

## Features

## Refugee program reunites members of Laotian family

By Lee Strong

Upon arrival in the United States, refugees from Southeast Asia face problems similar to those a U.S. citizen might encounter if he suddenly found himself in Siberia, observed Ed Patane, refugee supervisor at the Catholic Family Center.

"You don't know the language, or the customs," Patane said. "The food is unfamiliar. The climate is strange, and you don't know how to dress for it. Basic survival is the question."

Although they will have to deal with differences in food, customs and language, the eight members of the Douangdala family who arrived in Rochester Monday, March 28, won't have to deal with at least one problem faced by many refugees — not knowing anyone.

Daughter, Naly, her husband, Somboun, and their three children arrived in Rochester the previous Friday. The family's oldest son, Yong, arrived in Rochester as a refugee last September, and will now serve as sponsor for the rest of the family.

According to Patane, it isn't unusual for former refugees to sponsor other refugees, but for a refugee to become a sponsor after only six months in this country, and to sponsor his own family is uncommon. Yet the refugee resettlement program at the family center "is geared toward family reunification," he said.

For the Douangdala family, the road to the United States began more than three years ago in Laos, when Somboun was arrested by the country's communist government. After being hospitalized for a gunshot wound suffered during the arrest, Somboun escaped and fled to Thailand. The rest of the family later caught up with him there, joining the more than 300,000 Southeast Asians living in refugee-holding camps.

The Douangdala family settled in the Nakhompranom camp, which still holds more than 22,000 Laotians, Vietnamese and Cambodians. Thai soldiers guard the camps, forcing refugees to remain within. Although refugees are fed and clothed in the Thai camps, they are offered few opportunities for activity, CFC staff members explained. Space within the camps is limited, leaving little land for farming, and — except for jobs related to camp operations — employment opportunities in the camps are few. And, although many of the camps have schools to teach trades and English, the classes are not equipped to handle the large numbers.

In addition, the Thai government is burdened by caring for the refugees for many years, as they wait to be accepted by such host nations as the United States and Canada, Patane pointed out. In recent years, as interest in the refugee problem has decreased in the

United States, the government has steadily reduced the quotas for immigrants. In 1980, the United States accepted 166,000 Southeast Asians; the quota for 1987 was 25,000, he noted.

Patane also observed that continued maintenance of the camps is putting a financial strain on Thailand. The government has threatened to close the camps and send the refugees back to the countries they once fled, because it believes Western nations have not cooperated enough in processing refugees for resettlement. Some refugees wait up to five years before they are accepted for resettlement, he remarked.

For the Douangdala family, the wait lasted nearly three years. In 1987, the oldest son, Yong, left the holding camp to settle in Rochester. He has been studying English at Westside Adult Learning Center and is working part-time in a restaurant, using the experience in food preparation he had gained at the holding camp. Yong, his wife and two children, are still on public assistance — as are so many of the refugees when they first arrive — but he hopes to be self-supporting soon. Recently, he purchased a car, which has given him a greater sense of independence.

This sense of confidence is new for Yong, who was very frightened when he arrived in the United States. "When I first came (here), I felt nervous, scared," he recalled. "I (could not) go out of my home because I didn't know English."

Although he still struggles with his new language, Yong speaks remarkably well after only six months of classes, and he plans to help the newly arrived members of his family learn English as quickly as possible.

In addition to language problems, many refugees lack marketable job skills, Patane observed. "They have few skills; many of them are farmers," he said. "We've found the less Westernized (the refugees) are, the harder time they have adjusting."

The Douangdalas are typical of this refugee pattern. They were farmers in Laos, and Mrs. Douangdala acknowledged that she has no marketable skills. Moreover, Ary Sisuphan, a bilingual case worker at CFC, pointed out that refugees of Mrs. Douangdala's age — 44 — often have a difficult time learning English. Very likely, she will remain on public assistance or will be supported by her children, Sisuphan said.

Already, the CFC staff is beginning to arrange for programs for the Douangdala children. The two oldest boys still living with their mother — Sithonh, 20, and Bouakeo, 18 — are scheduled to attend Westside Adult Learning Center for intensive training in English. In addition, they will be encouraged to attend the



Bouliene Douangdala waits with three of her sons — (from left) Yong, Sithonh and Bouakeo — for a Catholic Family Center caseworker to help her complete forms. Yong, who has lived in Rochester since last September, is sponsoring the rest of his family, the last of whom arrived Monday, March 28.

CFC's monthly job club sessions, in which refugees practice interview techniques, and learn how to use the want ads and employment services.

The other children will be enrolled in a special Rochester City School District program for immigrant children. Meanwhile, with Yong's assistance — and CFC's guidance — the family will register for public assistance, apply for social security numbers and find an apartment. The U.S. Catholic Conference's Resettlement Office has provided \$2,000 — \$250 per person — to pay for an apartment and to help

the family survive until public assistance comes through, a process that usually takes three to five weeks.

