

Yreka

Restoration work on Miner Street's Gold Nugget Printing brings recognition to owner Mike Simas ... see page 3



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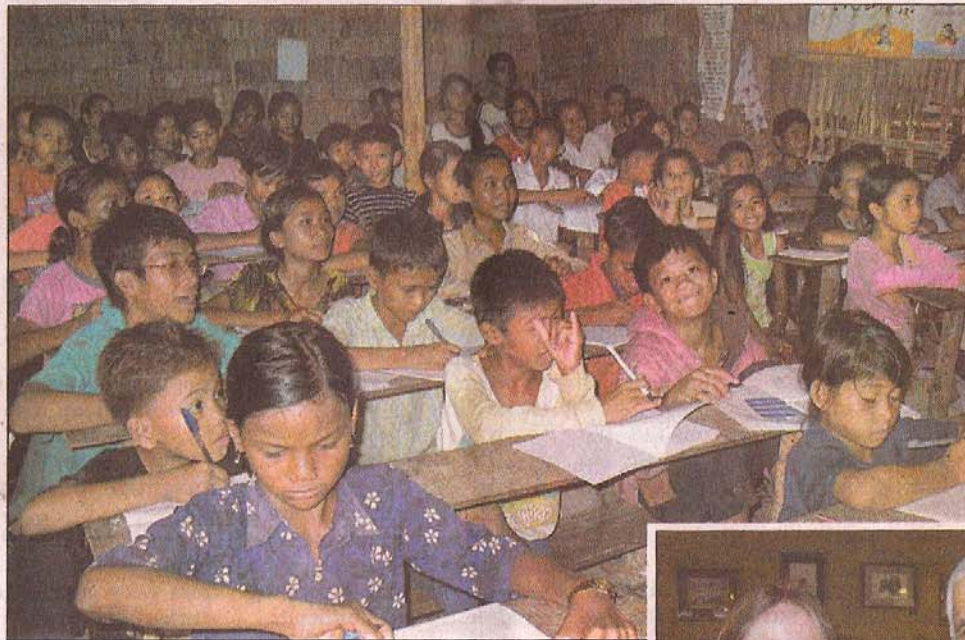
Guilty verdict: Woods faces minimum 12 years

By BRAD SMITH
Daily News Staff Writer

YREKA — After spending less than two hours deliberating, jurors presiding over the Greg Woods trial returned to the courtroom with a guilty verdict on four charges stemming from a 2005 robbery.

The former Yreka High School teacher and coach was charged with robbery, using a firearm in the commission of a crime, assaulting a person with a knife and evading law enforcement officers.

On Sept. 24, 2005, Woods entered the USA gas station on Main Street in Yreka armed with a .25-caliber semi-auto-



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Above, Cambodian students at the free school supported in part by Project Enlighten. Free education isn't available in that Southeast Asian country and people like Olivia Lorge and Asad Rahman, right, are trying to change that. The couple will spend the holiday season in Cambodia, with people they befriended years ago.

"Hands-on" helping halfway around the world

By BRAD SMITH
Daily News Staff Writer

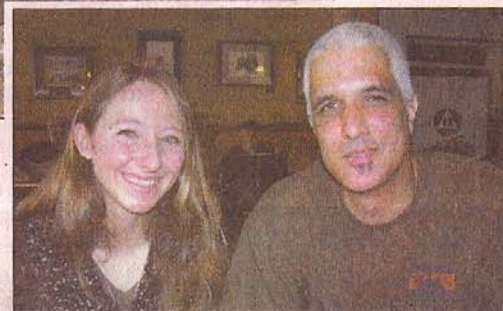
YREKA — U.S. Forest Service firefighters Asad Rahman and Liv Lorge believe strongly in helping people.

Rahman recalls watching TV commercials by organizations asking for people to help the less fortunate in other countries.

"But, I always wanted to do something more 'hands-on' than just be an anonymous donor," he said.

Rahman and Lorge got their opportunity two years ago.

The couple is now actively involved in supporting a free school for Cambodian children,



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Children

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establishing a college fund for Cambodian children maimed by land mines and raising awareness about the conditions of life for many poor Southeast Asian residents.

The road to the couple's focus on service began when Rahman went to Cambodia in 2003.

When he and a fellow firefighter traveled to the Cambodian capitol, Phnom Penh, Rahman was struck by the number of kids on the street begging for money and food.

Seeing children begging for food wasn't necessarily a shock to Rahman, he said, but their ages and condition bothered him.

"It was the two- or three-year-old kids asking for food that got to me . . . and the fact that some had been severely injured or maimed by land mines," he said.

One young man, missing a leg and using a tree branch as a crutch, caught his attention.

