

Santa Monica Beach Ringflyers

Who we are:

The Santa Monica Ringflyers are a diverse group of men, women and children who come together for fitness, fun and to continue the tradition of the original Muscle Beach.

Charity Work:

Combined, the Santa Monica Ringflyers have raised more than \$2500 for the Red Cross 9-11, Tsunami, Katrina & Haitian Earthquake Relief Funds.

1) In 2001, ringer Michael Teisan organized a benefit day with demonstrations and Cirque du Soleil performers, raising \$500 for the Red Cross 9-11 Family Fund (see NY Times article below)



Together, we can save a life

2) In January/February, 2005 ringer Jessica Cail organized a series of ring demonstrations and lessons for charity, raising \$690 for the Red Cross Tsunami Relief Fund.

3) In September, 2005, ringer Jessica Cail organized a similar fundraiser for the Red Cross Hurricane Katrina Relief Fund, raising approximately \$100 from the one-day event.

4) In January, 2010, ringer Jessica Cail organized a fundraiser for the Red Cross Haitian Earthquake Relief Fund, raising \$900 in cash and a similar amount in text message donations (see SM Daily Press article below)

Press:

The following is a selection of press articles featuring our group. More articles can be found at www.swingaring.com/news.html

Los Angeles Times

Hang Time

By Nicole LaPorte, Nicole LaPorte is a staff reporter at Variety.
July 28, 2005



In the scene around Santa Monica's traveling rings, the regulars have found an art form, an ad hoc family and, in some instances, salvation.

"Filchyboy" is in the zone. He reaches up, grabs the first ring and solemnly lowers his head, then begins running back and forth to build momentum. He takes off and kicks his feet, toes pointed, out to one side. His face tilts back to greet the sun. He grabs the second ring with his free hand and pushes himself higher by cranking downward with his ropy arms. For a split-moment he makes contact with a supporting pole and alights there, Spider-Man style. Then he swooshes down, chest forward, arm outstretched for the next ring, and the next, down to the 10th ring and back, along the way completing a series of twirls, flips, dislocates and then, finally, a daredevil dismount into the sand.

His return to earth is met with claps, compliments. "Great, man." "Nice swivel." Filchyboy pulls off his headphones, grins, and is absorbed into the cluster of swingers waiting their turns. Most of them are regulars: about two dozen young men and a few women, many in their 20s and 30s, who come down every weekend to work out on the traveling rings on the beach just south of the Santa Monica Pier. More than just a pastime, the rings are a significant fixture in their lives. They've helped some pull themselves together after debilitating setbacks, both physical and emotional. They've provided a focus and a community. Many swingers liken the scene to an ad hoc family.

Yet at the same time there's a loose, unmoored quality to the group. Most don't know each other's last names—many, like Filchyboy (Chris Filkins), go by nicknames—and as for where anyone's from and what anyone does for a living, who cares? At the rings, what matters is what you can do 15 feet up in the air.

To be clear, the ring swingers don't swing. Rather, they fly, soar, kick, coil, twirl. Tourists and other beachgoers regularly gather around, agape at the complicated routines and tricks—moves that resemble maneuvers from X Games sports such as skateboarding and snowboarding, or a D.I.Y. version of Cirque du Soleil.

"It's not like traditional gymnastics. It's more street," says Robert Chapin, a professional stunt- and swordsman who trains at the rings. (Last summer, when the swingers recruited former U.S. Olympic gymnastics judge Frank Endo to judge their annual self-organized competition, some were disgruntled when he deducted points for toes that weren't gracefully pointed.)

Beyond the swingers' skill and daring, the sheer scale of the traveling rings, which until recently were the only set of their kind in the world, commands attention. The 75-foot-long, 15-foot-high steel frame supports 10 rings, each set about 8 feet apart and suspended 7 feet off the ground. The idea is to swing down and back as artfully, and inventively, as possible, ideally without hitting a pole or rogue ring. Or worse. Four years ago, Paul Scott, a rings elder at 52, fractured a vertebra while practicing a back flip.

