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Richard Brothers Financial Advisors in 2018 hosted **Tim Harrison**, seen at front, a registered nurse who volunteers for **Doctors Without Borders**, to give a presentation on his missions to South Sudan and special Mediterranean SOS expeditions to help asylum seekers.

PHOTO / COURTESY OF RICHARD BROTHERS FINANCIAL ADVISORS

South Portland financial firm volunteers to aid volunteers aiding the world

BY LAURIE SCHREIBER

In 2015, Richard Brothers Financial Advisors in South Portland developed a partnership with an international humanitarian group, Doctors Without Borders/Medicins Sans Frontieres, to provide no-cost financial planning services for the organization's volunteers serving around the world.

The relationship is designed to help the Doctors Without Borders volunteers manage their financial affairs while in settings where that's often difficult.

Doctors Without Borders, headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, provides medical assistance to people affected by conflict, epidemics, disasters, or exclusion from health care. The organization's U.S. headquarters are in New York City.

Richard Brothers has also raised about $25,000 for the group through annual fundraisers.

We asked Richard Brothers' founder and president, Randall Richard, about how the relationship unfolded. Here's an edited transcript.

Mainebiz: How did your company's relationship with Doctors Without Borders come about?

Randall Richard: My wife and I had been supporting the organization for several years. We were talking about their amazing work. As a financial advisor, I started thinking, 'Imagine trying to manage your financial affairs while doing this work.' I decided to reach out to them and say, 'We think the organization has done amazing work. Our capability is helping people with financial challenges of any type. I'd be willing to provide support to some of your people who are trying to make the world a better place, if you're open to it.'

Their head of HR called right back and said that, coincidentally, they had just done a survey of the U.S. expats — about 400 per year — and one of the biggest things that was a challenge for them was this topic. He said, 'The timing is perfect. We have an overwhelming need for this and if your organization is open to providing that kind of support, we're all in.'

MB: What kind of financial advisory services do the volunteers need?

RR: For some, it's simply a coaching call, such as how to set your phone or laptop so you can easily access your financial institution. For others, there are specific matters to deal with — they're living in South Sudan, how do they get their taxes done, how do they get their estate planning in order? We get these complicated challenges and

Richard Brothers Financial Advisors president, **Randall Richard**, speaks at a 2018 fundraiser his company hosted for **Doctors Without Borders**.

PHOTO / COURTESY OF RICHARD BROTHERS FINANCIAL ADVISORS

we coach them through how to break that down and work on it.

Some have financial wealth but don't have a trusted financial advisory team. They consider working with us to follow their affairs and we have a longer-term relationship with them.

We don't charge for the basic planning, unless it gets into a deep dive and we have to bring in other professionals.

MB: Could you share some examples of folks you've worked with?
RR: We meet with them remotely. The first person we talked with was posted in Rwanda. She went to law school and was the liaison between various organizations. When we talked with her, she was in a little hut and it was pouring rain. You could hear the rain on the metal roof. There were no screens and it was buggy. We started out like any other client meeting, saying, 'It's great to meet you. How was your day?' She said, 'Today was very challenging. I had a meeting with two of the warlords and we had a good conversation about how we're going to work together.'

We worked with a locum tenens physician [a practitioner who travels to temporary placements] who was serving in South Sudan and who is really committed to helping in these troubled places. With our planning counsel and advice, she has been able to put away enough money so that she can volunteer more often and still have her long-term goals and needs met. She started with about half a million dollars in assets. Now she's got over two million and is getting very close to the point where she'll be able to draw enough income so that she can supplement as many missions as she would like. It's very fulfilling to understand what their plans are and help them get there.

MB: How many of the U.S. volunteers have you worked with so far?
RR: About 20% of them reach out to us for coaching.

MB: What's the top goal of these clients?
RR: They want to have a place they can call home. Many of them are between here and other countries. Many don't feel like they have a home. Many are renters and moving around and use their parents' or another family member's address. Of all the financial challenges they face, the biggest one is, 'Gosh, at some point I just want to have a property that I own, to say that's my home.'

MB: Did it come as a surprise to discover that you could help the organization's mission beyond donations?
RR: As business owners, sometimes we forget about our own core expertise and how valuable that can be. I think this partnership exemplifies how we can say, 'Can we fit in additional meetings to help people who are trying to make the world a better place? Yes, we can.'

What can you do? You can do a little bit. And I think we're doing our little bit. We're doing something versus nothing. We're not on the front lines. But we can support them so they can focus on the work at hand and not worry about their bills and credit card statements. M