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Philippe Houdard, the president of the Miami-based Developing Minds Foundation in Florida, opened a school in Rio de Janeiro that teaches children technology skills.

A Miami businessman's tech-focused school is one in a growing trend.

By **BRIDGET CAREY**
McClatchy Newspapers

MIAMI — When Philippe Houdard took a break from his career as a technology company executive and traveled to Brazil to help educate the poor of a Brazilian urban slum, he came face to face with children who carry Uzi submachine guns and work for drug dealers.

But after living in the area for a month, Houdard was inspired to do more.

The 37-year-old Miami Beach resident started the nonprofit Developing Minds Foundation seven months ago to start a school with computers for these children. As president of the foundation, he is launching other projects in Brazil and Colombia, which include another technology-focused school, literacy programs and sports

schools.

He works with other humanitarian and philanthropic organizations based in Brazil and Colombia to run the programs while he is in South Florida raising money. After tapping into his contacts from his business networks, he has raised more than \$50,000 to date.

"I have never really been able to fully articulate exactly what it is that inspired me," Houdard said. The people who help him set up these programs are "amazing" to him, because of the risk they take working in dangerous areas to help make a positive difference, he said.

That, combined with the opportunities he had in his education, compelled him to "try to make this thing a little broader, give it a little more depth."

His foundation opened its first school Feb. 19 in Rio de Janeiro's urban slum, Rocinha. It's set up to teach 100 impoverished children how to use computers and technology. The cost of construction, teachers' sala-

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Photo provided by Philippe Houdard

Houdard is working with other groups in South America. Here, he visits with children in Colombia. He is one of a growing number of what are called "social entrepreneurs."

Schools: Colleges including UF have social entrepreneurship studies

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ries, computers and classroom equipment came to \$15,000.

Companies and executives in the technology industry, such as Aspect Software and Alex Tellez, a former chief executive of Cell-IT Technologies, were quick to donate to the computer education programs, he said, and South Florida is "a natural fit for helping out Latin America."

But donations come from all over, including the South Florida construction firm Amicon Development Group.

"People here have this real deep and profound desire to help out these people," he said.

The executive-turned-social entrepreneur spent 10 years working in executive marketing positions for several technology companies in Miami, including Lucent Technologies and Concerto Software. He had enough money saved up to quit in 2006 and start the foundation. He said he chooses not to take a salary and doesn't plan to anytime soon.

"Even if I took a modest salary, one of these projects wouldn't get funded," Houdard said.

A social entrepreneur by definition doesn't have to be wealthy enough to give up a salary, but they do "sacrifice financial benefits," said Sandy Herz, vice president of marketing and communications for The Skoll

Foundation, a nonprofit organization that supports social ventures.

The number of social entrepreuneuring ventures are increasing rapidly, Herz said, and part of that is due to an increased awareness of global issues.

"There are certain hot spots for it in the world, and Brazil is one of them," she said.

According to the University Network for Social Entrepreneurship, more than 80 major schools are teaching social entrepreneurship around the world to meet the growing demand from students.

The University of Florida began a social entrepreneurship program about three years ago, but the popularity of the subject grew in higher education in 2006 when major business schools such as Harvard University and NYU received grants for social entrepreneurship programs.

"It was like the field of social entrepreneurship was on fire, growing exponentially, courses sprouting up all over," said Kristin E. Joos, coordinator of University of Florida's Innovative Social Impact Initiative at the Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation.

Houdard is part of the growing trend. His business model reflects the best practices of a private venture capital firm. But instead of trying to make the most money,

he puts his money in projects that get the best return on unleashing human potential.

One of those projects includes a judo and jujitsu school in the Rio de Janeiro slum Dona Marta. The project is almost

complete and has 230 students and a number of instructors, including Federico Flexa, who represented Brazil in the Olympics in 1984, 1988 and 1996.

The children "are learning for the first time that they can actu-

ally control their own destiny," Houdard said.

He plans to eventually start another company, and Developing Minds will be its charitable arm.

"I'm in this for the long haul," he said.