There's no real glory in the rings. No money. No sponsorships. Impressed hoots from tourists are about it. But for the regulars, the rings serve intense, almost religious roles in their lives.

"Everyone gets sucked down here for different reasons," says Wil Bethel, a writer who waits tables and who bicycles to the beach from Koreatown twice a week.

For Filkins, a 39-year-old single father, the rings were a kind of salvation when his life was at a low point a few years ago. His wife had run away, taking their daughter with her. Filkins, who'd been a stay-at-home dad, was without a job and spent six weeks living on the beach, showering with the homeless, his world reeling. Eventually he picked up the pieces: got hired at a website, gained custody of his daughter, moved into an apartment in Santa Monica. He also bought a pair of roller blades, which led him to the rings, where he'd watch a dreadlocked swinger called "Action" fly through the sky.

"After about a year or so of that I finally started trying it myself," Filkins says, propped up on a low wall near the rings. The wall separates the beach from the Rest of the World—the clots of tourists tooling along the bike path and the chi-chi hotels.

"It gave me all of my self-esteem back. I feel like I'm a completely different person than I used to be a few years ago," he says. "I don't know whether it would have happened without [the rings], but this definitely gave me focus."

Now he and his 11-year-old daughter, Kassia, are both regulars.

It's a warmer-than-usual Sunday in May, and Jessica Cail and Brad Meyers are starting to heat things up. They're practicing double leg-overs, a trick that involves swinging a leg over a ring and, in the process, momentarily letting go of the ring to reach under and grab it again, then doing the same with the other leg.

In execution, it looks something like airborne leapfrog.

Cail, with long red hair pulled back in a ponytail and a sturdy build, drops from the third ring. "I miss on the left, still," she says.

Meyers falls to his knees in the sand and sits back on his heels, prayer-like, to stretch his quads.

Gena Sorochkin, bearded and unseasonably dressed in winter biking gear, sits on the wall and watches. Scattered around him are bags of white hand chalk, tossed sweatshirts and water bottles.

While growing up in the Soviet Union, Sorochkin was a cyclist on the junior national team. "When I was 7, I wanted to do gymnastics, but I was told I was too old," he says. "You have to start when you're 4, 5. Now I'm 44 and doing the rings.... I'm older and I take long breaks, but at the end of the day I still have my hands."

Sorochkin turns over his palms: They are only slightly roughed up with calluses.

A new arrival, Erick Cabrera, drops his gym bag onto the sand. "The sun's not too strong," he says approvingly. Cabrera is greeted with an outstretched fist by Michael Villegas, a soft-spoken machinist who wears wire-rimmed glasses and his dark hair pulled back in a braid.

"Hey, man," Cabrera says as their fists touch. His crooked grin reveals a chipped tooth, courtesy of a wayward ring.

Fists are the secret handshake of the rings fraternity. Besides connoting insiderdom, they're also practical. Swingers have heavily callused and sometimes bloody hands. Fists keep it clean and painless.

Cabrera rides his motorcycle to the rings from his apartment in Hollywood every weekend, sometimes after nights working as an exotic dancer. By day he's a personal trainer and bodybuilder, and his swollen pectoral muscles twitch slightly as he talks. (Like most of the male swingers, Cabrera generally forgoes a shirt.)

For him, the rings are "like flying."

"There's no equipment. Only your grips and your talent," he says. "When you've got a problem and you come here, you forget about everything. It's like doing yoga. I don't do yoga, because I know I can find a better source when I'm feeling bad. I come by here, and it's only my soul and my security."

Seven years ago Cabrera was working as an electrician in Mexico City and was nearly killed while fixing an elevator. Unable to get out of the shaft, he was forced to fall seven flights to avoid being crushed when the cab above him began to descend. He shattered his knee and was unable to walk for eight months.

When he recovered he felt "born again." He started taking his life, and his body, more seriously—lifting weights and, three years ago, training on the rings. (Not that he lives entirely risk-free; since the elevator trauma, he's survived major motorcycle and skydiving accidents and has the scars to prove it.)

