

# Cambodian pupils steal heart of MCC prof

By Delynn Bodine  
SPECIAL TO THE REPUBLIC

What does opportunity mean to a retired MCC math professor?

For Rick Meyer it means providing schools to educate impoverished and middle-class children in Cambodia who cannot afford the daily fee for public school.

His interest was sparked several years ago on a trip to Phnom Penh when he volunteered to tutor math at a school near his hotel. He was told they didn't teach math, and was eventually referred to a school in the squatter village of Railway B to help teachers with the correct pronunciation of English.

"Within days, the children of Railway B Community owned me," Meyer said. "They called me Teacher Rick and had completely stolen my heart."

Residents of squatter communities find scraps of wood, sheet metal, plastic and cardboard to build their homes.

The children have one set of clothing including a pair of flip-flops while younger brothers and sisters have no clothes or shoes. By the time he had made his next visit to Cambodia and returned to Railway B Community, the school had closed.

"The volunteer organization had stopped their funding," Meyer said. "So, I reached into my pocket, pulled out the necessary cash and reopened the



COURTESY OF RICK MEYER

"They called me Teacher Rick." Rick Meyer and Narylen, a Cambodian teacher, pose for a class photo at their Village 15-Village16 School.

school."

Upon his return to the United State he formed a non-profit corporation called the Aogaah Foundation, which means "opportunity" in Khmer, the native language of Cambodia.

Meyer has subsequently rented a building and renovated it himself by dividing it into two classrooms, adding a

bathroom and burying a pipe to contain an open sewage ditch. The school is called Village 15-Village16 School and enrolls about 150 students, with hopes for 400 next year.

"We were overrun with students," Meyer said. "We had set the maximum class size at 25, and we had many times that many wanting to register. Parents

## FYI

In 2007, the Aogaah Foundation received tax-deductible certification and had its name registered with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. For information about the organization, go to [www.aogaah.org](http://www.aogaah.org).

## About this page

Stories on this page are the product of a News by You partnership between The Republic and Mesa Community College to keep readers updated on interesting people and programs on campus.

from neighboring villages were pounding on our door."

Students attend school one hour a day, six days a week and study Khmer, math, science and social studies with a quiz every Friday. It is Aogaah's goal to prepare students for employment by providing a six-year program that teaches them to read and write Khmer and use a calculator to solve trade math problems.

"The need is overwhelming," Meyer said. "These are impoverished people without opportunity. Our students often come to school hungry. But they come, always so eager to learn."