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Greenwich entrepreneur raises funds to assist Nepal

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Alexander Soule

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Mountkarma founder and Greenwich resident Kevin Lanuk at the studio in Kathmandu where his organization manufactures clothing and accessories made from recycled prayer flags, in partnership with Folk Nepal. Photo: Contributed Photo




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There are few companies in Fairfield County to match the profile of Mountkarma, run by a 26-year-old Greenwich resident named Kevin Lanuk who has built a business importing clothing recycled from old prayer flags.

And few individuals are better situated than Lanuk to help Nepal earthquake survivors, having laid the groundwork for his company in Kathmandu a few years ago and now working to raise relief funding via the Indiegogo crowdfunding website.

Lanuk grew up in Stamford and lives in Greenwich. He got the idea for Mountkarma



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while visiting Nepal in 2012, and now is doing his own small bit to reach out to friends and strangers there in desperate need of assistance.

"I was just sort of overcome with disbelief," Lanuk said. "All these memories flooded my mind -- it was just so terrible."

As of Friday, the Times of India reported a death toll of 8,413 people, with that number expected to climb further as rescuers continue to search wreckage for survivors.

Multinational humanitarian aid organizations have struggled to distribute supplies in Nepal, with Fairfield-based Save the Children having a team on the ground and Stamford-based AmeriCares dispatching a response team stationed in India. On the home front, businesses and individuals have stepped up with aid, including a \$30,000 donation from William Pitt/Julia B. Fee's Sotheby's International Realty to AmeriCares for disaster relief.

In the aftermath of Haiti's earthquake of 2010, Stamford developers Carl Kuehner III and his brother, Paul Kuehner, enlisted the aid of General Electric and others to marshal among the first airlifts of relief supplies to that country, where their family has long maintained a charitable organization.

On a far smaller scale but leveraging his own intimate knowledge of Kathmandu and its people, Lanuk is attempting to raise \$10,000 on Indiegogo to assist victims of the Nepal earthquake.

Lanuk said residents and visitors in Nepal are given frequent warnings about the possibilities of a debilitating earthquake -- to the extent that he would think about the scenario near nightly during the six months he spent in the country in 2012.

Along with the rest of the United States populace, on April 25, Lanuk woke up to the news that there had been a massive earthquake in Nepal, with early reports of hundreds of deaths quickly mounting into the thousands. Lanuk was getting his reports firsthand from people he knew on the ground in Nepal, via Facebook and other social media channels.

Conversing nightly via Skype with his business partner in Kathmandu, Lanuk looked at his account and saw that the last time he was online was just prior to the earthquake, creating anxious hours as he awaited word. The house collapsed for the owner of Folk Nepal, a nongovernment organization with which Mountkarma partners, with the owner surviving. Lanuk said everyone else with his organization checked in safe.

"A huge relief," he said. "Everybody was sleeping in tents and there were tons of aftershocks and everybody was just shocked. A lot of people had moved up into the hills ... before you get to real big Himalayas."

For Lanuk, the call to action came almost immediately, with his friends in Nepal alerting him that people were in desperate need of tents, rice, salt, cooking oil and medicine. He plans to use 100 percent of the proceeds from the Indiegogo campaign to purchase supplies and ensure they are delivered in advance of monsoon season, when rains pour daily for about two months, complicating relief efforts.

Indiegogo has Nepal relief efforts front and center on its website; the Mountkarma Aid Project can be located by searching Indiegogo using the term Mountkarma or visiting the company's website at www.mountkarma.com.

"I had this really close friend of mine who said, 'you can't sit idly by -- you need to step up and you need to do something,'" Lanuk said. "I wanted to do it myself, with people I knew and trusted."

Alex.Soule@scni.com; 203-964-2236; www.twitter.com/casoulman

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