



Rural Training Center-Thailand

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Community-based environmental education for the self-sufficiency and sustainability of small rural family farms

ชุมชนตามสิ่งแวดล้อมศึกษาเพื่อการพึ่งตัวเองและยั่งยืนชนบทขนาดเล็กครอบครัวฟาร์ม

You may post questions / comments to the Discussion area of our website

How We Got to Be the Way We Are



Saifon and Greg Lee, RTC-TH Co-founders

The end of the year seems a good time to review and ponder the path that brought us to where we are today. At the time life is happening to us, we often may not be fully aware of what made us as we are. Hindsight is a good way to “connect the dots.” It also gives us time to express our thoughts and thanks to many of the key figures in our lives that made a difference. So please bear with us as we share some of our thoughts and thanks.



Saifon's parents: Tang & Umporn Suttisan



Greg's parents: Mack & Irene Lee

Much of our basic character comes from our initial upbringing in our families. The common traits can be characterized by parents who were honest, hard working, thrifty, and who valued education. They fostered a love a reading, common sense, and independence from peer pressure. Though Saifon's grandparents were well-to-do in their respective villages, there was no significant transfer of wealth to her parents. They struggled to make their own farm without benefit of inherited wealth or lands.

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My parents were of more humble origins and as children worked hard to support their respective families. After getting married, they continued to work hard, saving and sacrificing to attain a better life for my brother and me while still supporting their parents.

Our parents taught us by example. As Saifon and I grew up in our own countries, cultures, and families, the actions of our parents spoke louder than words. They cared about others and shared what they had with those for whom they cared.

Neither of our families had much money. You need some money to get through life, but it had to come from honest work. Spending was limited; thrift ruled the day. Tossing things out was not so easily done. Saving, reusing, hand-me downs, making do with whatever was at hand was normal. This spawned an inventiveness and creativity not readily taught in schools. Today, the RTC-TH approach of no tech / low tech; no cost / low cost are directly related to our frugal and practical upbringing.



Compost: an effective, low-cost way to improve soil



Home-made non-toxic pest control methods

The core of our upbringing was the foundation for our formal education which added academic knowledge to our being. There is a saying: “Use it or lose it.” In our jobs, we both learned to apply our academic training. I later coined a slogan for myself, which we use in the RTC-TH: “It is better to know a little and use it a lot than to know a lot and use it little.” Many of the programs and lessons in the RTC-TH come from simply applying the basic common sense and the Geographic Systems Model in understanding and teaching many and diverse aspects of sustainable agriculture and living.

The essence of the RTC-TH Community-based Education model goes back to the basic fact the family is the first “school” and the parents are the first “teachers” in our lives. Saifon and I began to realize it was easier to supplement the family education effort than it was to reform a traditional institutionalized school system. For us, Community-based Education, like sustainable agriculture, is a way of life. We don’t talk about it. We don’t directly try to convince others. We teach by example. We live it.

We give thanks to our parents for their teaching, their example, their patience and understanding. We give thanks to our teachers who shared their knowledge, skills, and insights with us. As a tribute to our parents and teachers, we strive to live our lives in such a way as to give back to our community and to the next generation.

We created the RTC-TH to honor our parents, teachers, friends, and the many nameless others who contributed to making our lives full and rich with memories and dreams. 🌐

Facelift for Ban Na Fa Elementary School



This building was the oldest one on campus.



The building site will become new "green space".



The old wood is sound and will be re-used.

The oldest building on the Ban Na Fa Elementary School campus is gone. After 41 years of service, it has been replaced by a new classroom building near the site of our original compost training. The original classroom site will be converted to open green space.

The old building was "de-constructed". Salvaged wood was sorted and stored in the faculty carport. The old wood was given new life when some of it was used to make the new performing arts practice building.

It was very gratifying to see the construction effort serving as an example of adults using the Green School mantra of "reduce, re-use, and recycle". Teaching by example has been proven to be one of the most effective educational methods. When students see a real world case of implementing the "re-use" practice, it gives meaning to the words.



The old lumber is stacked and ready for a new project.



Salvaged old wood is used to make an arts building.



The new building has 6 classrooms and a library.

The old wooden teaching building is replaced by a new concrete and steel one. It is built behind the other teaching buildings and closer to the Nam Yang River. The new performing arts building is closer to the river and behind the new classroom building.

The school Library is housed in the new classroom building. There is ample wall space for the many new NASA posters delivered to the school. The posters will be a new added stimulus to the science education program.



One of the well-lit classrooms in the new building.



