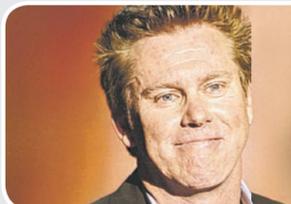


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## Web sites a 2-way 'lifeline' in Haiti disaster

By Judy Keen  
USA Today

After the quake hit, phones in Haiti stopped working and e-mail was unreliable, so Terri Vrugink used a satellite Internet connection to tell family and friends back home in East Grand Rapids, Mich., that she was OK.

"Facebook is my lifeline right now," she said in an interview via the site's messaging system.

Vrugink, a photographer documenting a missionary group's work in Saint-Marc, is among many people using social-networking sites to share news and photos, ask for help finding missing loved ones or seek donations.

"Facebook has been the only way that we could let people see what is happening," said Phyllis Bass, one of five mem-

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Thousands feared dead 7C

### On the web

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Resources and up-to-date news on disaster

bers of the Gateway Free Will Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Va., who landed in Haiti an hour before the quake. She's using the site to let people know they are safe and to post photos. Bass spoke to USA Today via Facebook-messaging.

There have been more than 1,500 Facebook status updates per minute containing the word "Haiti" since the quake, Facebook spokesman Andrew Noyes said.

In this crisis, said Michael

Roberto, a management professor at Bryant University in Smithfield, R.I., "people are realizing the power" of social media by "truly engaging it" and spurring its evolution. Here's how:

People in Haiti used Twitter to share firsthand accounts and photos of the quake, and Twitter users spread requests that people donate to Haitian relief.

Singer Wyclef Jean is using Twitter to solicit texted donations to his Yele Haiti charity. Response was so heavy, said spokeswoman Zakiya Khatou, that its Web site crashed. By Wednesday afternoon, \$250,000 had been raised.

Oxfam America raised \$7,500 in the first 12 hours after the quake through its Facebook page, said new-media manager Megan Weintraub, and celebrities are retweeting Oxfam's

tweets to their followers.

Catholic Relief Services is communicating with its Haiti staff through Facebook and Skype, an online phone service, and sharing updates on Twitter and Facebook, spokesman John Rivera said.

"Staff let their frantic families know they were OK through Facebook," he said.

Blogs written by people in Haiti are being used as online bulletin boards by those seeking missing people.

Facebook ended "15 minutes of panic" Tuesday for Sue Bicko of Conneautville, Pa., whose son Ian, 18, works at an orphanage in Port-de-Paix. Posts from the head of the orphanage and Ian assured her that her son was safe.

"Ten years ago," Bicko said, "we would have been staying up all night, waiting by the phone, wondering."



Patrick Farrell AP/The Miami Herald

Girls cry as a little girl is removed from the rubble in Port-AU-Prince, Haiti, on Wednesday.

## Local groups hard-pressed to help homeless who also have mental problems



Photos by David Bundy Advertiser

Jeannie Dowling, 49, talks Tuesday about being homeless and having a mental illness and other physical disabilities that make her life difficult while at the Friendship Mission in Montgomery.

By Kym Klass  
kklass@gannett.com

Ronald Brooks wears a bright yellow jacket, and in his large, dry hands, holds a black knit stocking hat, embroidered with the word "SECURITY."

The 21-year-old with cognitive disability — he has the mindset of a 15-year-old — has just come in from the cold. He lives in an abandoned apartment where there is no heat or running water. There are only other homeless people, crack addicts and prostitutes.

"They're all right there," he said.

Brooks is a former resident of Friendship Mission.

While overnight temperatures remain below freezing, he is allowed to sleep at the shelter as the cold makes it too unbearable, and dangerous, to stay in his small living space.

Somewhere between a fourth and a fifth of America's homeless are estimated to suffer from severe mental problems.

And because of these mental problems they have difficulty getting help. There are not enough mental health resources to provide them all beds, but their conditions often make it difficult for shelters to take them in.

The dangerously cold weather is the only reason Brooks has been admitted into the shelter on the Mobile Highway. It's not a common practice for the shelter to take in people with mental illnesses. Not with the erratic behavior they can bring with them.

"It's not so much not taking the mentally ill in, but you have these other guys ... you've got to take care of them," Tom



Vince Rosato, left, executive director of the Friendship Mission on Mobile Highway in Montgomery, listens as Ronald Brooks talks about his mental illness and being homeless Tuesday.

Whitfield, the mission's director, said of the other shelter residents.

Although the National Institute of Mental Health said that only about 6 percent of America's overall population was classified as severely mentally ill in 2009, between 20 and 25 percent of America's homeless suffers from some form of severe mental illness, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Cynthia Bisbee said shelters aren't well equipped or trained to handle the special needs of people with mental illnesses.

If they are clients of the Montgomery Area Mental Health Authority, then they can qualify for permanent supportive housing, said Bisbee, MACH's interim executive director. She also is the executive director of the Montgomery Area Community Wellness Coalition.

"There are not nearly

enough beds for that," she said. "They only have about 60 beds for permanent supportive housing for people with mental illness who are homeless."

"If they are clients there, they can be referred for an apartment, along with supportive service such as case management to help them remain in their housing."

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## Riley stands firm on budget forecast

By Sebastian Kitchen  
skitchen@gannett.com

Some lawmakers are skeptical, but Gov. Bob Riley said the state's budgets will not see cuts because of an injection of federal funds he is expecting from Washington including a second federal stimulus.

Riley and Acting Finance Director Bill Newton said they are expecting the U.S. Senate to follow the action of the U.S. House and pass another stimulus that could pump more than \$1 billion into Alabama.

"I am assuming something is going to pass," Riley said.

But, if the money doesn't come, he said there is a contingency plan to cut costs and reduce spending.

The governor said building a budget with furloughs, layoffs and other contingencies that would upset employees when he does not believe there will be a severe budget deficit would be "asinine."

Riley said he has talked to members of Congress and feels comfortable that more help is coming.

Riley's comments from his state of the state address Tuesday about the state's budgets not being in a dire situation were a regular punchline from Democratic lawmakers during committee meetings Wednesday.

Riley said he thought the "doom and gloom" forecasts were coming from lobbyists and gambling operators trying to encourage the Legislature to expand gambling to increase revenue coming into the state.

Some of the lawmakers were shocked to hear Riley say there were no cuts in his budgets after hearing from the Legislative Fiscal Office that there was a more than \$600 million hole in the General Fund.

Lawmakers returned to Montgomery on Tuesday for the regular legislative session, where they will begin crafting

Budgets Page 5A

### BY THE NUMBERS

Every year, the Mid-Alabama Coalition for the Homeless counts the number of homeless in Autauga, Elmore, Lowndes, Bullock and Montgomery counties. The numbers help MACH determine the needs in the community.

Here are the numbers from their July 2009 count:

- Total: 114 (2008: 117)
- Interviewed on streets: 49
- Interviewed/identified in provider agencies: 35
  - Salvation Army Soup Kitchen (noon interviews): 7
  - Salvation Army (sheltered homeless questionnaires): 1
  - Faith Crusade Soup Kitchen (noon interviews): 11
  - Faith Crusade (sheltered homeless questionnaires): 12
  - PATH: 4
- Observed on streets, but not able to interview: 9
- County DHR offices: 9
- County sheriff's offices: 12

Of those interviewed, between 35 percent and 40 percent said they have a mental illness.

The next street enumeration count is Jan. 26.

Source: Mid-Alabama Coalition for the Homeless

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