

Heroes offer relief in Haiti, preserve city's history, far more

BY MARILYN BOWDEN

Behind the scenes of contemporary issues, from Haiti earthquake relief to preserving Miami's history and defining its future, are unsung heroes.

One of these, says Maria del Valle, director of the Cultural Center of Spain, is **Xavier Anton**, MD, Emergency Department co-chair at Mercy Hospital.

For the past 10 years, Dr. Anton and his wife, Inma Roca, have been attending to the medical needs of residents of Ile à Vache, a Haitian island, and have created the Miami-based Kakok Foundation to help fund the cause.

"I have seen the advancements in Ile à Vache," Ms. del Valle said, "and how the lives of the inhabitants have changed as a result of his efforts. Not only has he spent most of his free time there as a physician and a community leader, he has encouraged his friends all over the world, his colleagues and his neighbors to participate in this project, which ultimately seeks to improve living conditions and contribute to human development, providing things that every single human being should have access to: education, a healthy environment and medical care.

"Dr. Anton does it because is the right thing to do. He gets personal satisfaction doing this, and I respect him for that."

Dr. Anton has worked to build a clinic and a school, overseen the paving of roads, improved sanitary conditions and developed a scholarship program for nurses living in Haiti. He's now working on wind and solar power for the island as well as

the introduction of computer and Internet technology.

Haiti is one of many causes **Siriporn Lek Chuaindhara**, regional care coordinator for First Health, raises funds for, says Miami dentist Elizabeth De Aguirre.

"She has helped in two different fundraisers for Haiti," Dr. De Aguirre said, "the International Rescue Committee for Haiti Relief, and the First & Alton grassroots charity drive.

"She is currently running in a marathon to donate money for the marathon-training division of the Leukemia-Lymphoma Society, and is also involved in the Himalayan Healers Project, which helps Nepal's Untouchables train as massage therapists and then finds jobs for them."

Ms. Chuaindhara said she is "trying to live my life to be the change I want to see in the world. If I am going out anyway, why not make it a charitable event?"

Having grown up in a restaurant-owning family — her sister now runs the restaurant at the Mutiny Hotel — she said she knows how to put on events.

"If I'm going out with friends for drinks," she said, "I will host a Happy Hour with a charitable component. Some places will throw in free hors d'oeuvres or one free drink."

Ms. Chuaindhara is also a member of the Young Philanthropists for the Sylvester Cancer Center.

Miami Dade College Professor Paul George said **Penny Lambeth**, principal of Lambeth & Nagle Communications, de-

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serves more credit for her historic preservation and environmental efforts.

"One of her accomplishments is the restoration of Miami City Cemetery," he said. "She is a founding member of TREEmendous Miami, and has served on the Board of Directors of Art in Public Places Trust, Dade Heritage Trust, Miami Lakes Beautification Board, among others."

Ms. Lambeth said Miami City Cemetery, 1800 NE Second St., founded in 1897, had fallen into disrepair and suffered some vandalism when, a dozen year ago, she and Dade Heritage Trust Past President Enid Pinkney founded a taskforce to restore it. The work continues.

"It involves everything I love — history, art and plants," Ms. Lambeth said.

Since TREEmendous Miami, which plants trees around the county and maintains them, was formed about 10 years ago, she said, the two groups have joined efforts. Both have become favorite community service activities for volunteers of all ages.

The emerging face of downtown Miami owes much to **Javier Betancourt**, deputy director of Miami's Downtown Development Authority (DDA), said Christina Casado, Miami-Dade County's community image manager.

"He is really responsive," she said. "Under his leadership, the DDA's master plan for down-

town was finally realized, which is huge. We are looking at improving quality of life countywide, and having them come to us with this plan of what their vision is for downtown took a lot of the pressure off us. It helps convince people that this is important.

"Javier is a planner who also understands the economics and importance of a beautiful city whose economic engine is going to be concentrated in areas like downtown."

Mr. Betancourt is unlikely to remain an unsung hero. His recent promotion to deputy director, he said, brings him into the spotlight as the DDA's spokesperson.

"The master plan has been great for downtown and the DDA," he said. "Getting to the point of developing it brought us out to interact with our key constituents and stakeholders and get a feel for what the issues are. With them, we're formulating some great ideas for improving downtown.

"So that process alone was wonderfully rewarding for those involved. We have strong partnerships with the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce New World Center Committee, the city, the county and community redevelopment agencies.

"Our vision is to elevate downtown to the epicenter of the Americas. We have five key goals: enhancing our business and cultural institutions, leveraging our waterfront, elevating our grand boulevards to prominence, creating great streets and common spaces, and promoting transit and regional connectivity."