Thank you for taking the time to visit the Wong Mean Reth Learning Campus; albeit via the Internet! We know Cambodia is quite a distance, but we’re hoping this Table of Quick Links takes you to where you want to go.

Click each link and join us at the Wong Mean Meth Learning Campus.

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This site will be updated with photos and stories as the school continues to grow. Thank you for visiting and sharing in this journey.
The Start of Wong Mean Reth Learning Campus

The first question usually asked of Harry and Rosemary is, “How did all of this get started?” And their response is, “In a traffic jam in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia!”

The Wongs were traveling with a group in Ethiopia in October 2007, and while stuck in traffic, the discussion turned to education. One of the passengers told of her involvement with building and sustaining schools in Cambodia. Back at the hotel they were shown pictures of the schools and the children.

Their hearts melted as they saw an opportunity to better the world one child at a time. The following months were a series of email exchanges with the Apsara Foundation in Cambodia who act as liaisons between the foundation and the government.

A site was selected and a name was chosen for the school. The Wongs chose a remote area in the jungle where there had never been a school. The Mean Reth commune leaders welcomed the possibilities for their children and donated the land to build the school.

The Wongs chose a name for the school calling it Wong Mean Reth Learning Campus. The plans were approved and construction got under way.

The Wong Mean Reth Learning Campus was planned for 70-100 primary students with two to three teachers. A single building was built for all of the classrooms. Housing on the school grounds was created for the teachers to live in. A canteen was constructed to serve one hot meal a day to each student. Teacher salaries were doubled to attract talented educators. (The government salary for a teacher in Cambodia is $30 a month!)

The Wongs and The First Days of School Foundation knew that this was just a start and planned for future growth to sustain the school, the children, and the teachers. A five-year plan was created to build another series of classrooms and expand the school to the upper grades, bring in power with solar panels, dig an aquaculture pond and plant a garden to help ease the cost of feeding everyone, and provide training for the teachers to increase their skill.

Registration was announced via the community grapevine and children poured out of the surrounding jungle to come to school. On the first day of school, over 275 children came through the gate!

The local school committee along with the principal and the Apsara Foundation coordinator quickly divided the children and set up a morning and afternoon shift for the students. Another two teachers were hired.

In February 2009 of that first year, the Wongs made their way to the school to formally dedicate the Wong Mean Reth Learning Campus and meet the children and teachers. Click the School Expansion link to find out what happened during their visit and how the school grew overnight.
The school is located in the Kompong Thom province, Sondan district, Mean Reth commune in the country of Cambodia in Asia. To get to the school requires a four-wheel-drive vehicle to navigate the mud roads riddled with potholes. The journey takes 5 hours from either Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, or Siem Reap, the home of Angkor Wat, the 12th century temple site and the main tourist attraction in Cambodia.
Construction of Wong Mean Reth Learning Campus

Classrooms under construction

Classrooms nearing completion
The teachers’ home

The student canteen for meals

Sign at the construction site
The Dedication and Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

Arriving at our school
Parents and students at the ceremony
Greetings to the Government Representatives, Community Leaders, Representatives of the Apsara Foundation, Principal, Teachers, Students, Parents, Brothers and Sisters, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is humbling this morning to see so many gathered here for this very special occasion. We are most grateful that an opportunity has been given to us to help you build and sustain a school for this community and for the children of this area.

The beautiful thing about children is that they are full of hopes and dreams and potential and that is why we have parents and schools.

As parents you are the most important people in the development of your children. You give your children roots. Like the roots of the beautiful banyan trees at Angkor Wat, you are strong and hold your children firmly to your heart.

The purpose of a school is to help you bring out the enormous potential in children. Schools give children wings, to fly, to reach for the sky.

As students here at Wong Mean Reth Learning Campus, every one of you has the potential to become a governor, a chief, a president. You can be a doctor, a nurse, a teacher. You can be an architect and create beautiful buildings for people to behold. You can be an artist and bring smiles as people admire your work. You can be a business person and bring prosperity to your community and country. You can be a diplomat and bring peace to the world.
You have the potential to help others and to give back to the world what we have all gathered today to give to you.

