

## NOURISHED IN HAITI

In Haiti's central plateau, unemployment hovers around 80 percent. The island nation has been almost deforested by people seeking fuel for cooking. Food can be scarce.

After completing his undergraduate degree at Oxford University, Dipesh Patel took classes at the University of Miami. While there, he raised money for and volunteered in a mission to Ecuador. Among the sources of funding his group relied on were the Rotary Clubs of South Florida. By 2005, Patel was looking for a project that, to succeed, counted on the involvement of those being served rather than simply serving them. He started talking to a friend about Haiti. Then a former Haitian health minister shared an idea with Patel.

Today, Patel is a third-year student in the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. And finally, he has seen the minister's idea come to fruition. Haiti's central plateau residents will soon have a fully functioning, potentially lifesaving, factory that produces Akamil, a staple food consisting of cereal, beans, minerals, and vitamins.

"It was an incredible idea built on sustainability and empowerment," says Patel. "Unfortunately, nutrition isn't quite the 'sexy topic' in medicine or public health and is often ignored. This ... is exactly what attracted me to the idea."

Patel is cochair of a nine-member group that raised $112,000, primarily from the Rotarians, for the project, which is overseen by Project MediShare, a nonprofit organization started by University of Miami physicians. The factory will open this fall and can produce up to 10 tons of Akamil daily. A pound of it costs 40 cents and can feed a family of three for a day, Patel says.

The cereal and beans are grown by local farmers. The Akamil will be sold by women's cooperatives, who are given start-up capital in the form of microcredit loans. The project also involves a training component for farmers and salespeople, housing, and teaching uses for Akamil and the value of healthy eating.

In between his Pitt classes, rotations, and research on pneumonia in children younger than 5 (the biggest killer of young children worldwide), Patel volunteers at local clinics and shelters and for the homeless. He plans to maintain a high level of community involvement in whatever medical specialty he chooses for his career.

He'll go back to Haiti for the opening.

"It's self-sustaining," Patel says of the Akamil project.

"We thought it would take six months, but it's taken three years. We think it will make a difference." *—Joe Miksch*