Today, Cabrera says, "I feel great, man. I feel great with my life, with God, you know. He gave me a lot of opportunities."

There are a few unwritten rules at the rings. Such as: chalk is to be shared. A swinger gets only one warning when he's about to be hit by a ring (the rings can swing violently when a swinger pushes off from one to the next). But most important: Nothing matters more than style.

"Everybody tries to raise the level and tries to come up with new tricks, which is cool," says Bruno

Angelico, a French Italian ringsman. As he talks he applies a mixture of Chinese herbs to his sore upper arms—preparation for his first swing of the afternoon.

"I'm kind of farouche. An enemy of routine," Angelico continues in his thickly accented English. "So every time I come up with something I like to raise the stakes higher. For me this is not about working out. It's also about being able to create."

Three years ago Angelico's back was broken in a car accident, and only recently has he been able to return to the rings.

"When I was at the hospital the only question I had to the surgeons was, 'OK, but when you think I'm going to be able to go back on the rings?' " he says. "They would look at me and they go, 'Bruno, we're just trying to get you walking.' ... The first time that I grabbed the rings again, I was like, was I doing this stuff before? It was like moving walls. It was so hard."

Now Angelico is trying to get back to the point where he can swing upside down, a move enabled by a metal hook he Velcros around one ankle.

Angelico isn't the only one with a signature trick. Filkins is known for his pole play (the Spider-Man move). Chris Tin, a.k.a. "Flyaway Chris," a film composer with a mop of straight black hair, is so nicknamed for his dismount, which incorporates a soaring back flip. Cabrera likes to roll upside down and swing with both hands and feet on the rings, inspiring monkey-calls from his friends.

"Just walking down the beach at night, you can tell who it is by their silhouette," says Jessica Cail.

The first public gymnast rings in Santa Monica were built in the 1930s for the original Muscle Beach . Back then there were several sets, some with only a pair of rings. Ross Simms, now 70, a Muscle Beach alumnus who performed on them in the late 1940s and early 1950s, is crankily dismissive of the current generation of beach swingers. "They're not doing the same tricks I was doing," he says. "Those guys are just swinging on rings. I can do what they do all day long."

In the late 1950s, the Muscle Beach equipment was dismantled. Soon after, a set of 10 traveling rings was designed by a local architect and built by L.A. Steelcraft, a Pasadena-based recreation equipment company. They eventually fell into disrepair and were often missing rings until the late 1980s, when a group of Muscle Beach old-timers pushed to have the area restored. Although there was initial resistance from the city of Santa Monica , which feared liabilities, the current set—also built by L.A. Steelcraft—was installed in 2000, along with a smaller set for kids.

Two years ago, Dorlene Kaplan, a publisher of guides to educational travel and self-described "rings enthusiast" who lives in New York City, worked with the city's parks department to have a set of traveling rings erected in Riverside Park on Manhattan's Upper West Side. In May, Kaplan got approval to build a kids' set. She's also trying to bring the rings to Miami Beach , where she grew up.

he New York rings inspire more of a "family-type thing" than the Santa Monica rings, Kaplan says in a telephone conversation. "It's really quite different in terms of the people who use them. There are some hotshots who come out, but on the weekends I usually see families."

"Eyes open, iPods down!" Filkins barks. It's nearing dusk and the shadows of the rings are starting to get long, the hazy yellow sun more forgiving.

Filkins and four other guys are working on the Switch, a difficult routine in which people swing one after the other and form a human chain, then bypass one another (that's the tough part) when they turn to head back. Filkins, Cabrera, Tin, Meyers and Eddie Saleh have been attempting the move for a few weeks but have yet to nail it, even after practicing on the kids' rings and discussing it on <http://www.Swingaring.com>,

a rings-dedicated website where swingers chat and post messages ("Grips for sale!"; "Anyone heading down today?").

"Last night I was thinking about the move and some possibilities," began a post by " Venice ." "If we do something quickly after we clump up it will work, but the pull in the middle is intense if we hold it."

Filchyboy responded: "I think Chris was right yesterday. On the smaller rings the pull in the middle shouldn't be so bad and we should have more time to work out a move before our shoulders fail from the stress. I think some cool stuff may come of this."

