

GOOD CITIZENSHIP

Bringing Power To The World's Rural Communities

(NAPSA)—Many Americans are proud of a unique cooperative program that's helping shed light on the problems of poverty and lack of development in some of the world's most isolated and rural areas.

In impoverished places all over the world, electrification has been the well-documented cornerstone of economic development. Without electricity, malnutrition, starvation, illiteracy and extreme poverty are commonplace and economic development is all but impossible.

For example, the town of Pignon, Haiti, has a population of 30,000 and is in a mountainous region 30 miles from the nearest city. Six years ago, electricity service in the community was almost nonexistent, with no plans to build or revitalize the necessary infrastructure.

"The bottom line is if there is no electricity, there is no economy, little health care and less education," explains Mike Callies, engineer for the Minnesota Valley Electrical Co-op.

Callies first traveled to Pignon as leader of a youth mission sponsored by his church. Word of his expertise spread quickly, and he was asked if he could help get assistance from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). In Pignon, he also met Caleb Lucien, a pastor and school administrator with whom he formed the *Cooperative Électricité du Pignon*.

The project began by collecting equipment and donations and has since received tens of thousands of dollars and significant materials donations. A digger truck, bucket truck, 165-kW diesel generator and extensive hardware and wiring have been shipped to and



America's electrical co-ops are helping to bring power to some of the world's poorest areas.

stored in Pignon and donations continue to be received and transported to the site approximately three times per year. Residents contributed money to start up the cooperative and Haitian expatriates living in the United States donated a substantial sum to transport equipment.

The workers that have already visited the site and will continue to do so are all volunteers from U.S. electrical co-ops and churches. Materials, financial contributions and volunteer labor have contributed significantly to the progress already made by this project. Volunteer time has been donated by individuals, as well as by cooperatives that lend their trained personnel to the project at no charge.

"They're building this thing from the ground up. It's a difficult and expensive proposition," says Jim Durnil, former director of NRECA's International Programs Division. "I'm confident that when they call, America's electrical co-ops will come through because, in the end, providing safe, reliable power to rural communities is what we do."