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## Interview with Eileen Mick

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Eileen Mick

## INTERVIEW WITH EILEEN MICK

### Engineering Student

Eileen Mick is an engineering student who has managed to merge her desire to help others with her academic pursuits through the club Engineers Without Borders (EWB). Recently, Eileen and other club members went to Thailand in order to improve the drinking water quality in a northern village. For her work in EWB and the club's

work done in Thailand, she has received the Outstanding Woman in Engineering and Technology in January 2006 from the Society of Women Engineers (SWE). Even with the trip to Thailand, she has been able to stay on track with her work towards a master's degree in Science Environmental Engineering.

*Moebius: Why did you and several other EWB members go to a village in Northern Thailand this past winter break? Did the group accomplish its goals?*

*EM:* In March, 2005, our chapter performed a drinking water assessment in Mae Nam Khun, a small hill-tribe village in northern Thailand. We gathered all the information we could by talking with various community members, investigating the water distribution system, and performing water quality tests. Upon return, we quickly formed a larger team of dedicated students and began research on an appropriate design to treat the drinking water in Mae Nam Khun. After a lot of work and consultation with professionals, we raised enough money to return in December and build a filtration system for the school's water supply in Mae Nam Khun. I went with eight other EWB members from Cal Poly and a professional engineer from Texas over winter break and it was an amazing experience! We constructed a slow sand filtration system that is able to treat 1800 gallons per day, learned a lot about the hill-tribe community, trained locals on construction and maintenance of the system, and made new friends who are interested in forming a partnership for continued work in the area.

*Moebius: What did you gain from the experience, personally and professionally?*

*EM:* This project provided irreplaceable experiences. Working through a real-world design and seeing all aspects of a project provides an understanding that you simply can't fit into a class. Our team was responsible for each part of the project process: researching, designing, organizing travel plans, ordering materials and equipment, and fundraising. It was a lot of work, but being able to actually implement the project and directly affect a community's health is an indescribable feeling. Given continued operation, the filtration system is expected to drastically reduce illness at the school, which serves Mae Nam Khun

and surrounding villages.

*Moebius: Can you describe what the club Engineers Without Borders is about?*

*EM:* EWB is a national non-profit organization that assists developing communities around the world to improve the quality of life through sustainable engineering projects, while involving and training internationally responsible engineers. Projects typically fulfill basic needs, such as buildings, electricity, and water or wastewater treatment. They are completed through a partnership between the host community and project teams and are successful by establishing long-term relationships and a community plan.

*Moebius: What made you want to co-start a chapter of EWB at Cal Poly?*

*EM:* I had always been incredibly frustrated by the starkness of inequality between most of us in the developed world and those born in Third-World countries. There never seemed to be the right opportunity to assist until I saw a presentation about EWB. It struck me immediately!—This is the perfect opportunity to get involved now, without giving up time towards my education. It included so many positive attributes: I got to work in my field of engineering, learn about sustainable engineering projects, experience a new culture and assist those people learn the appropriate technologies to improve an area of their lives, meet and work with other students and professionals with similar interests, and be a part of creating this amazing club at Cal Poly. I couldn't turn it down. After laying the basic groundwork at Cal Poly, the people began coming to meetings, and it was naturally self-propelling. Our chapter now has weekly meetings, two international projects, and a variety of local projects.

*Moebius: Does the club have any other trips like the Thailand trip planned?*

*EM:* At least three of the team members from December's trip plan to return to Mae Nam Khun within the next year to evaluate the success of the filtration system and work with the community to decide on the next phase of the project. There are several potential projects in the area, including additional treatment systems, wastewater collection and treatment systems, and construction of a community center and classrooms, to name a few.

There is also a team preparing for an assessment in a few small communities in Nicaragua. They are currently working with other humanitarian organizations to gain information.

*Moebius: How do you envision the club expanding and growing in the next couple of years? How do you envision the club expanding and growing in the next couple of years?*

*EM:* Ideally, we'd like to incorporate EWB projects into academia to help facilitate

## Claros: Interview with Eileen Mick

project progress. We are currently working with faculty to come up with a plan to do this. We hope to develop classes that cover topics like project management, sustainable technologies, and special projects. 

*Interview on behalf of Moebius conducted by Beatrice Claros, Winter, 2006.*

### Notes

For more information about Engineers Without Borders, try the Cal Poly chapter's website at [www.ewb.calpoly.edu](http://www.ewb.calpoly.edu) or the national website at [www.ewb-usa.org](http://www.ewb-usa.org).