On the beach, these theories get broken down into simple edicts. "Swing real big!" Filkins calls as he sets out. The others follow until a chain is formed and everyone is sharing a ring. Five pairs of feet dangle above the sand as an audience of beach-goers, en route to their cars, begins forming, sensing something's up. So far so good.

Things fall apart when it's time to switch directions. Saleh, unable to maneuver past Meyers, is forced to drop to the ground. The rest of the chain quickly collapses.

"Hey, you weren't supposed to let go," Cabrera kids Saleh as the men regroup in huddle mode.

"We had the timing down, we just need to apply that when we get bigger," says Tin, who has the strategic mind-set of an Eagle Scout. Last year he had "Original Muscle Beach Traveling Rings" T-shirts made and helped organize fundraisers for Sept. 11 and tsunami victims.

"I wasn't pulling high," someone confesses.

"Let's see if we can do four. We did five last time," suggests Filkins.

No one argues. But after a few better-but-still-not-there attempts, the Switch is abandoned for free form.

Filkins puts his headphones back on and walks a few yards away from the others. He rests his hands on his hips and looks out at the ocean. The water is placid under the crazily lit sky—pink- and orange-streaked, with purply-blue clouds.

It's time to fly.

The New York Times

September 9, 2002, Monday

On the Beach, a Subculture of Lords of the Rings

By NEIL STRAUSS (NYT)



SANTA MONICA, Calif., Sept. 7 — "Look at this," Lawrence Kolb, known by the nickname Indian, said, slipping a finger into the loose waistband of his jeans. "My waist size has gone down from 32 to 28 inches in six months."

"And look," he said, fanning the lateral muscles of his bare back like wings. "I never even worked out my upper body before this."

Mr. Kolb was not talking about a miracle diet or celebrity trainer. He was discussing a row of metal rings that was built two years ago on the beach near the Santa Monica Pier as part of a public fitness and recreation area.

The rings are 10 dangling hoops, about seven feet off the ground, and the idea is for people to swing Tarzan-style from the first ring to the last and back, a feat harder than it sounds. This is not normal playground equipment: it was built for the beach to the specifications of a similar set that used to be on the old Muscle Beach here. The rings were erected after great debate with the city's risk-management team, which feared the city would be liable for injuries.

In a clear demonstration of the maxim "If you build it they will come," the traveling rings have attracted their own subculture. "We are our own society," said Mr. Kolb, a freelance director of photography for television. "We are the Lords of the Rings. We kick it here until the sun goes down, and sometimes we come back at 3:30 in the morning because no one is here."

It is a scene that Brett Horner, a senior analyst for the Community and Cultural Services Department of the City of Santa Monica, said was completely unanticipated.

Every day, a mix of latchkey teenagers, struggling actors, foreign exchange students and others can be found there. Most of these ring people previously had little athletic prowess, but after swinging from four to seven days a week, they look like professional gymnasts. "We recognize each other by shaking hands," said Jessica Cail, a local graduate student, "because you can feel the calluses from gripping the rings."

Michael Teisan, 17, a high school senior, often shows his hands to tourists, revealing calluses the size of quail eggs. He is at the rings seven days a week, sometimes talking on his cellphone as he twirls and flips among them. "I guess it's the rush of flying," Mr. Teisan said. "And when you come down here, all your worries go away. You don't think about anything else but the rings."

"My parents are glad I'm here instead of in the street," he added.

In fact, the rings are responsible for his first attempt at philanthropy. One day, Mr. Teisan, Indian, and a Frenchman named Bruno Angelico were hanging out at the rings, talking about 9/11, when they decided to organize a benefit. They brought down performers from the Cirque de Soleil and movie stuntmen, and organized a ring demonstration day, raising \$500 for the Red Cross.

The original rings were built in the 1930's at Santa Monica beach in an area that became known as Muscle Beach, says Judith Meister, a retired Santa Monica beach manager who was responsible for building the

recreation area several years ago. "It was really the beginning of the whole physical fitness movement," Ms. Meister said, "and a lot of people who worked in Hollywood and did stunts came to Muscle Beach."

