

Giving back to the British community

By Jeremy King

As a long term resident of Asia, with extensive stints in Hong Kong and Thailand, my wife hailing from the Philippines and two children at Bangkok Patana I consider Asia, especially Thailand, to be my home.

However, I often think of Britain with my happy childhood in Durham and Perthshire and with key family members still living in Edinburgh and Durham. I like to think we bring part of what is good about Britain to these distant shores.

The British, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand community in Bangkok is quite tightly knit with Embassy and Chambers of Commerce functions, Rotary clubs, the British Club and international schools bringing us together. Overall, most of us can be thankful for a standard of living rarely enjoyed in our home country.

In Thailand there are 600 members of the British Chamber of Commerce, There are approximately 50,000 British nationals resident in Thailand, of which over 10,000 are living in Thailand on retirement visas. In 2015 there were over one million British arrivals, the majority of them tourists with whom we have relatively little interaction.

It came as some surprise to me, whilst attending an Embassy consular briefing by Layla Slatter last year, just how much good work their office does. Apart from processing 7,646 notarisations for the resident community in 2015, the team also handled over 1,400 assistance cases including 334 deaths, 46 missing persons, 259 hos-



The British Embassy grounds in Wireless Road, Bangkok.

pitalisations and, unfortunately, 161 cases of arrest.

Ms. Layla, then went on to mention a number of examples of cases which had somehow “fallen through the cracks” of normal process. Cases where British subjects became stranded in Thailand with no financial lifeline to access urgently needed medical care, or lacked the price of a ticket home, or were even desperate for a basic meal after being pick-pocketed. Hard to imagine amongst BCCT members, but who knows, it could happen to any of us (and probably did when we were students !).

The Embassy helps in a number of ways, firstly in terms of immediate assistance, from an emergency relief fund, which survives entirely

on charitable donations, and generally dishes out between Baht 1,000-5,000 to the most urgent cases, and did so for 37 cases in 2015.

The next level, are cases where the person is just a bit short of funds for a ticket home, or in unfortunate cases where someone dies, but relatives lack the funds to arrange transportation; in these cases the Embassy lends money against a “promise to repay”, but there is an internal policy limit per individual.

Thirdly, are the more financially demanding cases where patients cannot afford their medical bills, but often have reserves back in Britain that they cannot access. Again the Embassy may lend with a promise to repay, but because the amount is

larger the approval process may take longer, which exacerbates the financial burden.

Having taken all this on board, I decided I would like to help, and the thought occurred to me that other BCCT members might like to contribute too. As a result, we have established The British Community Charitable Fund (BCCF) which is administered by the British Embassy.

The Embassy offered to have representatives from the British community to participate in the decision-making, but we felt it would be better to rely on their judgement. Instead, the Embassy will produce a quarterly report, with a simple tally of inflows and outflows, and real life examples of beneficiaries.

So far this year, the BCCF has received Baht 100,000 in donations, and given out THB 36,430 in emergency relief since March 2016, spread across 4 cases. The BCCF would look to fill any gap up to Baht 50,000 per case where the Embassy has reached its "promise to pay" limit for repatriation or medical cases.

A reasonable estimate of money needed to fully fund the program is about Baht 1 million, much of which would be more like a revolving facility: effectively making loans to recipients which would generally be repaid at a later date. So the annual inflow needed might be Baht 1 million the first year, but would then be about Baht 500,000 per annum thereafter.

In conclusion, there is an opportunity to share your good fortune, in a small way, to assist your stranded or distressed countrymen return home, after a sojourn gone wrong. The Embassy will issue receipts and recognize larger donations in the form of embossed certificates.

If you would like to learn more about this program, please email Fem at the British Embassy, Ms. Fem Wild Fem.Wild2@fco.gov.uk or myself at jfk@skfm.com.



Congratulations to The Bangkok Angels football team for maintaining its superiority in the 'super senior' category by winning the 2016 Bangkok Masters Over 55s trophy. The team eased through the group format before producing a fine performance in the final to beat the Coffin Dodgers 1-0. Thanks to sponsor Cornerstone.

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The Chamber asks all members to review their current profiles and update if necessary online at: www.bccthai.com. Use your login (membership number) and password. Information from your online profile will be downloaded by the publisher for inclusion in the print version of the Members Handbook and Directory. Please keep all text to within 300-350 words.

The Chamber only includes half page profiles of member companies that have paid 2016 membership dues. For a copy of your 2016 membership invoice, please email: finance@bccthai.com.

The BCCT Handbook and Directory is an invaluable source of data for advertisers and members, offering a wealth of information including updated contact details of all members.

It is distributed to BCCT members and to many influential organisations in Thailand and throughout the region including business, cultural and political associations. The Handbook is also sent to British and European organisations – commercial, NGO and governmental.