

April 1993

A ROTARY PROJECT IN LAOS

Supporting the Ban Na Sai Thong Community Health Project

The Ban Na Sai Thong project in Laos is a proposal to develop a low-cost integrated community health project in a rural area of 38,000 people located just north of Vientiane, the capital city of Laos. The aims of the project are to achieve a significant improvement in the health of the population over a five year period, especially in the survival of its young children, and to develop the site as a practical training program in community health for medical students and other health personnel from the University of Health Sciences in Vientiane.

The project has active Lao support from the University of Health Sciences, the Institute of Maternal and Child Health, the Vientiane Municipality, the staff of the 10-bed District Hospital at Ban Na Sai Thong, and local community leaders. It builds on a highly successful collaboration, developed over the past three years, involving the Lao University of Health Sciences, the Center for International Health of Case Western Reserve University (CWRU), with funding from the McKnight Foundation, and involving Health Frontiers (HF), a small non-profit organization established to facilitate the project. Additional participation is now being sought from other organizations, including Rotary. The US project directors of the McKnight grant, and the principals of Health Frontiers, are pediatrician Karen Olness MD and her husband Hakon Torjesen, both of the CWRU faculty, who have been involved in Laos since the 1960s and speak some Lao. Hakon is a member of the Cleveland Rotary Club, a past president of the Eden Prairie, MN Club, and a former member of the Vientiane Club.

The proposed Rotary project has three components: 1) To furnish a project vehicle for Ban Na Sai Thong to be used primarily for transporting medical students daily between the project and the University, 2) to provide some of the basic drugs, vaccines, and other essential supplies for the project, and 3) to provide Rotary medical volunteers to help with the project as needed. Rotary involvement is being sought through clubs in Minnesota, the home of Health Frontiers and the McKnight Foundation; in Ohio, the home of Case Western Reserve University; and in Thailand, the very active Rotary country bordering Laos. To date, Minnesota Rotarians have contributed \$6,000 toward the \$18,000 cost of a four-wheel drive four door pick-up for the project. The vehicle has been ordered for tax-free delivery in August 1993, and more funds are being solicited. An additional reason for asking Rotarians to provide the project vehicle, is to put on the road in Laos a positive symbol of Rotary International, thus helping to further the hopes for re-establishing the Rotary Club of Vientiane, which was disbanded when the Lao communist government was established in 1975.

The needs and opportunities in Laos are compelling. Health conditions, according to a World Bank Report, are "among the most wanting in the world." Malaria remains the leading cause of morbidity and mortality in children. Meanwhile, the Lao government in recent years has moved substantially toward establishing a free market economy in Laos, and the country has begun to open up to the rest of the world. The CWRU/Health Frontiers effort in Laos is operating with formal governmental approval.

For further information, contact any of the following Rotarians.

PDG Dean Edstrom, Rotary Club of Eden Prairie, MN, 612-340-5575

Bill Pinter, Heights of Greater Cleveland Rotary Club, 216-421-4564

Hakon Torjesen, Case Western Reserve University, 216-368-6321 or 507-789-6725



CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

The Health Frontiers Volunteer Project in Laos

*A proposal to
Lao-American friends of the project
March 2003*

Health Frontiers is an all-volunteer non-profit organization engaged in health related activities in the US and overseas. It was founded by Karen Olness MD and Hakon Torjesen, who worked in Laos for five years in the sixties, and served as volunteers in the Lao Refugee Camp at Nongkhai in 1980.

Since 1991, Health Frontiers has been working in Laos on a volunteer project to help strengthen the Lao medical school, one of the neediest such institutions anywhere. We started by helping the Lao faculty to establish the first village-based training program in community health for Lao medical students. In 1997, after years of joint planning, we helped the Lao to launch an intensive three-year residency training program in pediatrics, the first full-time postgraduate medical education program in the history of the country. The curriculum is based on specific health needs in Laos, and is consistent with international standards.