In the 1950's, she said, the city tore down much of the equipment. The traveling rings remained, but were often neglected and missing parts. In 1995, a group of Muscle Beach alumni in their 70's and 80's began working with the city to restore the area; the project was finally completed in October 2000. A miniature set of traveling rings was even erected for children.

Instead of creating a scene like that of the old Muscle Beach, the rings became the centerpiece for a very different beach civilization. At sunrise, several of the homeless people who wash themselves in the bathroom facilities nearby make their way to the rings, which they use to play on and exercise. In the afternoon, the ring people can be found flying through the air and teaching their moves to tourists. In the evening, opportunists with metal detectors patrol the sand under the rings, looking for change and jewelry dropped from the pockets of the airborne.

The bike and in-line skate rental stand on the boardwalk nearby has even started selling blocks of chalk for ring-swingers to rub on their hands. Sometimes, said Edwin Garcia, who manages the stand, he sells 16 blocks of chalk a day. Some of the more serious ring-swingers have bought gymnast handgrips and wrist support bands — and Mr. Angelico even has hooks for his feet, so he can swing upside down.

"I came up with a move called the Flying Bob," said Robert Chapin, who performs stunts and swordplay in movies, including "Hook" and "Army of Darkness." He demonstrated, inverting himself on one of the rings and wrapping his legs around the chain supporting it as he swung. He then demonstrated another acrobatic invention — tandem swinging — by grabbing Ms. Cail and traversing the rings with her.

Every day, hundreds of local residents and tourists stop to watch such stunts and often find themselves succumbing to the lure of the rings. "It's become a serious addiction for me," said Ryan Ashford, 20, a philosophy major at the University of Southern California. "I'd never even seen them before until three months ago, and now I'm down here four times a week. I even have dreams about them — and nightmares.

Remembering Muscle Beach New Book Celebrates Santa Monica Heyday

Peggy Clifford
Mirror Editor



Helen Smith, shown with Moe Most, swinging on the high bar

It was long ago, in a time very different from today, yet it probably couldn't have happened anywhere but Santa Monica -- "the zenith city by the sundown sea," as its boosters once called it, the beach town whose leaders have tried, intermittently, to ignore the beach, shut it down or dress it up, and, inevitably, failed, because the beach is the primary fact of Santa Monica. "Remembering Muscle Beach" (Angel City Press, 1999) by Harold Zinkin with Bonnie Hearn recalls, in grand detail, one of the most glorious, significant and ultimately shameful chapters in Santa Monica's history.

Zinkin became the first Mr. California in 1941. In 1945, he won the national AAU weightlifting championship, light heavyweight division, and went on to invent the Universal Gym Machine. He was here, at Muscle Beach, at the center of it all, and his memory is as sharp as the extraordinary photographs which illustrate his story.

He begins the book with an apt quotation from Camus: "In the midst of winter, I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer."

In the mid-1930s, when the country had been brought low by the Depression, a bunch of boys began gathering at The Beach, after school and work. Zinkin mopped the cafeteria floor at his school and later set pins in a bowling alley for 25 cents an hour. Then, he and his pals, drove 21 miles from east L.A. to The Beach. "It began," Zinkin and Hearn write, "as a place where a few friends could work out in the sand and grew to include a mismatched but amiable group of athletes, circus performers, wrestlers, college gymnasts, movie stunt people....On weekends the crowd of spectators could easily top ten thousand, all lining the sidewalk to watch amazing stunts."

Stuntmen and circus performers went to the beach to practice their craft. The “kids,” boys and girls, went there for fun and stayed on to make lives, and livelihoods, out of it. Future stuntman Russ Saunders, future gym impresarios Vic Tanney and Joe Gold and Jack LaLanne (who used to drive all night from his Berkeley health club), along with Zinkin, were among the young athletes who became regulars at what Zinkin calls “the birthplace of the fitness movement.”



Pudgy Stockton holds Glen Sundby in a handstand. Another hard-working Sunday in the 50's.

