



For immediate release

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Quick thinking, fast action and collaboration made for happy children in Caribbean aid delivery

A multi-country, last minute effort brings gifts to children of Dominica after the country was hit by its worst natural disaster in recorded history.

On 18 September Hurricane Maria pummelled Dominica, becoming the worst recorded natural disaster to befall the Lesser Antilles island of over 71,000 people.

On 8 December, Tim Forderer, general manager of superyacht aid organisation, YachtAid Global was boarding a plane after visiting the disaster-torn area, when he received a call.

Caroline Blatter, director of Superyacht Services Guide, reached out to Tim in the hope the superyacht industry could organise something special for the holiday season for Dominican kids who had been physically and emotionally ravaged by Hurricane Maria.

UK-based Blatter, who had raised US\$700 with local children straight after the hurricane hit, knew she would need help across the Atlantic to coordinate a gift delivery. Forderer was up to it however, and immediately got on the phone to pull together a festive season for Dominican children for whom the natural disaster was still top of mind.

The category 5 storm raged for three hours over the island through that September night, with winds of 175mph causing devastation described by the country's Prime Minister, Roosevelt Skerrit as "mind-boggling".

Around 90% of structures were destroyed or damaged and the once green island was stripped of its crops and natural vegetation. Thirty people lost their lives and, after the storm had passed leaving the island reduced to rubble, schooling, employment and other day to day business all but ground to a halt.

Forderer's first call was to Dominica member of parliament, Denise Charles, intent on quickly putting together as much Christmas cheer as he could - and discovering Charles had been hoping for an opportunity like this to arise.

"This year we weren't able to have our normal fundraiser for Christmas. So this news blessed my heart deeply," said Charles.

From there, Forderer contacted commander Mark Hattabaugh, Sr Pastor of The Pentecos-

tals of Cooper City, a man he knew from experience would embrace this challenge. Forderer outlined what was needed to pull off this Christmas Caribbean story - not only fundraising, but shopping, cataloging, wrapping and transporting gifts from Ft. Lauderdale to Dominica in less than a week.

“Absolutely,” was Commander Hattabaugh response.

Using YachtAid Global’s established network of vetted NGOs and partners, logistical details and a plan were solidified within hours of Forderer completing his connecting flight from Ft. Lauderdale to San Diego. Funding quickly followed personally from within the group, and with the help of contacts in the United Kingdom through Caroline Blatter, Rachel Tanner, Ditcham Park School and the Superyacht Services Guide - it was sufficient to cover the full cost of holiday gifts for the children, aged between one and eleven.

Back in Florida, the community of Cooper City and the Pentecostals, under the leadership of Commander Hattabaugh, showed up in full force. The toy store where the gifts were purchased were so moved by the cause that they sold the toys at cost.

Numerous other gifts and toys were dropped off at the church, where community members began the process of wrapping hundreds of presents and cataloging each by age. One woman in the church donated 169 backpacks, each with a personal note from a student, written to the future recipient of the backpack.

The last piece of the plan was transporting the goods to Dominica. Forderer contacted captain Locky MacLean and his dedicated crew onboard *Sea Shepherd* who were making plans to set sail and who readily agreed to make a slight detour to deliver the gifts.

Commander Hattabaugh called on his friends at the Cooper City Fire Department who jumped in to transport the gifts to the ship, led by a police escort.

“The love and selflessness of the people who got behind this project so quickly have left me in awe and inspired,” said Forderer.

“There really are no traditional distance barriers any more. Anything is possible when you’re working to help others alongside likeminded people with a shared vision to create action and results,” continued Forderer.

“If you can think it, you can create it through collaboration; all turbocharged by social media and story telling apps.”

Thanks to this combination of organisations, civic leaders and liaisons, Christmas came to children in Dominica with 355 gifts and 151 backpacks delivered when the *Sea Shepherd* reached the island.

“YachtAid Global is dedicated to using the resources we have at our disposal, which include: yachts, yacht owners, logistical crews, community civic leaders and liaisons, to provide humanitarian opportunities that promote resilient and sustainable development in these communities to encourage them to bounce back quickly.”

Working to the ethos that combining resources with other NGOs and agencies maximises the impact they’re able to have on those in need, YachtAid Global has quickly positioned

itself as a leader in the field of delivering aid.

It coordinates a global network of volunteers, vetted NGOs and disaster relief experts for the delivery of humanitarian aid to coastal communities in need, and through the use of superyachts, and aid vessels, is often able to reach people which other aid agencies can't.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

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YachtAid Global orchestrates the delivery of disaster relief, development and conservation aid to coastal communities worldwide. The organization was founded in 2006 and is a registered nonprofit which utilizes a network of volunteers who coordinate logistics, yacht owners and donors who match with yacht owners and yacht crew to transport these life-saving basic supplies in serious times of need. Since its launch, the YachtAid Global team has expanded its mission in order to be able to best utilise charitable resources to deliver maximum impact. The charity sits in a unique position where it's able to mobilise superyachts and aid vessels, and connect them with aid providers, volunteers and other NGOs for natural disaster relief and humanitarian work quickly and efficiently.