loaded with bottled water every day," said Quentin Kelly, founder of Worldwater & Solar Technologies.

The company has ties to Haiti. Its vice-president of operations, Mickey Ingles, previously installed solar panels at the Louverture Cleary School, a 350-student Catholic boarding school in Port-au-Prince where he is a board director. Kelly said that half the students there became orphans after the quake.

Without clean drinking water, Ingles said more people in Haiti could die. Pure water is even more rare in the country after the magnitude 7.0 earthquake hit on Jan. 12, killing more than 215,000 people and leaving a million others homeless.

"Every 20 seconds a child under 5 dies for illnesses related to a lack of having clean drinking water in the world, and Haiti's at the bottom of that scale," Ingles said. "They absolutely need clean water, just like everyone else does."

The Worldwater purifier had just been manufactured when Rahway decided to buy it and ship it to Haiti. The machine's journey on a boat named the Sea Hunter lasted several weeks and was side-tracked by port officials and a change in boat captains.

For the last month, Kennedy has been making phone calls to port officials in Miami and Haiti to leapfrog bureaucratic obstacles to get the machine on land.

The machine finally disembarked from the boat in Haiti on Friday, according to Kennedy.

For several years, Kennedy has spent time working on international water issues. He served as the U.S. representative at the World Water Forum, an international conference in Mexico City, in 2006.

Now, all of Kennedy's phone calls have paid off. If all goes according to plan, the machine should be installed early next week.

"Without water, you have nothing," Kennedy said last week before leaving on a U.N.-chartered flight for Haiti to see the machine installed. "When you saw the report of the kid coming out after 12 days, it was only because he had water in the little space he was confined in in the collapsed building."