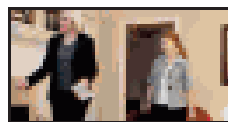


**Hogs fall to Gators**

Florida gains control late to win 71-66 at Walton Arena. — Sports, 1C

**Home sales perk up**

Last 2 months of 2009 rocket past '08 figures. — Business, 1D

# Arkansas Democrat Gazette

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## ARKANSANS DIGGING DEEP

CHARLIE FRAGO ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Arkansas rice will soon be feeding hungry Haitians, with more than 40 tons of it coming from a Stuttgart church battered by a tornado nearly two years ago.

"We know what it means to be on the other side," said Pastor Sam Roberts of First Baptist Church. The church's relief efforts highlight a growing response of Arkansas churches to earthquake relief in Haiti. A May 2008 tornado cut a 2-mile-long path through the center of the Arkansas County town of 8,971 people, heavily damaging First Baptist Church, where roughly 300 people worship each Sunday.

The church suffered about \$1.5 million in damage and spent 15 months making renovations and repairs.

The bad luck that hit his congregation doesn't compare with the devastation of last week's earthquake in Haiti, which might have killed as many as 200,000 people and displaced millions more, Roberts said.

But the church wanted to help, and addressing a staple of the Haitian diet seemed like a good place to start. "Stuttgart is the rice capital of the world, so it was a logical choice," Roberts said.

He called the Florida Baptist Convention, which has had a strong presence in Haiti for 15 years, only to find out that that organization had just ordered two truckloads of rice from Stuttgart days before.

John Sullivan, executive director-treasurer of the Jacksonville, Fla.-based religious organization, knew about Riceland Foods Inc., the world's largest miller and marketer of rice, because his son lived in Stuttgart.

"Riceland gave us the best price anybody can hope for," Sullivan said. He said he paid \$20 for each of the 420 100-pound bags of rice that will make up each truckload.

Roberts and his congregation agreed Wednesday night to raise the \$20,000 necessary for two truckloads of rice. The preacher said he hoped to have the rice bought and ready to head to Haiti by mid-February.

The Florida church group is driving its own tractor-trailer to Stuttgart and plans to pick up the first load of rice today. It will also transport the Stuttgart church's rice in coming weeks.

All the rice — 168,000 pounds total — should be headed to Haiti by early March, Sullivan said.

**An average Haitian can live on a quarter-cup of rice each day,** Sullivan said. A family of four could live off one 100-pound bag "for a long time."

Riceland spokesman Bill Reed said the company had been looking for a way to get rice to Haiti. The Florida Baptist Convention's Miami warehouse and strong presence in Haiti seemed like a good match, Reed said.



AP/RAMON ESPINOSA A boy screams after being beaten Thursday during looting of quake-damaged stores in Port-au-Prince. Sporadic looting and violence continued in the Haitian capital.

"It seemed like the best way we could get something done quickly," Reed said.

Other churches have also stepped up efforts to aid the Caribbean island nation of 9 million.

***Pleasant Valley Church of Christ in Little Rock collected \$70,000 for Haiti earthquake relief in a single Sunday, according to missions minister Roger Pritchett.***

***"There's a real outpouring of support and concern" for the people of Haiti, Pritchett said. Donations "just flowed in."***

***The congregation, with average attendance of 1,200, has supported missionaries in Haiti for a quarter-century or more. It also gave \$80,000 in 2008 to help Haitians recover from a string of hurricanes, tropical storms and flooding.***

***"This church is very well known for being generous and rising to the occasion," Pritchett said.***

In North Little Rock, worshippers at First Assembly of God raised \$34,000 for Haiti, Pastor Rod Loy said. Assemblies of God General Superintendent George O. Wood last week appealed to the denomination's more than 12,000 churches to raise money for Haiti.

The roughly 2,500 people who worship at the North Little Rock church each week quickly responded. "People are just heartbroken and moved with compassion," Loy said.

The North Little Rock money will be used to restock a warehouse with food and water in Port-au-Prince, he added.

***Judsonia Church of Christ, along with sister congregations in Tennessee and Mississippi, has sent 42,000 pounds of rice and is assembling family buckets full of soap, shampoo, washcloths and other hygiene items, said John L. Kachelman Jr., the congregation's minister.***

***It is also sending thousands of tarps to the island, said Kachelman.***

***Relief teams have alerted aid organizations that — as much as Haitians need food and water — tents, tarps and other temporary shelters are even more important, the minister said.***

***Kachelman said his church had given humanitarian aid to tsunami victims several years ago as well as to needy people in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, but had found it difficult to gain a foothold in Haiti because of restrictions placed on aid by the Haitian government.***

***Last week's earthquake changed all that, he said. Now, there are "unlimited possibilities," Kachelman said.***

Many other Arkansas churches have taken up collections. Park Hill Christian Church in North Little Rock moved its annual "Week of Compassion" charitable fundraiser from late February to Jan. 17 and Sunday, according to the church's newsletter.

Catholic parishes across Arkansas also passed the plate.

Meanwhile, Arkansas charitable organizations with ties to Haiti are still assessing the damage.

The El Dorado-based Haiti Education Foundation, which supports 40 schools for 10,000 students run by the Episcopal Diocese of Haiti, is still gathering information on the extent of the damage and loss of life, said Susan Turbeville, the foundation's spokesman.

Patchy Internet and phone connections mean that news is trickling in "very, very gradually."

One school in Cherident was destroyed, and another in Trouin was seriously damaged, Turbeville said.

But no one was hurt — at least at Cherident. An e-mail Wednesday from Haiti confirmed that the children and teachers there had left the school before the quake, Turbeville said.