



Jan / Febr / March 2005 No.6

Solar Serve News

Dear friends,

Happy new 'solar' year to all of you! First of all we want to thank you for all your suggestions, ideas and encouragements. We do not want to pretend that we have all the solar knowledge. Most of our information comes from you or from the internet. So, don't worry to ask us the questions, because we are also learning. It is great that there is so much information available. Our special thanks to Solar Cooking International. They have a wonderful website with good information. Have a look for your self: www.solarcookers.org If we can start a project, you can do it too!

New Truck

In our last letter we told you that we received a few donations from some generous people and were able to buy a truck. We went to the bank on the motorbike and received loads of Vietnamese dong in plastic bags (1USD = 15.700 VN Dong). We have been laughing as little children when we left the bank. The truck dealer helped us with all our paperwork (insurance and police permissions), the cover on the back and the Solar Serve logo on the truck. Finally we were very happy and thankful to be the owners of our first truck. It came just in time, now the rain season has been started. During this time we are not working in the countryside but we are involved in making the solar cookers in our main factory. We had to buy a lot of material. Now we are growing we have to think also about more storage space. The box cookers do not take so much space because we can store them in small pieces, but the parabolic cookers with a diameter of 1.30 m take a lot of space. Step by step we are learning what the needs are. It is great to learn through those experiences. We are not professionals, but just a group of people who are willing to help others. But we do not take it lightly and go for quality and excellence, and try to do our best to make it work.



Son of Lien

Lien is an engineer and has been on staff for several years. He has been a teacher in our solar cooking workshops. There he met his wife Thuy. They became our first Solar Serve couple and soon a beautiful son named Hiep was born. They discovered that Hiep had problems with his heart and the doctor advised them to have surgery. He was still too young for a big operation and we hoped that his health and heart approved in this waiting time. It seemed to them that he did better, but after a check-up with the doctor, there was still a hole in his little heart. They are planning to do a surgery next year in Ho Chi Minh city (Saigon), which is 800km south of their home. Please remember Hiep and think about this young family. Lien will attend a school in the Philippines from February till July for more education.



Thuy



Hiep



Lien

200 km walk in four days.

Some people are wondering who supports our Solar Serve project. First of all we want to make it clear that the purpose of this letter is not to get financial support. We just want to inform you as friends and have our own way in trusting day by day for our daily solar needs. But in this letter we would like to mention one handicapped man, his name is Fred, who has been sponsoring us for years. Every year he walks 200km in four days and ask people to sponsor him. Although he doesn't live in Vietnam, but it amazes us how much impact he has on people. It has not always been easy for him and recently he lost his job, but we are so thankful that he as a handicapped himself, wanted to help others who are handicapped and poor. Therefore we were able to employ mister Vinh, who was shot in the war. Although he is handicapped, he managed to become a carpenter and Vinh is now able to make the wooden solar boxes for us at his home. Is it not wonderful that people can help each other although they are separated thousands of kilometers?



Plans for a new project

Although the box cooker has been our main cooker in helping people, we have also been researching the parabolic cooker. We compared similar projects in China, India, Nepal, Chili and Africa and came up with our own ideas and plans. In some countries this project is subsidized by their governments. Others have been trying to sell the parabolic cookers in order to maintain the work when there is no support from the outside. People were able to buy the cookers by loans and had to pay back in a certain timeframe. They could do this by saving the cost of fuel, which they normally should pay for their daily cooking. The cost has to be as low as possible in order to make it reasonable for somebody to buy it. We have been talking with the University if this will be possible in Vietnam. Even if they allowed us not to pay tax, will be already a great help. The University was very open for this idea. We can make the parabolic cooker for only 50 USD. (In other Asian countries almost double).

But we are not going into business! Our goal is to help the poor and needy, but it will be wonderful if the project can run by itself, without any outside support. We have already made more than 50 parabolic frames. Our staff learned to weld, cut and bend the steel bars. A few weeks ago we bought a lot of reflecting sheets for the 270 pieces on one frame. A lot of work, but some of the workers became very skillful. A parabolic cooker and a box cooker were given to the University for research. Now we are waiting for their approval of starting the parabolic project in 2005.



Called to serve

A few years ago we started to call ourselves Solar Serve. In this name you find our purpose, that is to serve people. The year 2004 has been a wonderful year to serve so many people. Sometimes they were poor or rich, old or young, single or married, sick or healthy, illiterate or educated, or living in the countryside or mountains. It was a privilege to serve them. It brings so much joy! To serve the people of Vietnam is also our desire for the coming new year. It is a challenge. Again we are not qualified but we see the need and do our best. We hope that we can inspire you by doing something for you neighbors. It doesn't mean solar cooking but be creative. We have heard of a friend who helped a very rejected aids patient with a cup of homemade chicken soup. He didn't know that this aids patient had been dreaming that same day about his mother making some homemade chicken soup. He was desperately in need of love, after being so rejected. This (creative) cup of soup of our friend changed his life. He had experienced love by serving. What a story! Lets fold and put our hands together by serving in a world of many needs, shall we?

We have made hundreds of box cookers already. During the rain season we ask the workers to make the separated parts (wooden boxes, glass covers, reflecting plates, rubber seals, wheels and basins). This could be done in our main factory or at home. When we begin a local project in the Summer, we rent a small house, move all the parts to this place and reassemble the cookers. (see photo's below)



Metal seal

We bought a machine to make a seal on the solar cookers. We are not afraid that people will copy the cookers, because all information is free available on the internet. Solar cookers are made for people's benefit and not for making money. We only want to protect ourselves in case people are misusing it. If they come up with a bad product and sell it in our name, the seal will help the user to recognize who has made it. The machine and seal (4 x 4 cm) are difficult to copy.



Keep in touch!

Solar Serve Team

Called to Serve

For more Solar Serve News:

<http://www.vietnamsolarserve.org/solarservenews.html>

Or write to:

solarserve@yahoo.com