Generally, CFC involvement with refugees is "in inverse proportion to the kind of help they get outside," Patane explained. "If they have good sponsors, a lot of the work is done outside the agency." In the Douangdalas' case, Yong's success in adjusting to life in the United States may make it easier for other family members to become self-sufficient, Patane concluded.

## Holy Father

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Supper March 31 in Rome's cathedral, the Basilica of St. John Lateran. In his sermon commemorating Christ's establishment of the Eucharist, the pope quoted the Gospel of John: "He loved them to the end."

"This is the most profound truth of the Last Supper," the pope added. "The body and the blood, the passion on the cross and the death signify" this truth of love, he said.

Earlier in the day, Pope John Paul joined 22 cardinals and more than 30 archbishops and bishops in St. Peter's Basilica for the traditional blessing of sacred chrism and holy oils.

In a Holy Saturday vigil service in St. Peter's, the pope baptized 27 catechumens — people entering the church after a program of instruction. The group included three Vietnamese and one American, 19-year-old Sean Lamb, a student at the University of California-Los Angeles.

## Church professionals to meet at Canandaigua retreat house

Parish secretaries, bookkeepers, business and office managers throughout the Rochester diocese will gather for a day of prayer and sharing on Tuesday, April 26, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua. The event is being sponsored by Church Office Professional Employees.

The theme for the day will be "Feelings and Spiritual Growth" and will feature Father Frank DiSano, parochial vicar at St. Rita's Church in Webster, as retreat leader. The day

Lamb decided to become a Catholic after the pope's visit to the United States last September and began taking lessons at an Opus Dei center in Los Angeles, said an Opus Dei spokesman in Rome.

In an informal Easter evening gathering at the Vatican, the pope joined some 4,000 Opus Dei members from more than 400 universities around the world. The traditional encounter featured Chinese and Nigerian folk songs, dance and a clown act performed by three students.

"With word and example, you should always transmit hope and Christian optimism to the contemporary world, so often clouded by sadness and anguish," the pope said.

Opus Dei, an organization of lay Catholics and priests, carries out much of its formation work on college campuses and among professional groups.

On April 4, the pope traveled by helicopter to Castel Gandolfo, 15 miles south of Rome, where he was expected to rest for two days. He greeted local pilgrims in the courtyard of the papal there shortly after his arrival.

will close with the celebration of Mass by Father Thomas Barrett, CSSR, rector of Notre Dame and Father DiSano.

Members of C.O.P.E. have extended an open invitation to for all church employees to attend the event. The donation for the day is \$7, which includes lunch.

Those wishing to attend should contact Mary R. Cantatore at Church of the Holy Spirit, 1355 Haich Road, Webster, or call (716)671-5520 for information.

## Social ministry office allots funds to area food providers

The board of directors of the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry has approved the allocation of Operation Breadbox funds to 17 emergency food providers in Cayuga, Ontario, Seneca, Wayne and Yates Counties. Recipient organizations are primarily free, local food cupboards in the five-county area. The following organizations received Operation Breadbox funding:

In Cayuga County — the St. Mary's Charity Fund in Auburn, and the Southern Cayuga County Emergency Food Pantry in Aurora.

In Ontario County — the Gleaners/Community Kitchen in Canandaigua; the St. Felix Community Cupboard in Clifton Springs; as well as the Center of Concern, the Geneva Ecumenical Community Lunch Program, the Salvation Army and the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry Assistance Program, all of Geneva.

In Seneca County — the Seneca County House of Concern in Seneca Falls, the South Seneca Ecumenical Food Pantry in Ovid and the Interlaken Food Cupboard.

In Wayne County — the Wolcott Food Pantry, Wayne County Rural Ministry/Community Center in Williamson, and the Wayne County Action Program in Lyons.

And in Yates County — the Dundee Food Pantry and Penn Yan Food for the Needy.

Giovina Carosco, executive director of the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry, referred to the U.S. Catholic bishops' pastoral letter on economic justice — "Economic Justice For All" — in announcing the emergency food grants.

In the pastoral letter, the bishops state "as individuals and as a nation, we are called to make a fundamental option for the poor." The obligation to evaluate social and economic activity from the viewpoint of the poor and the powerless arises from the radical command to love one's neighbor as one's self. Those who are marginalized and whose rights are denied have privileged claims if society is to provide justice for all."

Operation Breadbox is a hunger-education and donation program organized annually in local parishes of the Diocese of Rochester. Emergency food service allocations ranged from \$50 to \$500, with some \$3,300 being allocated across the five-county area.

## Annual 'Spring Fling' planned for Mapledale Party House

The 30th annual "Spring Fling" sponsored by the Genesee Conference of Senior Citizens Directors, Inc., will take place May 4 from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Mapledale Party House, 1020 Maple Street, Rochester.

Highlights of the day's events include the presentation of the senior citizen of the year award and certificates of appreciation. Following the buffet lunch, the John Capone Band will be playing for your dancing and listening pleasure.

For reservations call Sandy Burgett or Sandy Kasprzyk at the Monroe County Office for the Aging, (716)274-7811.