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‘Helping hands’ improve productivity at Baghdad site

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BAGHDAD--Two U.S. Army Corps of Engineers employees at the Falcon Power Plant project in south Baghdad are proving the adage “take care of your people, and they will take care of you” by ensuring the Iraqi work force has first aid for its minor, work related injuries.

The quality control manager for the contractor, SEI Group, Incorporated, Gerry Valliant, and the quality assurance manager for the Corps of Engineers, Mario Guzman, at Camp Falcon are improving the productivity of the Iraqi workers by caring for their construction-related, minor injuries, such as blisters, cuts, scrapes and headaches. The two Good Samaritans have not only volunteered to help build a free Iraq, but are using their personal, as well as donated, first aid supplies to treat the Iraqi workers.



However the increased productivity was a side benefit of what the two managers saw as their opportunity to improve conditions for the Iraqi workers at their job site. Their efforts began as simply complying with the safety requirements of the contract.

The two managers began performing caring first aid at the project’s beginning in June 2004 and they plan to continue until its completion in November. The minor first aid is being performed for the workers because both of the managers feel that the workers deserve respect and better treatment than they had under the Saddam regime.

“When we started the project some workers were showing up wearing sandals, flip-flops and some of them even barefooted, Mario and I contacted our families and had them collect and send us used boots to give to the workers as a reward for a safe job,” said Valliant.

As time passed, their efforts turned to helping workers who had minor ailments. Because of safety concerns for the workers, the Iraqis are housed in tents on the work site. “When I would walk through the tent in the evening someone would say ‘come look at this’ and I would do what I could to help,” said Valliant.

“These guys had years of suffering under Saddam. I just want to show them someone cares, and if I have to buy a few band aides and some ointment to do it, then that’s ok,” said Valliant. “I just want to assist them, show them...that we’re there for them.”

Both Valliant and Guzman downplay that they’ve done anything special, but they took the opportunity to show the Iraqi workers that they genuinely cared about their welfare.

“I really don’t do anything,” said Guzman. “I just help Gerry when he needs something.” But his actions contradict his modesty when others relate the times he has used personal supplies to aid workers who otherwise have no access to the first aid items.

“The Iraqi workers appreciate the caring attitude of the QA and QC managers and it shows in their productivity and allegiance to the project,” said Wes Snowden, 5th Brigade Combat Team Resident Engineer. “The Iraqi workers fondly refer to Gerry Valliant as Doctor Geddy.”

Nor does it appear the lessons of caring will end with the project. “Iraqi engineers on this project are observing and learning to care for their countrypersons,” said Snowden.

“There is no greater caring than to work after hours and to use your own money to administer first aid to Iraqi workers to make their lives more comfortable and enjoyable,” he added.