NEWS RELEASE

Chicago family helps provide light for school children in Haiti

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For Glaucia McAtee, a Premium Customer Services agent at Chicago O'Hare International Airport, Black History Month is about more than just recognizing the history of African-Americans in this country. It's also about helping those of African descent in other countries during their time of need.

Glaucia's grandparents, Jose Evaristo and Maria Isoline Barbosa. Jose was the first freed slave in Glaucia's family.

The McAtee family

Glaucia's son, George, tests the solar lights.

Glaucia is a native of Brazil, and the third generation of a free man; her grandfather was born in 1889, one year after slaves were freed in that country. But her childhood was still challenging. She grew up in poverty and quickly discovered the value of education.

"In Brazil, education was very important because it meant success," Glaucia says. "It was the only way out. Today, my career at American Airlines pays for my children to attend private school, which I hope will lead them to a successful and productive life."

That passion for education, especially in countries with extreme poverty, has put Glaucia and her family on a mission. Right now, they're making 100 solar lights for school children in Haiti who have been impacted by devastating earthquakes. She was motivated to help after learning the challenges these kids were up against. "The children are at a disadvantage," Glaucia says. "I wondered, 'How can they continue their studies without proper electricity, doing homework in the dark?'"

Her 12-year-old son, George, has enjoyed building the lights from scratch with his dad and is looking forward to going to Haiti for the first time with his family to deliver them. Glaucia says that trip is coming soon — on American, of course. Meanwhile, George is testing the lights with his teacher, Mr. Van, who has close ties with a Haitian school and will also join the trip.

"He encouraged us to not just go and deliver lights, but make a connection with the school and children prior to going there," Glaucia says. Because of that connection, she and her family have learned of other needs and will be bringing clothes and other necessities with them.

As Glaucia prepares for the trip, she is also reflecting on why this mission is so important. A picture of her grandfather hangs on her wall, and she wants George to learn from his ancestor's freedom. She wants this experience to teach him the responsibility people have to one another: to love regardless of economic status or race and to see others for who they are as people, rather than judge them by how they look or where they're from.

"We all share the same ancestors and we can never forget where we come from," Glaucia says. "When we see someone, our brothers and sisters who need help, we help them."

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