The library (with lots of wall space) in the new building.



Teacher Karuna with her computer in her new classroom



Faculty and administrators with the NASA posters

The many colorful NASA posters are the direct result of RTC-TH networking. Mark Hayden, a friend and fan of the RTC-TH and his contact Paula S. Partida, Administrator at the NASA/JPL Educator Resource Center, provided the NASA materials for the RTC-TH REEEPP effort. The timing was superb. The new school building and library with its white walls were calling out for new colorful displays. Greg made the delivery to the school at just the right moment. The new classroom building had been completed about 1 month ago, but much work needs to be done to complete the finishing touches. 🌐

Rice Harvest (Cont'd)



Our annual supply of rice is safely stored.

Each year, the big question for many Thai farm families is whether they will have enough rice for the year. Despite having one less paddy and getting a late start in planting due to water shortages, for us, the answer is "Yes!"

The surprising results are in. With threshing completed, the annual yield for 2010 was 58 bags of rice harvested. This is an amazing 81% increase in the amount of rice harvested last year! The rice grains are fuller and heavier than last year as well. This certainly is a testament to the organic method of soil amendment we use when preparing the paddies for planting.

We also noticed our family is eating less rice than in the past. So the lower consumption means we are even more secure in our rice supply and can build a reserve. 🌐

Other Food From the Farm



Pumpkins and squash from the overhead trellis.



Long beans in the pit garden.

We continue to reap the benefits of farm fresh food due to the ability to grow things year round. Our table is amply supplied with garden fresh vegetables and farm fresh fruits. The fish, though small, are still enough for us. 🌐



Bananas



Papayas



Water morning glory in the fish pond.

Friends on the Farm



Saifon successfully created and uses the Pantip Agriculture Room to effectively network in Thailand.



Khun Rian and Sri Nuan on our farm.



Sharing fun, food, and ideas is networking at its best.

Sri Nuan and Boonrian, Saifon's friends from the Pantip Agriculture Room visited our farm this month. They were visiting from Ayutthaya in central Thailand. They previously visited Nan, but this was the first time for Saifon and to meet them face to face.

Rian has experience in consulting, electrical engineering, business and project administration. He never forgot his rural farming roots. Both Rian and Sri Nuan share a common goal with us: to give back to their community. So we had much to talk about. They are considering a variety of ideas for their 20 rai of land along the Ping River. As any of you who know Greg, there's never a shortage of ideas to share.

This visit was an ideal opportunity to see how the RTC-TH slogan "It's better to network than to not work" is put into practice. The free flowing exchange of ideas and experiences was like a rushing torrent of water cascading down the mountain side.

It was good to find others interested in applying the King's Self-Sufficiency ideas and striving for a balance of modern life and times with the natural environment. They were amazed to see we were so far along the path to sustainability while they were still in the planning stages. However, we assured them there are many more people in Thailand and around the world that were not even at the point of making a plan.

We gave them a CD with information about the RTC-TH Community-based education model, lesson / reference materials. We parted with promises to keep in contact, to exchange more ideas via e-mail, and to expand our contact by more networking in the near future. 🌐

German Friends on the Farm

Dagmar (Dagi) Hoffer is the niece of Ruth Bornhauser, a German friend of ours from Switzerland whom I met in the early 1970s. Ruth introduced me to Dagi, and after writing to each other for 20 years, we finally met face to face on the farm! Her partner Uwe Herbert Doll joined her for the trip.

They enjoyed the warm escape from the 0.5 m of snow in Germany and helped survey the site for the new farm office building. 🌐



Dagi and Uwe visit the farm and enjoy the tranquility.



Uwe and Dagi setting the stakes for the site survey.



Dagi using a string level for the site terrain profile survey.



Uwe begins to take the measurements.



Orange flags indicate 1m elevation points above the driveway berm. The yellow lines are approximate 1m contour lines. The first layer of the farm office building would be cut into the slope to create an underground cool storage room. The next layer would be at ground level on the up slope side of the building.

American Friends on the Farm

Kate and Jaime Aguilera are teaching English in Nan Mueang. Jaime is Greg's former student from California. Pat and Robert Bowser, Kate's parents from California, visited Thailand. Jaime and Kate brought them to visit the farm. Pat is fond of gardening and is hoping to take back some ideas from the farm. She is planning to try to grow some vegetables.

Composting and mulching for soil moisture retention are very applicable to southern California gardening. The shade trellises also caught her eye.