This program has already graduated eight Lao pediatricians, and has 19 more physicians in three stages of training. For a poor country like Laos, with three million children, and previously only seven fully trained pediatricians, the prospect of adding six or more pediatricians per year has huge implications for child health. And last year, an intensive three-year training program in Internal Medicine was launched, with six Lao physicians in training.

The primary resource supporting these activities, valued at \$340,000 per year, is the donated professional time and travel of volunteer faculty from many institutions, who help mentor the Lao physicians in the Vientiane teaching hospitals. This includes a pediatrician, Leila Srour MD, and an internist, Rory Ramsey MD, together with their spouses, Byan Watt and Margareta Ramsey, who are volunteering full-time in Laos for two years on very small living allowances, plus a dozen or more short term visits per year by faculty specialists, often traveling at their own expense. Meanwhile, Khon Kaen University, in nearby Northeast Thailand, is providing 25 or more tuition free clinical rotations per year for the Lao trainees.

The core funding to support these activities comes primarily from contributions by individuals and community organizations, and from a small USAID grant. We welcome the involvement of Lao-American individuals and groups in this effort. If your organization can pledge a contribution of \$15,000, it will support the entire cash cost of three years of training for a Lao physician to become a pediatrician or internist. This includes direct costs for the trainee, and prorated costs of the Lao and volunteer faculty. Health Frontiers is registered as a non-profit organization in Minnesota and classified as a public charity under section 501(c)(3) of the US tax code. Contributions to Health Frontiers are tax deductible.

When these Lao pediatricians and internists graduate in the coming years, some of them will serve as the only pediatrician or internist in a remote province, others will join the teachers in Vientiane, who will eventually be able to replace the faculty volunteers from abroad. It is hard to imagine a better return on an investment of \$15,000 per specialist. For more information please contact Health Frontiers at the numbers below. Many thanks.

Hakon Torjesen
Assistant Professor of Medicine in International Health
Center for International Health, School of Medicine

President, Health Frontiers
44500 66th Avenue Way
Kenyon, MN 55946

MAILING ADDRESS
Case Western Reserve University
10900 Euclid Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44106-4978

VISITORS AND DELIVERIES
Room T-505 School of Medicine

Phone 216-368-6321
Fax 216-368-8664
E-Mail kno@po.cwru.edu

Phone 507-789-6725
Fax 507-789-6575

World Community Service Committee
Rotary International District 6630
Attn: Hakon Torjesen, 216-368-6321 or 507-789-6725

March, 1999

A ROTARY PROJECT IN LAOS

This Rotary project will support a unique effort in Laos, in Southeast Asia, to improve the health of children. Health conditions in Laos have been described by the World Bank as "among the most wanting in the world." Laos has more than two million children, but only six fully-trained Lao pediatricians to help meet their dire health needs.

For the past nine years, a group of volunteer medical faculty from several North American universities have been working with the struggling Faculty of Medical Sciences in Laos to help strengthen their training programs. Their work has been coordinated by the all-volunteer organization, Health Frontiers, of Kenyon Minnesota, in affiliation with Case Western Reserve University of Cleveland. A year ago, the Lao Faculty, with support from the volunteers, launched a three year pediatric residency training program. Initially, five young Lao physicians were enrolled -- in the first full-time post-graduate medical education program in the history of Laos. Five more began this year, and more will begin each year. For a poor country like Laos, the prospect of adding five new pediatricians per year has huge implications for child health. The training is specifically designed to meet the health needs of Lao children, while being consistent with international standards.

Rotary involvement in this program began six years ago, when Rotary clubs in Minnesota and Ohio raised the money for a four-wheel-drive pickup truck to serve as the project vehicle in Laos. Their aim was twofold: the help a worthy health project, and to encourage the prospect that the Rotary Club of Vientiane, disbanded in 1975, might some day be reinstated in this Communist country. Since that time, the Rotary wheel, not seen in Laos in twenty years, has adorned the project vehicle, and been seen daily on the streets of Vientiane. Meanwhile, Rotarians from RI, Thailand and the US have continued the delicate negotiations that hopefully will lead soon to reinstating the Vientiane Rotary Club.