“Muscle Beach really was glue,” he says. “You became part of it. You became part of the activities. There wasn’t anywhere else in the world where you could find that kind of life or know people like these.”

Legend credits a physical education teacher, Kate Giroux, with persuading the City of Santa Monica and the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) to install a tumbling platform and other equipment on the beach. In fact, according to Zinkin, Paul Brewer and Jimmy Pfeiffer, who took gymnastics at John Adams Junior High, and Al Niederman, a former gymnast who worked as a mechanic for the bus company, built some basic equipment themselves and finally persuaded the City to kick in some money. As for Giroux, at one point, she tried to get the Muscle Beach habitués banned from the beach.

No one knows where the name came from, but some of the regulars, like Brewer, didn’t like it, nor did they like to be labeled “Muscleheads,” as they were, but they loved gymnastics and people loved watching them. Just south of the Santa Monica Pier, the Beach became more and more popular with athletes -- including many young women -- and spectators. In 1935, the City of Santa Monica hired UCLA coach Cecil Hollingsworth to teach gymnastics at Muscle Beach. By the late 1930s, there were 50 or 60 regulars and thousands of spectators came to see them perform on weekends.

Writers and photographers did countless stories and eventually The Beach was known nationally and internationally. To Zinkin and the other regulars, its fame was irrelevant, it was, he writes, “our education, our club, our cause. It was our youth.”

When America went to war in 1941, Muscle Beach went with it.

The City of Santa Monica sent Zinkin, Saunders and Ran Hall out to promote the sale of war bonds. Subsequently, they and most of their pals served in the armed forces. One of them, John Kornoff, appeared on the cover of LOOK magazine, bare-chested, holding a rifle, as a symbol of the American fighting man. As much as anything else, Zinkin believes, that photo was “the beginning of a change of attitude regarding fitness,” but, he adds, “It was certainly revolutionary to see a Muscle Beach regular glorified instead of vilified.”

Joe Gold, served in the Coast Guard, and suffered spinal injuries that later made it necessary for him to use a wheelchair, but it didn't stop him from founding Gold's Gym and World Gym.

After the war, “No longer kids, the Muscle Beach regulars tried to find their places in the world that was ever so slowly starting to accept them...(and) show business was a natural next step.”

Stars worked out with them. They worked as stunt doubles and one, Steve Reeves, became a star himself. As some of the regulars went off to work as chorus boys with Mae West, weight lifters and wrestlers began to join the gymnasts at The Beach. In 1952, Zinkin opened a gym in Fresno. Within three years, he had five gyms and a TV exercise show, but he began to hear stories about trouble back at Muscle Beach.



The kids at the beach became as involved in the mounts as the adults.

The crowds of spectators had got too big for the City to deal with and it wanted to turn the space into parking lots. In addition, it was rumored that the owners of the Ocean Park Pier alleged that the free shows drew paying customers away from the Pier, while the owners of the Surf Rider Hotel found the entire scene offensive. In any event, the City closed Muscle Beach down after five weight lifters who lived in a boardwalk apartment were reportedly found partying with two underage girls. The headline in the Evening Outlook read: Officials Stirred as Sex Orgy Bared.” Although the cases against the weight lifters were dropped, the City bulldozed the area, claiming it had become a magnet for “perverts” and “narcissistic parasites.” Several months later, the City reopened it, as “Beach Park 4.” Use of the name “Muscle Beach” was forbidden, as were weightlifting and any events not approved by the City's recreation department,

It was never the same. Zinkin concludes, “Muscle Beach, as we knew it, may be gone, but the Muscle Beach attitude is not. Those of us who were around in the early days feel vindicated -- happy to be alive and still flexing our muscles.”

Evoking a unique time and place and some unique young people, “Remembering Muscle Beach” finally sets the record straight and fills in another gap in the great and wonderfully strange Southern California saga.

It should be noted that in tardy recognition of this vanished era, as well as that “invincible summer,” the City of Santa Monica is resurrecting Muscle Beach as part of the South Beach rehab.