Greg guides Pat and Robert Bowser around the farm



An overview of the farm's watershed and fish ponds



Water morning glory: food for fish and folks

Up to now, the primary focus of our efforts has been on water resource management. Without access to irrigation water, we have worked to increase water retention on the farm from rain water harvesting to deepening the fish ponds to boosting soil moisture retention. 🌐 [Photos by Jaime and Kate Aguilera.]



Greg explains the emphasis on water for the farm



The overhead trellises caught Pat eye.

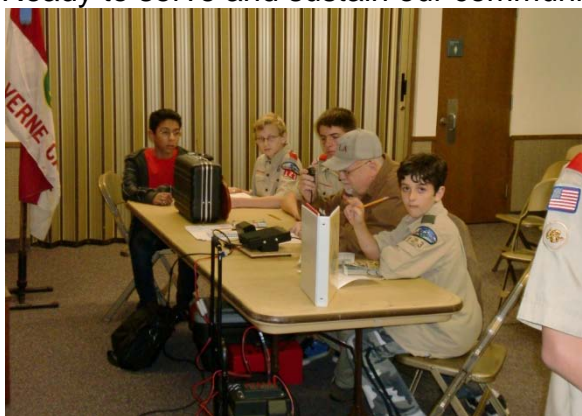
RTC-TH EmComm Supports K6U Event



Greg, HS0ZHM, at his EchoLink-L station (#520300)

At the request of Mark (N7YLA), we stood by our EchoLink station to support the K6U special event amateur radio activity. Fellow GERC hams, Jim (KG6TQT) and Frank (KI6TQV) ended their Boy Scout Radio Merit Badge class with getting the scouts on the air. The scouts contacting us via EchoLink were Dylan, Cameron, Kaden, Alex, Jared, Davis, Brierton, Chris, Thom, Gavin, and Ethan). Each of them received the RTC-TH QSL card featured a photo of an Atlas Moth taken on our farm.

A common problem faced by all organizations is perpetuating their existence beyond the life span of the founders. Getting new recruits and leaders for the “next generation” is a challenge. Over the years, GERC hams Mark (N7YLA), Jim (KG6TQT) and Frank (KI6TQV) collaborated to conduct Boy Scout Radio Merit Badge classes as well as FCC amateur license classes and test sessions. This is one way to get prospective amateur radio operators into the “pipe line.” The RTC-TH EmComm is glad to support their efforts. Cooperating with GERC is another way the RTC-TH EmComm station stands “Ready to serve and sustain our community.” [Scout photos courtesy of Rick Wride]



K6U via EchoLink: Alex, Kaden, Dylan, Mark, Cameron



K6U via 2m HT: Brierton, Gavin, Jared, Ethan with Frank



Frank
KI6TQV



Jim
KG6TQT



Mark
N7YLA

The GERC team hams operating the K6U special event station. Frank and Jim ran the Radio Merit Badge class. Mark facilitated the EchoLink communications.



The HS0ZHM Atlas Moth QSL card for K6U QSOs.

“Down-sizing” / “Right-sizing”

The economic slump, moving to another place, home foreclosures, and other factors forcing folks to move creates an opportunity to clear accumulated “stuff.” A growing trend is for folks to cut housing costs by getting a smaller place. For some it’s called “down-sizing” while others prefer to call it “right-sizing.”

About 30+ years ago, “built-ins” were a popular to make effective use of interior space in buildings. These kinds of projects seem well-suited for the “right-size” trend. And in preparation for the new farm office building, we made a foray into a compact, space efficient furniture design we call the rolling storage tool.

As many of you know, we take a lot of photos. Unfortunately, the CD photo cases we have didn’t fit most of the bookshelves very well. So we came up with a simple idea to solve a storage problem and a limited seating problem in our office.

Also, in keeping with our “sustainable communities” idea, we had local carpenter do the work for us. We could have made the stools ourselves IF we had all the proper tools. Dealing with a local vendor helps “support” the local community and economy.



The rolling stool can store 2 sizes of CD photo cases for easy access and saves about 5 sq ft of bookshelf space.

The addition of a seat cushion will be made later. But these roller storage stools can be conveniently put under the table out of the way when not in use. The combined function of photo album storage and stool is space efficient. The odd size of the CD albums did not make good use of regular drawer or bookshelf space. Also, sitting on the storage roller stool while working on the computer when preparing reports and newsletters puts the photo files in easy reach saving time/motion to retrieve the files.

A design for a storage bench / bed unit is in the works for the farm office building. So in the future, we will be calling on our village carpenter about a new project. 🌐