

# PIWC just keeps on giving

By Nick Davies

Children and parents at Ao Por School enjoyed fun, games and feasting on August 10 at a children's day organized by the Phuket International Women's Club (PIWC). The event was held to celebrate Mother's Day and as part of an ongoing initiative by the PIWC and local sponsors to provide much needed support for the primary school.

The school kids competed for medals in traditional sports day games, including relays, sack races and competitions in bursting water-filled balloons while parents and teachers cheered them on. Adult members of the PIWC were no match for the determined youngsters in a tug of war to round off the games before lunch.

Back in the classrooms after lunch, the children lined up expectantly to receive colorful goody bags of sweets and useful items for their lessons, such as pens, scissors, rulers, erasers and pencil cases provided by the day's sponsors, which included Phuket TGR Group Asia, Ocean Villas, Sunseekers (Max Marine), Bovis, Hunter Sotheby's International Realty, Enhance, Jumeirah Private Island Resort, Engel & Volkers and Simpson Marine.

The *Gazette* kitted out the kids with caps and Oriental Leisure helped organize the day and provided transportation for equipment as part of continuing efforts by the PIWC to provide assistance with schooling and scholarships for the region's underprivileged children.

Ao Por, on the east coast of Phuket, is fast becoming home to many high-end projects, boasting several magnificent residential developments, yet many of the 260 children attending Ao Por School come from very poor homes and lack basic necessities; some of them walk to school barefoot while shiny chauffeur-driven cars glide by.



**FUN & GAMES:** (Above and top right) Students at Ao Por School take on Phuket International Women's Club (PIWC) members during the fun day.

**RIGHT ON:** (Right) Students give a 'thumbs-up' thanks to the PIWC for awarding scholarships that will see them continue their education.



PWIC Co-ordinator Carol Fryer explained, "The children here are desperately in need of help, both immediate and long term. Many come to school with no socks or underwear and lunch for most of them is often little more than a bowl of rice," she said.

"We are often asked to directly contribute to educational projects, such as providing kitchen equipment, computers or new toilet facilities, but after evaluating the school's immediate needs, we decided that our main contribution should be to provide ongoing funding for nourishing lunches for these growing children," Carol added.

Students from the Rajabhat and Prince of Songkla universities in Phuket, who are currently studying under scholarships provided by the PIWC, also lent a

hand on the day. K. Siriporn, 22, is currently studying to be a music teacher with the help of PIWC donations. She was also able to buy a saxophone, which would have been impossible for her without funding assistance from the PIWC.

K. Jeab, 20, and K. Koi, 21, are studying Information Technology on PIWC scholarships. K. Jeab is well on her way to becoming a competent computer technician and hopes to work as a system analyst, while K. Koi is looking forward to a career in graphic design.

The PIWC was established over 18 years ago with just five women, but now has a membership of more than 120 with about four new members joining each month. The club is currently headed by President Cindy Ratcliffe, who was awarded an

MBE by Queen Elizabeth II of England in the 2006 New Year's Honors list.

Mrs Ratcliffe sees the funding of scholarships as the best way to ensure donated money is well spent. "Our aim is for these students to eventually be able to give something back to society."

"The scholarships are not loans; the students are not expected to pay them back, but we hope that by helping them achieve success, their knowledge and experience will be a valuable asset to the community and will enable them to make their own contribution to society in the future," said Ms Ratcliffe.

The club's voluntary charitable efforts are geared towards providing educational scholarships for needy children in Phuket and the region by organizing fund raising events, such as monthly lunches and raffles.

The PIWC also organizes an annual Gala Ball, which has become one of Phuket's most glamorous social events, attracting the island's well-heeled movers and shakers.

Through the generosity of PIWC members, local businesses and members of the community, more than 500 scholarships have been awarded since 1988. More than 250 students currently receiving PIWC support for their education.

Scholarships have been

awarded to students studying medicine, nursing, dentistry, pharmacology, law, engineering, computer science, chemistry, music and art.

PIWC Treasurer Wipa Tanmanatragul explained on their policy on student funding. "As long as the students receiving scholarships show continued dedication and willingness to learn, we endeavor to help as much as possible with funding until they complete their studies," she said.

The PIWC originally focused solely on providing girls with scholarships, but boys are now also considered. The first male student to be given a scholarship studied art in Bangkok. He has now returned to teach at Phuket Vocational College and made a name for himself as a successful artist.

This year, the PIWC Gala Ball will be held at the stylish Indigo Pearl Resort on November 24 and promises to be as glitzy as ever. More than half the 350 available seats already booked. Funds raised at the event will go towards the club's continuing efforts to provide scholarships and funding for Phuket's underprivileged children.

*For more information regarding funding or to reserve tickets for the Gala Ball, contact Carol Fryer at 087-4178860, email: carol.fryer@piwc.info*