THE NEXT AMERICAN IDOL?
SEE PAGE 4

We have you covered

THE TO THE RESCUE ISSUE

Locals come together to aid Haitians

By Kevin Herrera
January 16, 2010

DOWNTOWN — Doctors and nurses with Santa Monica-based International Medical Corps are on the ground in Haiti providing treatment to the thousands who were injured during the 7.0-magnitude earthquake that devastated the island nation Tuesday.



ON THE GROUND: A member of the International Medical Corps Emergency Response Team treats a woman with a severe leg injury in the days following the devastating 7.0-magnitude earthquake that struck Haiti, killing tens of thousands. *Margaret Aguirre/IMC*

The International Medical Corps' Emergency Response Team is in Port-au-Prince assisting survivors, with members of the team reporting serious shortages of supplies and facilities suitable for patients.

Doctors are working out of hotels and are sleeping in tents because it is too dangerous to move indoors because of aftershocks, said Maisie Cunningham, a donor relations officer for the corps, which has been based in Santa Monica for 25 years.

"It's pretty dreadful," Cunningham said. "It is beyond anything we could have imagined. There is no place to bury people, resources are incredibly limited, with the doctors scraping together supplies and working out of hotels. It is incredibly challenging."

International Medical Corps' Emergency Response draws on 25 years experience in emergency settings, including last September's earthquake in Sumatra, Indonesia, and the massive 2005 earthquake in Pakistan.

The team of healthcare professionals, who are all volunteers, arrived in Haiti within 22 hours after the quake, landing in the Dominican Republic before making their way into the disaster zone.

On their way in, the doctors and nurses reported a surreal scene. Most of the city was without electricity, yet random traffic lights were operational. Streets they drove down were strewn with rubble and fallen cables and littered with vehicles and buses that crashed as the quake struck.

People lined the streets, standing away from buildings and quietly sitting in a daze, exhausted and affraid of the next aftershock. Many injured people were helpless in the crowds and many dead bodies were stacked up alongside the road, team members said.

"People are afraid to go indoors because of aftershocks, so most of the care is being provided outside," Margaret Aguirre, director of global communications for International Medical Corps, told Reuters. "We are working with the few Haitian health workers that are here. The goal is to provide triage and basic treatment with the limited staffing and supplies that we have."

Most patients are suffering from broken bones, but some are in more serious condition and there is no hospital to refer them to, Aguirre said.

Another 13 doctors, the majority from Stanford University, are being deployed, Cunningham said. The doctors are in desperate need of supplies and those interested in helping are urged to donate money to the International Medical Corps in Santa Monica by visiting their Web site at www.imcworldwide.org or by texting "Haiti" to 85944. A \$10 charge will be added to your mobile phone bill.

Donations can also be made at the corps' headquarters at 1919 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 400. Checks can be mailed to the address also. The zip code is 90404.

"We are just trying to spread the word to the local community about what we do, that we are here in Santa Monica and that the best way for them to help is to donate," Cunningham said.

Another way to donate

In what is sure to be the most visually dazzling Haiti fundraiser of them all, a group of amateur gymnasts, tumblers, jugglers and others this Sunday will swing from the rings, walk the tight-rope and climb 20-foot-high ropes at Santa Monica's famous Muscle Beach.

"Whatever it is, we'll take it," said Pepperdine psychology professor Jessica Cail, who is organizing the effort.

The Santa Monica Ringers, a fixture at Muscle Beach each weekend, have held fundraising efforts before, collecting more than \$1,200 for the Red Cross' 9/11, tsunami, and Hurricane Katrina Relief funds.

When Cail and fellow Ringers saw photos of the devastation in Haiti, they knew it was time to hold another fundraiser.

"We are going to try to get the crowd involved as we do every weekend," Cail said. "If they want to learn how to walk the slackline, swing on the rings or take a picture with one of the big muscled men, whatever they want us to do, we'll offer ourselves up for a donation."

Muscle Beach is located on Ocean Front Walk just south of the Santa Monica Pier. The Santa Monica Ringers will be there to entertain from 1:30 p.m. to sunset.