

TRACING RELATIVES OF SOUTHEAST ASIANS

COMPUTER NETWORK IN CALGARY

by Bill Laberis, *Computerworld*

Joe Caruana of Calgary has established a tracing system for family reunification using a network of volunteer computer operators. Caruana's service deals only with Vietnamese and has records back only as far as 1975.

An international microcomputer network is helping unite the thousands of former "Boat People" who were separated from family members while fleeing Vietnam . . . and scattered throughout the world.

Using 2,100 microcomputers in 23 countries, Family Reunification Services (FRS) has located 900 missing family members since its founding just six months ago.

Vietnamese who know about FRS initiate the reuniting process by filling out a personal data questionnaire available through refugee resettlement groups around the world . . . Someone, say a Vietnamese man living in New York and looking for his wife, fills out the 25-question form, describing his wife by marriage and all family names, ages, places of birth, place last seen, and so on. He also fills out a data profile of himself, a file of which is sent to FRS headquarters in Calgary.

A tape of his wife's profile is then sent from one microcomputer operator to another until it has reached the 2,100 operators in 23 countries. Each operator codes the data to be programmed into his own system.

If the missing wife should herself fill out a questionnaire in any one of the countries where the FRS operates, a microcomputer there will match her profile with the file of her made out by her husband and entered at an earlier date. The computer registers a "find".

The good news is relayed back to Calgary where FRS then begins the arduous task of physically reuniting the family, working within statutory limitations of international immigration laws.



Despite its early successes, the project has not been without its problems, many of which develop in the questionnaire phase of the process.

For one thing, a 20-year-old American would be listed as 21 years of age by the Vietnamese, who consider a newborn to be one year old.

And some Vietnamese women retain their birth names, while others write their first name last and their last name first, sometimes including their mother's maiden name and sometimes not.

And once FRS came within hours of sending an anxious wife in France winging to the waiting arms of a husband in New York - but not her husband.

Rewarding Moments

"We've had our share of rewarding moments, too," Caruana said. "Recently we had a pretty definite match between a woman in Saskatchewan and her four-year-old son in Wellington, New Zealand, but we weren't absolutely sure."

FRS sent a photo of the woman to Wellington. The child took one look at it, then burst into tears, crying for his mother. The two were reunited, and the woman, who speaks no English, has phoned Caruana several times since then, saying "Cam onh" over and over again - Vietnamese for "Thank you".

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For more information contact Family Reunification Services, 7203 Huntercrest Rd., N.W., Calgary, Alta., T2K 4J9.

THE RED CROSS

by Patricia McCarthy, Tracing & Reunion Section

Each month the Canadian Red Cross Society receives around 500 requests for Southeast Asian Tracing and Family Reunion. Sponsoring groups, individuals, and refugee organizations should direct their inquiries to their local Red Cross branch (*not* the National Office). Only the local Red Cross branch is in a position to obtain and clarify all information necessary. The enquirer will complete a form giving the following information about the person being sought:

- full name
- date of birth
- place of birth
- names, dates and places of birth of any children
- last known address of the person sought and its date
- relationship of the enquirer to the person sought
- the reason for the search, and details of the circumstances surrounding the request for the search
- father's name
- mother's name
- spouse's name

Because of the large number of requests we receive, we must give priority to enquiries for close family members, i.e. husband, wife, children, mother, father, brother, sister. *It is not possible for us at present to search for friends or acquaintances.* A search usually takes months to complete, as every Red Cross Society shares our problem of overwhelming numbers of enquiries.

Kampuchean refugee child at the Sakao Camp Tracing Office. Photo: UNHCR