We are grateful to the community for providing the land for this learning campus. We are grateful to the ministry of education for providing the teachers and the lessons. We are grateful to the Apsara Foundation for coordinating the work of many to build this school. Most importantly, we are grateful to the parents, the children, and the community members of the Mean Reth area for allowing us to be part your education and your lives.

In the United States of America, we have been school teachers for many, many years, just like your teachers here today. We have seen many of our students grow up to be very successful. We know the power that education brings to your life.

With your help, dedication, and commitment we are prepared to improve this school. We want to see this school become sustained with its own garden, farm, and fish pond. We want to see solar power here at the school. We want to see computers here to connect the teachers and students to the world. We want to see the teachers improve themselves so that they help their students become successful in school and in life. We are prepared to help, but we need to work together achieve this.

Today there are about 250 children present. How fortunate you are to be here today in a school with a teacher. Do you know there are children who will never have the opportunity to go to school? Around the world, there are 323 million children who will never go to school. Do you how many that is? In all of your country of Cambodia, there are about 15 million people, young and old. So image about 20 of your countries filled with people; that is how many will never go to school. What an opportunity you have in the world!

Boys and Girls, you are the future of your beautiful country, Cambodia. You will need to study hard, listen to your parents and teachers, do your homework, and work together with each other to make each day have value and meaning.

If you are educated, you can change your life. Take and build on each opportunity to fulfill what you dream and want to be. Education is the only variable for success. Boys and Girls, strive very hard to be a well educated person.

We are here to work hand in hand with you as you begin this incredible journey of learning. Together we will make Wong Mean Reth Learning Campus a place where young minds grow with wisdom and young hearts grow with desire to make each day better than the last for themselves, their families, their community, and the world.

We thank everyone one of you Honorable Governor, Commune Chief, Apsara Foundation, ministry of education, parents, teachers, students, ladies and gentlemen - for your very warm welcome here at the Wong Mean Reth Learning Campus. We will carry your smiles with us until we return.

Parents, teachers, and community members—Today, let us dedicate ourselves to helping our children become successful and realizing their full potential in this world.

Thank you.
The Students and the Classrooms
Wong Mean Reth Learning Campus Grounds
Lining up for lunch prepared in the kitchen of the Canteen
The Growth of Wong Mean Reth Learning Campus

Harry and Rosemary Wong attended the dedication and ribbon cutting ceremony on February 15, 2009. While they had been to Cambodia many times, this was their first visit to the region and their school.

During the construction process, the Apsara Foundation sent detailed photos and a narrative to describe the construction. So, the Wongs were surprised to see two more classroom buildings on the property when they arrived at the school. Meeting with the local school committee they discovered that the World Bank and the Asia Development Bank each donated the construction of the buildings, but it would be up to the community to support the school.

The local school committee asked the Wongs if they would “adopt” the other buildings and the 50 children and 3 teachers and make it Wong Mean Reth Learning Campus. How could they say no!

Their five year plan quickly became a one year plan and details were discussed on how to integrate all of the children and the teachers and give everyone the same opportunities.

From an idea in February 2008, of one building with 5 classrooms, 100 children, and 3 teachers, the Wongs left Wong Mean Reth Learning Campus on February 15, 2009, agreeing to support and maintain 3 buildings with 15 classrooms, 325 children, and 8 teachers.

At the writing of this update, the new school year has just begun. Unfortunately, a typhoon swept through the area at the same time. While the school did not suffer any damage, the community was flooded and many homes were destroyed. The start of the school year has been postponed until the flood waters recede and children can once again make their way to the Wong Mean Reth Learning Campus.
Become a Part of Wong Mean Reth Learning Campus

You can make a difference in the world. We are always grateful to those who want to join us in creating a place of opportunity for the children of Cambodia. Projects for the years ahead that are not in the annual budget include solar panels, a playground, a science lab, and computers.

If you would like to make a contribution of any size to any of these projects, please send your check made out to The First Days of School Foundation. Your contribution is tax deductible as allowed by the law. All contributions will be acknowledged for tax purposes.

Please send all contributions to The First Days of School Foundation, ATTN: Rosemary Wong, 943 North Shoreline Boulevard, Mountain View, California, 94043. Please email RWong@HarryWong.com with any questions. On behalf of the children of Cambodia . . .