

Girl spends birthday helping Haiti

JESSICA SELBY
jselby@ricentral.com

COVENTRY — Instead of celebrating her eighth birthday with cake, ice cream and presents, Alyssa Conlan spent it holding a collection can outside of several local stores.

The second grade student from Washington Oak Elementary School said that she saw news of the horrific earthquake to hit Haiti earlier this month and was determined to do something to help all of those people.

“I was watching the news and I knew that they needed help so I wanted to raise money so that I could send it to them,” Conlan said.

Conlan said that she talked the idea over with her mother and that together they decided that she would make some “collection buckets” and bring them to several local stores and ask the store managers if it would be OK if she solicited funds from the people that visited the store for the Haitian Relief effort.

She said many stores declined her offer, but just as many welcomed her. Those that did, she said, allowed her to stand at their front entrances and ask customers for donations as they approached and left the building.

Conlan said she and her parents counted all of the money that she had collected by the end of her weekend-long venture and was surprised to learn that she had raised \$363. Dr. Donna Raptakis said Conlan came to school on Monday with news of her venture and a request to get the school on board.

“As a Feinstei School, we do something every month as part of the Feinstei Good Deeds Program so I sent out a flyer letting our families know that this month this would be our project,” Raptakis said.

In the flyer that Raptakis sent out she notified families that the school would be holding just such a collection for the victims of the earthquake in Haiti on Jan. 21 and 22. She also indicated in the flyer that Conlan played an instrumental role in getting the fundraiser going.

Raptakis said over the course of the two days, families, teachers, faculty and administration raised \$1,209.



Submitted Photo

Alyssa Conlan, a second grade student at Washington Oak Elementary School in Coventry, counts up the proceeds from a Haiti relief fundraiser she organized on her own on the weekend of her birthday.

She said that many families were “extremely generous” sending in checks for as much as \$100.

“In two days that is a lot of money to raise,” Raptakis said. “Especially in these times, and the fact that Alyssa, at eight years old, and on the weekend of her birthday too, was so committed to doing this, I think really deserves some recognition.”

Conlan’s second grade teacher, Melissa Bibeault, said Conlan typically is “studious, con-

scientious of others and their needs, and genuinely caring,” but was still taken aback by her “independent drive” for this particular project.

“Her mother had already informed me of her plan to grow out her hair for Locks of Love, so it is in her character to do things for other people, but this was quite an undertaking to initiate all of this on her own, but she did and we are all very proud of her.”

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Conlan said she and her mother will be bringing all of the funds raised by both her and her school, a grand total of 1,574 to Cardi's. The company has agreed to connect Conlan to the Rhode Island Red Cross chapter so she can get the money into the Haiti Disaster Relief Fund.

Deborah Gist, commissioner of the Rhode Island Department of Education, recently reached

out to Conlan to commend her on her efforts. Raptakis said she also sent along a check for \$100 to put towards the Haiti fund.

Gist apparently wasn't the only one to commend Conlan for her good deeds. State Senator Leonidas Raptakis (Dem. Dist. 33) also extended an invitation to Conlan and her family to come to the Statehouse so that he could present Conlan with a Senate citation and introduce her to the entire Senate.