

Local carpenter Dylan Fires is preparing to lay down his tool belt and spend the next five months in Haiti working for the international relief organization Samaritan's Purse, commonly known for their Operation Christmas Child shoe box project. The organization responds to domestic and international disasters, brings children with heart defects to the US for life-saving surgeries, and has developed a wide variety of international projects.

"I've wanted to do this kind of work for a long time (humanitarian aid)," Fires said. "One day, I just happened to hear about Samaritan's Purse on a local TV station."

That broadcast led Dylan to apply for and eventually win a highly competitive five-month paid internship with the organization.

In Léogâne, Dylan will help with daily tasks on projects ranging from water treatment programs to a multi-partner recycling program that is generating new livelihoods for families impacted by the massive 2010 earthquake. And there's always the possibility that the tools of his trade will come in handy along the way.

Dylan's parents, William "Jinks" Fires and Peggy Shannon of Pekin, have been a familiar presence at Churchill Downs for decades and have broken, trained and exercised countless thoroughbreds on the famous track. Jinks Fires' brother, Earlie Fires, reined hundreds of horses into the winner's circle in a career that spanned forty-four years.

But, Dylan's hands have taken to the hammer rather than the horse.

"A church group came and worked on our house when I was 14," he says, remembering the day. "That experience instilled a sense of happiness in me and I knew then and there, that's what I wanted to do."

He graduated from Eastern High School in Pekin, and enrolled at Ivy Technical Community College in Sellersburg, Indiana.

In September 2012, he matriculated with a degree in Applied Science of Industrial Technology.

"That's a fancy name for a carpenter," he says with a grin. "Maybe it's an elementary view of the world, but I want to use my God-given skills to help people in other cultures."

For more information on the work of Samaritan's Purse, go to www.samaritanspurse.org