

SWAPPING STETSONS FOR SAWS

RCMP INSTRUCTOR RAISES FUND TO BUILD HOMES IN CAMBODIA

BY MALLORY PROCUNIER

For the fifth year in a row, Bob Carver, Instructor for Tactical Training Section, will be spending his winter vacation in Cambodia. In what seems like a peculiar destination for a three-week getaway, Carver and his team of humanitarian house builders will be setting up shelter for 16 Cambodian families through the work of the Tabitha Foundation.

EYE-OPENING EXPERIENCE

Carver and his wife have been visiting Asia annually for many years, both out of interest and in support of Carver's work teaching southeast Asian martial arts in Ottawa. Thailand, Laos and Vietnam are just a few destinations they frequent, and in 2003, they decided to add Cambodia to that list. Sights of dry fields that yielded no crops and shelters that were crafted from leaves and branches instantly made Carver and his wife want to help.

"We were hit by how the poverty was so very apparent, and that only an hour's flight away from Thailand the conditions were hugely different," Carver says.

Bob Carver rocks out at Rockin4Tabitha, a musical fundraiser for his house-building efforts in Cambodia.

BOB CARVER



It wasn't until they returned to Canada that they found out about the Tabitha Foundation — a volunteer-based charity that works to address the needs of Cambodian people in a holistic and sustainable way and help them to become self-sufficient. Carver and his wife immediately became involved, donating money to Tabitha's well-building program and eventually joining the house-building program in 2006.

UNDERSTANDING CULTURE

A few corporate sponsors contribute to the group's costs, which consist solely of building tools and supplies, as the team funds their personal expenses and airfare. Another portion of the funds are raised through Rockin4Tabitha, a musical fundraiser held annually in Ottawa.

"Through Rockin4Tabitha, we want to help the foundation get a bigger profile in the community, and it's also a fun way for people to come out and support a good cause," Carver says.

The group's most recent build in January 2010 took them to Sre Ambel in Koh Kong province. Joined by two Coca-Cola Europe executives, a Geology professor and several of her students and others, Carver says it was one of the most fun builds he has been on yet.

In January, the group travelled to Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital where they had an eye-opening orientation to the realities of Cambodian history and culture. New volunteers are required to visit the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum where the Khmer Rouge communist regime killed 10,000 to 15,000 prisoners, as well as the "killing fields" to better understand the Cambodian people.

"They need to visit these places to make sure they know how to connect with the people when they're there," Carver says. "Cultural sensitivity is so important because we have to understand how these people think and what they do and we must know that we are very different from them."



A grateful Cambodian family accepts their newly built home from the Tabitha Foundation.

BOB CARVER

CHANGING LIVES

Sixteen houses and many new friendships later, the team left Cambodia smiling.

"It's one thing to donate money and know that you're doing some good, but to actually be involved with the building and to be in the village is something else altogether," Carver says. "It's incredible to know just how much we're improving their lives."

Cambodian villagers aren't the only ones whose lives are touched by Tabitha. When returning from a build, Carver says it takes a while for him to adjust to the Western world. "The culture over there is so polite, and it takes me a while to get used to things back here when I return. I always have to be patient when I come back and see healthy young people with their hands out when I know there are people with far less."

Rockin4Tabitha recently completed their fifth musical fundraiser, and is heading to Phnom Penh in January for another inspiring journey. For more information on building homes in Cambodia through the Tabitha Foundation, Carver welcomes emails at bob.carver@rcmp-grc.gc.ca. ♦