Despite his handicap, the young man easily weaved his way across a crowded street, dodging vehicles, "easily out-distancing me - and I have both legs," Rahman said.

The young man and his friends slept in an alleyway not far from Rahman's hotel.

Seeing them as he returned from a day touring Phnom Penh, Rahman decided he wanted to do something for them.

He told the kids he would buy them something to eat. An English-speaking taxi driver, who was acting as Rahman's tour guide, translated.

The kids cheered and shouted.

"Ice cream," Rahman said. "All they wanted to eat was ice cream."

After an ice cream feast, Rahman asked his taxi driver guide if he could do anything else for the kids. The driver told him the kids slept every night on the cold streets, and could use some warm clothes.

So Rahman and the kids walked a few blocks to an open-air market and shopped.

"The boys grabbed whatever they wanted, even flowery shirts made for women," he said.

According to Rahman, the kids were grateful for the clothes, especially the young man with the tree branch crutch, whose name was Chet.

The young man darted down the street to the alleyway where he slept and brought out drawing paper and pencils he had wrapped up in cloth and hidden away

in a wall.

Sitting down on the street, Chet "furiously drew something on paper" and gave it to Rahman.

It was an "incredible drawing," Rahman said, one which Chet insisted he take, as a gift.

The next day, Rahman left for the U.S.

When he met Lorge, his future fiancée, one of the first things Rahman shared with her was the story of his Cambodian trip and his meeting with Chet.

In Dec. 2005, Rahman returned to Cambodia with Lorge. The couple planned to end up in Phnom Penh by Christmas.

Although it was "a long shot," Rahman hoped to locate Chet.

During a temple tour early in their trip, Rahman and Lorge's guide told them about a former Khmer Rouge soldier named Aki Ra, who was famous for disarming Cambodian land mines and creating a land mine museum.

The couple visited the museum, where Aki Ra, his wife Hourt and extended family of adopted children also lived.

Lorge recalled the moment when she was holding a small, de-activated land mine in her hands and Rahman called out to her.

"Asad was nearby looking at pictures of children," she said. "He called out to me, 'I found Chet.'"

Sure enough, a photo of the young man was hanging on the museum wall.

They learned from Hourt that Chet had been adopted by herself and Aki Ra, and had moved from Phnom Penh into their home. He was attending school and selling his artwork in the museum's gift shop.

When Chet came home from school that day, Rahman said, the reunion was emotional.

"It was a great Christmas - especially for Asad," Lorge said.

Lorge and Rahman learned that Aki Ra was working to establish a college fund for the children he and Hourt had taken in, and that he wanted to help other children get an early education as well.

Cambodia doesn't have a free education system, Rahman said. Parents send each child to school with thirty to fifty cents to be given to the teacher as salary.

But in a country where a family's average income is no more than \$300 a year, even that amount makes sending children to school difficult.

When they learned that Aki Ra was working with

two Buddhist monks to construct a free school for children, Lorge and Rahman knew they wanted to help.

Back in the States, the couple started telling their families, friends and co-workers about Aki Ra, Chet, the land mine museum and the special education project.

Fellow firefighters from California and other states expressed interest in helping.

"It was a snowball effect," Lorge said.

The Cambodian Land Mine College Fund was started last year. Aki Ra also takes donations for both the school and the college fund at his museum.

Rahman, Lorge and several others established Project Enlighten, which offers college or trade school scholarships and micro loans to Cambodian kids who finish school. The Project also helps Aki Ra and the monks with school costs.

"Our project is helping people to better themselves. It's a hand up, not a hand out," Rahman said.

He expects Project Enlighten to expand over time.

Lorge works with a firefighter whose family came from Laos, and through his stories she and Rahman have come to believe that they can use Project

Enlighten to help people in that country, too.

Rahman is preparing for his trip overseas this week, on Thanksgiving.

He is going back to Aki Ra's new museum and the new school with some new equipment, including a few donated laptop computers, for the teachers.

"They're using rebuilt computers that still use the old floppy drives," Rahman said. "The new laptops will really help them."

Lorge will join Rahman and Aki Ra's family in Siem Reap for Christmas.

She said it's "interesting" celebrating Christmas in a Buddhist country.

Due to the influx of American and European tourists, Cambodians have adapted to new ceremonies and celebrations.

"You step out of the Phnom Penh Airport and hear Christmas songs and see tuk-tuk drivers wearing Santa Claus hats," Lorge said.

To learn more about Project Enlighten, visit www.projectenlighten.org.

Lorge and Rahman said that donations of everything from money to pencils are needed.

"If people want to pitch in and help, even a little bit, they can learn how at that Web site," Rahman said.