

EXCEPTIONAL

KIDS GROW A FUTURE

Sabine Klaus could use some help guiding Phang Nga youngsters to more promising lives

MANOTE TRIPATHI
THE NATION

Sabine Klaus followed through on her plan to pack in a career as a high-flying corporate executive and do something more useful for society. It just landed her in an unexpected place - Phang Nga.

The marketing director at a German dairy company, who's previously worked for multinationals like Kraft and Johnson & Johnson, loves mountains, so she planned to go help needy children in the Himalayas, maybe Nepal.

"I wasn't so keen on Thailand at the time - on dealing with the aftermath of a big disaster like the tsunami," says Klaus, 49.

But she found herself at Yaowawit School in Phang Nga last January - and loved it.

She's now the school's project

manager and is hoping to commit to a two-year stay.

"I don't regret for a second quitting my job in Germany. I'd planned to get out of the corporate world at age 50 and now I'm glad I did it earlier!

"For me, changes in life aren't frightening. I'm the adventurous type. I can adapt very well. I can live modestly. And the experience here is rewarding and exciting. I've met so many great people who've come to visit Yaowawit."

Philipp Graf von Hardenberg established the school in Kapong after spending time in Thailand helping victims of the 2004 tsunami.

He set it up as a boarding school offering kindergarten and primary education for youngsters who'd lost their parents in the catastrophe and for others from socially disadvantaged families.



SABINE KLAUS gave up a lucrative career to help less fortunate people, and that's what she's doing among the children of Yaowawit School in Phang Nga.

NATION/ CHARNKONG BHORNDILOKRAT

LEND A HAND

■ Sabine Klaus will gratefully accept donations to Yaowawit School.

Call her at (082) 283 8355 or e-mail sabkrs@aol.com.

■ Find out more at www.Yaowawit.com and <http://SabineKlausYaowawit.Wordpress.com>.

When Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn formally opened Yaowawit School in 2005, it had 80 students. Now there are 120, ages four to 18, and staff of about 30.

Foreign volunteers help teachers, nannies and family members look after the kids and add English lessons to the Thai curriculum.

The students also grow organic vegetables, fruit and herbs for their own use and to sell at the Kapong market, and learn about working in the hospitality trade at the school's Yaowawit Lodge, which has two restaurants and six rooms for overnight guests.

It was Klaus who got the Phang

Nga kids raising vegetables, reasoning that they'd not only learn to be self-sustaining but also pick up some entrepreneurial spirit.

"They're learning to grow things and make organic mosquito repellent from lemongrass and other herbs," she says.

"We're trying to educate them in how to build a business and sell products on the market. It's important to be self-sustaining like this, because that's how they can break free from the cycle of poverty."

Then there's the hospitality sector and the English language, all of which will stand the youngsters in good stead in the tourism-oriented South.

The financing has always come from public and corporate donations, but Klaus says the funds are running out because, with the sole exception of Mercedes Benz, the German companies with business in Thailand have ended their sponsorship.

So Klaus is putting her marketing expertise to use again. She's hunting for income-generating opportunities.

In one instance, she arranged to have students from a Hong

Kong international school come to Yaowawit for two weeks of leadership training. The visitors also got to know a lot about nature - and the problems facing their Thai peers.

With schemes like that and its rented accommodations and restaurants, the school aims to cover half of its Bt120,000-per-month overhead by 2015. Klaus has also planned a fund-raiser for her 50th birthday this month.

Along with donations, they need more volunteers - ideally university students looking for some experience in business and project management, but anyone who speaks Thai or English can teach art, drama, music, sports and language.

"I'm happy if the children can speak one foreign language," Klaus says.

"I don't want to overwhelm with too many things."

And there's something else the volunteers can do: just sit with the kids, play some games and have a bit of fun, especially in the evenings when there are no lessons to occupy their minds.

"Children need people who can just listen to them," Klaus says.



SOME OF YAOWAWIT'S students lost their parents in the 2004 tsunami, but all are socially disadvantaged.