

## **Press Release**

Two months later than planned, Arne Sahlen returns to Kootenay life following his latest action-packed trip for the Cambodia Support Group (CSG). The schedule was pummelling, he says, but the results made it all worthwhile and more.

### **Royal endorsement**

CSG now has the support of Cambodia's Prince Sirivudh, brother of the retired King. His letter states:

I am pleased to give my endorsement to the Cambodia Support Group (CSG).

For more than twenty-five years, CSG has been helping our country and people with deep respect for the traditions, initiatives and abilities of Cambodians in all levels of society. ... The CSG approach is to serve as a bridge enabling Khmer people to move from wishes to success. CSG first resettled two hundred refugees in Canada, and now works in a unique blend of project areas to improve overall Khmer life: training and jobs for the disabled, support to women, child protection and schooling, and training in both traditional and western music. Please offer CSG all the usual courtesies, and assist in any way possible.

A bridge in many ways, CSG also carries awareness of Canada and the East Kootenays halfway around the world. "Cambodians and the aid community are amazed," said Arne, "at so much support generated from a base of small cities and towns well off the main track."

### **A few of many CSG-linked successes**

Five students, sponsored for advanced schooling by CSG and its partner agency Khmer Women's Voice Centre, have leapt ahead in school and life. Freed from rural poverty and tragedy, four of them now have jobs that pay some salary – this in a country of very high unemployment. They are contributing to their living costs, and soon will have Bachelor Degrees or Diplomas.

KAVTV electrical training school for the disabled has set up SIXTY repair shops around the country in just three years. KAVTV graduates, some seriously disabled, run the shops - rising from lives of begging, dependence and hopelessness to earn a good living at skilled work. They care for selves and families, enjoy self-esteem, and are strong role models for ability in disability.

CSG Co-ordinator Kheav Samnang's dedication has carried him into the Prince's circle as well as all areas of CSG service. A polio survivor, Samnang is now opening Independent Printers. Under a Self-Help for Success umbrella, this printing shop will employ other disabled people in his small village - and among other jobs will print CSG documents including writings in Khmer about peace-building, forgiveness and shared vision.

A brilliant composer, singer and piano-saxophone-drums-voice performer, Prince Sirivudh is in spirit much like famed musicmaker Louise Rose. He arranged a great Khmer (Cambodian) song, Au Teuk Ho (Water Below the Bridge) on studio

technology in orchestral style. Arne re-arranged it for live orchestra; Khmer tenor Chanthavouth Hy, now studying in Cranbrook-Kimberley, will sing it next March in a three-city tour with the Youth Symphony of the Okanagan.

As Chanthavouth's name rises in Cambodia, he joins professional tenor Sethisak Khuon promoting the great western opera style. "Imagine my delight," recounted Arne, "as Prince Sirivudh lay back one day and dreamed of the future ... a Southeast Asia gala concert with the Singapore symphony -- and TWO Cambodian tenors!" For a small country with no opera tradition, to burst on the scene this way will help Cambodia to stand out in international arts.

Chanthavouth is invited to sing next summer in a Cambodia Living Arts festival, joined by Soun Piseth. This brilliant composer-pianist studied in Kimberley-Cranbrook with CSG sponsorship in 1997-98. One of Cambodia's top musicians and studio technicians, Piseth composes in many styles. His song Proud to Be Cambodian, written in response to a neighbour country's border incursions, is considered a 'second National Anthem'. It seamlessly weaves Khmer traditional and folk styles with western flavours right up to hip-hop.

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JblvvRGy8VU> ; history segment at 0:45, main song starts at 1:35)

### **Homegrown Help**

Now in its Year 26, and linked through all levels of Khmer society, CSG can make the most of all donations large and small. Contact 250-427-2159 or [csg@cyberlink.bc.ca](mailto:csg@cyberlink.bc.ca) for more details.