Today, with the volunteer training program in Laos growing so dramatically, there is an urgent need for a second pickup truck to transport students and residents to training sites in and out of Vientiane. And Rotarians in Ohio and Minnesota believe that this vehicle, again, should be a Rotary vehicle, with the Rotary emblem on the doors. The estimated cost of the pickup, delivered tax free in Laos, is \$18,000. As there is no Rotary Club in Laos, it is not possible to request matching funds from the Rotary Foundation. The suggestion is that the Rotary clubs of Cleveland Ohio and Eden Prairie Minnesota take the lead in this project and encourage other clubs in their districts to join the effort. Health Frontiers is prepared to add other contributions to this project if necessary, but a dominant share of the cost needs to be born by Rotary in order for it to be called a Rotary vehicle. For more information, please contact Rotarian Dean Edstrom at the Eden Prairie Club, or Rotarian Hakon Torjesen at the Cleveland Club.

World Community Service Committee
Rotary International District 6630
Attn: Hakon Torjesen, 216-368-6321 or 507-789-6725

March, 1999

A ROTARY PROJECT IN LAOS

This Rotary project will support a unique effort in Laos, in Southeast Asia, to improve the health of children. Health conditions in Laos have been described by the World Bank as "among the most wanting in the world." Laos has more than two million children, but only six fully-trained Lao pediatricians to help meet their dire health needs.

For the past nine years, a group of volunteer medical faculty from several North American universities have been working with the struggling Faculty of Medical Sciences in Laos to help strengthen their training programs. Their work has been coordinated by the all-volunteer organization, Health Frontiers, of Kenyon Minnesota, in affiliation with Case Western Reserve University of Cleveland. A year ago, the Lao Faculty, with support from the volunteers, launched a three year pediatric residency training program. Initially, five young Lao physicians were enrolled -- in the first full-time post-graduate medical education program in the history of Laos. Five more began this year, and more will begin each year. For a poor country like Laos, the prospect of adding five new pediatricians per year has huge implications for child health. The training is specifically designed to meet the health needs of Lao children, while being consistent with international standards.

Rotary involvement in this program began six years ago, when Rotary clubs in Minnesota and Ohio raised the money for a four-wheel-drive pickup truck to serve as the project vehicle in Laos. Their aim was twofold: the help a worthy health project, and to encourage the prospect that the Rotary Club of Vientiane, disbanded in 1975, might some day be reinstated in this Communist country. Since that time, the Rotary wheel, not seen in Laos in twenty years, has adorned the project vehicle, and been seen daily on the streets of Vientiane. Meanwhile, Rotarians from RI, Thailand and the US have continued the delicate negotiations that hopefully will lead soon to reinstating the Vientiane Rotary Club.

Today, with the volunteer training program in Laos growing so dramatically, there is an urgent need for a second pickup truck to transport students and residents to training sites in and out of Vientiane. And Rotarians in Ohio and Minnesota believe that this vehicle, again, should be a Rotary vehicle, with the Rotary emblem on the doors. The estimated cost of the pickup, delivered tax free in Laos, is \$18,000. As there is no Rotary Club in Laos, it is not possible to request matching funds from the Rotary Foundation. The suggestion is that the Rotary clubs of Cleveland Ohio and Eden Prairie Minnesota take the lead in this project and encourage other clubs in their districts to join the effort. Health Frontiers is prepared to add other contributions to this project if necessary, but a dominant share of the cost needs to be born by Rotary in order for it to be called a Rotary vehicle. For more information, please contact Rotarian Dean Edstrom at the Eden Prairie Club, or Rotarian Hakon Torjesen at the Cleveland Club.