



March 29, 2012

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Cal Poly's Engineers Without Borders Named the Nation's Premiere Student Chapter

SAN LUIS OBISPO – The Cal Poly student chapter of Engineers Without Borders (EWB) was recently named National Premier Student Chapter.

Founded in 2005 by a handful of students dedicated to making a global impact, the Cal Poly chapter now includes almost 200 members who are working with communities in India, Thailand and Nicaragua to implement sustainable engineering projects.

The award recognizes outstanding chapters that excel in organization, fundraising and public relations, engagement in mentor/mentee relationships, and local and regional participation.

Since the group's inception, it has designed and constructed six water filtration systems in Thailand and a health clinic in Nicaragua, and it is in the midst of implementing a project to design and install latrines in India. The new Local Projects division is partnering with San Luis Obispo County to pioneer the first septic tank reuse in California.

"With such a motivated and passionate group, it's no wonder Cal Poly has rapidly excelled to the top," said chapter president Bill Woods, a civil engineering senior.

Debra Larson, dean of Cal Poly Engineering, said, "I am struck by the fact that EWB-Cal Poly promotes sustainable engineering solutions that are truly innovative in their simplicity and distinctly appropriate to particular communities. For instance, the group designed a device to de-kernel corn that is made from a couple of nails and materials readily available in mountaintop villages in India. It's ingenious. I am very proud of our Cal Poly EWB students."

The small agricultural project helped build trust between the Cal Poly team and the villagers of Sainji, a tiny community of subsistence



EWB-Cal Poly President Bill Woods (red shirt) with members of the Cal Poly Thailand team and villagers at an 8,000-liter-per-day drinking water filtration system installed in the rural mountainous community of Huai Nam Khun, Thailand. The team returned to the village in September 2011 to facilitate the appropriate technology transfer to the villagers.

farmers in the foothills of the Himalayas. The group's next project in Sainji is more ambitious: building sanitation facilities that will protect the environment and safeguard the health of the villagers.

"We interact with the community to make certain that the projects we implement are community driven," Woods said. "In every step of the process, we talk directly (sometimes with the aid of a translator) to the community members who are affected. We do not go through with a project unless we have full support from the community."



EWB-Cal Poly's corn de-kerner will assist the villagers of Sainji, India, in marketing their primary cash crop.

In Sainji, EWB-Cal Poly is also collaborating with the Garhwal Organization for the Upliftment of the Needy (find out more on Facebook), a local NGO, along with the village residents.

Woods stressed that EWB's commitment and interactions with their project communities go beyond technicalities. "Team members immerse themselves in the culture and curious children enjoy tagging along with us," he said. "In fact, students on the India team have inspired some of the younger children to pursue engineering as a career."

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