

# Plumber



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## Plumbers Without Borders Committed to Improving World Health

By Ed Wodalski | October 27, 2015 | Recommend 48

### Database enables nonprofit organization to connect volunteers with plumbing-related projects

Seattle-based Plumbers Without Borders completed the first phase of its global database/directory this month, enabling volunteers and organizations to [register online](#). After creating a password, volunteers are prompted to provide contact information to connect with humanitarian organizations on plumbing-related projects around the world.

PWB has about 300 plumbers and another 200 industry-related individuals registered in its database.

The next phase of the project will enable volunteers with completed profiles to search available projects via a mobile app or computer. In the interim, new project information will be posted on the [Plumbers Without Borders website](#).

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PWB is a grass-roots organization committed to increasing access to safe water and sanitation, with the ultimate goal of improving global public health. There is no cost to join.



The group doesn't initiate projects, but supports ongoing projects managed by humanitarian organizations around the world.

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The 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization was formed in 2010 by retired Seattle plumber Dom DiGregorio, master plumber Fred Volkens, their wives, Carmela and Judy, and members of the Northwest Washington Chapter of IAPMO and the Cascade Chapter of IAPMO. PWB's vision is for everyone to have access to safe water through the implementation of appropriate plumbing and sanitary systems.

The group was inspired by the impact fellow plumber and friend Jed Scheuermann had on the lives of the people of Haiti following the earthquake of 2010 and how critical plumbing

and sanitation was to the health and well-being of everyone in that country.

Since its founding, the group has helped hospital administrators in Ethiopia develop plumbing, sanitation and maintenance procedures, worked with Habitat for Humanity on housing restorations in King County, Washington, and helped improve the plumbing infrastructure at several King County community centers.

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In 2013, DiGregorio and Volkens, traveled to Ethiopia with a group of volunteer doctors and nurses from Seattle Alliance Outreach (SAO). Their mission was to help design solutions for upgrading the plumbing system at the Zewditu Hospital in Addis Ababa, as well as help set up a nonprofit dialysis clinic.

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“There were no working faucets in the operating room pre-wash area, and doctors had to resort to using water from 5-gallon buckets poured over their hands prior to surgery,” DiGregorio says.

“In nearly every clinic there was a risk of cross-connection problems between the dialysis machine and the sewer drain.”

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Schilling says the organization’s main focus is showing local personnel how to do the work.

“We don’t want to just show up with a toolbox and say we’re here to fix stuff. When we’re

finished with a project, we want the local people to be able to help themselves.”

Schilling has made three trips to Haiti and trained students at Haiti Tec vocational college in Port au Prince to install water purification systems designed by World Water Partners, an organization affiliated with Seattle University.

Through a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, American Standard Brands developed the SaTo toilet pan, which Schilling installed in Haiti while training plumbing students. The pan employs mechanical and water seals that reduce disease transmission by closing off pit latrines.

“It’s a country with a population of 12 million people and not a single certified plumber,” Schilling says. “If we can do this, it will make a big difference in the health of this country.”

PWB has the support of the World Plumbing Council, international plumbing associations and receives corporate sponsorship from American Standard Brands.

Going forward, one of PWB’s main goals is to establish local chapters both nationally and internationally. DiGregorio says the success of that effort will

depend on the organization growing its global volunteer database.

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*Fred Volkers at Zewditu hospital in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. (Courtesy Plumbers Without Borders)*