

perspectives

...on the Semiahmoo Peninsula

Rotarian revisits Cambodia

Project making progress

Melissa Smalley
Staff Reporter

A year after visiting an orphanage in Cambodia, a local Rotarian returned last month to see for himself how improvements were coming along.

Brian O'Ruairc, a longtime member of the Rotary Club of South Surrey, returned to the Peninsula March 17 after a 10-day trip to Southeast Asia, where he visited the orphanage in Battambang that his club has been raising money to improve.

The trip took place almost exactly a year after O'Ruairc and fellow rotarian Stuart Wilson journeyed to Cambodia to initially inspect the run-down orphanage – essentially nothing more than three tin-roof

shacks – and determine what upgrades would need to take place.

Upon returning to Battambang last month, O'Ruairc was pleased to see a marked improvement in the conditions for the 38 children who live there, specifically a major overhaul of the girl's dormitory.



Brian O'Ruairc
rotarian

"We paid to have a wall put in, and it was divided into three rooms. Now they have windows and doors with screens on them, so they can have air at night," O'Ruairc explained. "At the back of these rooms there are also two little toilets, so they don't have to go outside in the middle of the night to use the toilet."

The Rotary Club of South Surrey has raised a total of approximately \$15,000 for improvements to the orphanage, including \$7,500 to construct a proper kitchen.

Currently, the kitchen consists of a dirt floor within one of the shacks; however, a separate structure is being built that will include tiled floors, tiled walls up to four feet and a stainless steel sink and table.

According to O'Ruairc, the upgrades to



the orphanage are helping to provide an environment for the children – many of whom were abandoned by their parents – to grow up safely. However, he noted the facility – founded in 2007 by Amsterdam-based Float Foundation – has a strong educational mandate as well.

"The main ambition is that no child leaves there without a trade or profession," O'Ruairc said, noting this year, a young woman who grew up in the orphanage is due to complete her training as a midwife.

While the construction of the new kitchen is expected to be completed by mid-May, O'Ruairc said there is plenty of work to be done at the orphanage. The boys' dormitory will need to be upgraded, similar to the work that took place on the girls' quarters, and the property needs a safer and more efficient electrical system, as well as a sewage system. O'Ruairc also plans to elevate the orphanage's garden beds so they don't flood during monsoon season.

While no official timeline for further improvements has been set, O'Ruairc hopes to complete additional work upon his return some time next year.

During his recent trip, O'Ruairc also had the opportunity to visit a hospice for AIDS victims north of Bangkok, run by an elderly Thai woman.

"The government won't recognize anybody with AIDS," he explained. "Most people ostracize anybody in their family if



they have AIDS, too."

Conditions at the hospice, O'Ruairc said, were deplorable; it has no proper sewage system, its dirt floor is perpetually flooded and the minimal equipment and supplies available are in poor condition.

Along with other rotary clubs overseas, O'Ruairc hopes to raise the funds to build a new roof and concrete floor, reinforce the structure and build additional accommodations, as well as a septic system.

"We're looking to raise around \$12,000 Canadian," he said. "I'm going to meet with two other Rotary clubs to see if they can get some money together."

Anyone who would like to contribute to the club's fundraising efforts can contact O'Ruairc at shamrockhome@shaw.ca or 604-250-4806.



Contributed photos

Top, children linger outside the boys' dormitory at the orphanage in Battambang, Cambodia the South Surrey Rotary Club has been helping to improve. Above left, the refurbished girls' dormitory, which includes screened windows and a new roof; above right, the building that will house a kitchen is under construction.

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