

# U.S. teacher outlines needs in Thai village

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Former Santa Barbara resident Mac Bakewell left for Thailand in November 1991 to start a new life. Just what he would do with that life was up in the air.

"I had a few bucks in my pocket and a desire to do something," he said Friday.

The desire turned out to be a calling in the teaching profession. Bakewell, 45, teaches English to schoolchildren and teachers in a village of the Uttaradit province in northern Thailand.

After eight months, Bakewell says he needs books, magazines and videos to supplement scarce teaching materials. He also intends to raise \$40,000 to build a learning center where Thai children can receive private English lessons, read, watch American videos and play word games such as Scrabble.

To do all this, Bakewell wants to form a nonprofit organization. He also has started a fund-raising campaign while he, his wife, Boosaba, and their 7-month-old daughter visit relatives here.

Bakewell said he wants to bring back books and comic books —

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MAC BAKEWELL

such as Walt Disney and Sesame Street — geared toward elementary-level children. Magazines such as LIFE and National Geographic would help show American culture and teach environmentalism.

He also wants to bring back children's tapes and videos, including home videos that depict life in America. Computers and a copy machine is also on his wish list.

The Thai people "are really curious about people who live (in the United States)," Bakewell said. They learn English to get a broader world perspective and better jobs, he added.

With the extra skill, they can bypass the factory for a hotel job, he said. "You don't have to sell yourself cheap in Bangkok if you

know English."

The Thai government has a second-best attitude toward country schools, Bakewell said. They get little resources and often serve as training grounds for young teachers.

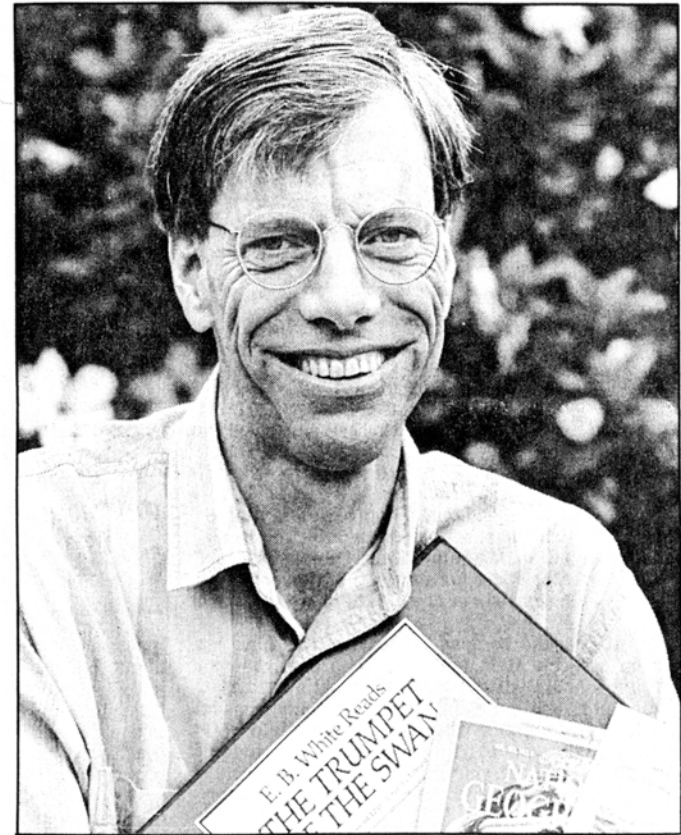
He rarely uses the textbooks because they are inadequate, he said.

A carpenter and house designer by trade, Bakewell got into teaching through the back door. It started with tutoring sessions in Chiang Mai, a popular tourist town in northern Thailand where he first lived. He traded English lessons for Thai lessons to supplement classes he was taking in the language.

He met his wife, a college graduate, during those tutoring sessions. They ended up in the Uttaradit province after a month-long visit to his wife's relatives became permanent.

Bakewell said he began teaching English for fun to the children of the village's 600 families. Soon, he was teaching the children of his wife's former teachers and that led to an invitation to teach upper-grade children at the vil-

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Mike Eliason/News-Press

Santa Barbaran Mac Bakewell teaches English to schoolchildren in Thailand.



## Teacher

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lage school, which offers kindergarten through ninth grade for 350 children.

Bakewell teaches older children during the day and tutors sixth-graders at home in the evenings. In Thailand, compulsory education ends at the sixth grade, and some families cannot afford to send their children beyond that.

When news spread about him, he was asked to also teach teachers in the 47-campus school district, which encompasses several dozen villages.

Because he is a foreigner, Bakewell said he does not get paid for the school job. He does get about \$60 a month for the teacher

seminars, he said.

He has relied mostly on savings to keep his family financially afloat. Though the savings are drying up slowly, he said he does not plan to give up his career.

"I want to stay teaching in public schools," he said. "Teaching teachers to enliven their teaching is a ball I don't want to drop."

Bakewell said he prefers a creative, hands-on approach over the rote, chanting approach that Thai teachers use. "I make the lessons more like games."

For example, during a seminar, he listed several words on the blackboard and told the teachers to come up with as many sentences as they could in 10 minutes. The lesson was fun for the participants, and it showed him each teacher's grammar level, Bakewell said.