

Campus effort raises money for tsunami victims

The ASUO, College Democrats and OSPIRG joined other University groups to put on Day of Tsunami Relief

BY MORIAH BALINGIT
NEWS REPORTER

As television images of tsunami destruction poured in from Asia and Africa a few weeks ago, junior Susan Woodard sat transfixed by the grim pictures of unimaginable devastation.

But there was one thing in particular that she just couldn't shake.

"I was just watching the news," she said. "I had been watching all the orphaned children, and it was breaking my heart."

Woodard wanted to do something, but said she couldn't make much of an impact by herself.

"I thought if we got the whole campus involved, it could be

something huge," she said.

The next day, she was on the telephone recruiting student groups to host a campus-wide relief campaign. Her efforts culminated with Tuesday's Day of Tsunami Relief, an event that drew volunteers from a number of student organizations.

Woodard wasn't the only one moved to action. Across campus, student organizations from the fraternity Pi Beta Phi to the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group have mobilized efforts to raise money for the victims of the tsunami that devastated countries in Africa and Asia in December.

The College Democrats, OSPIRG, ASUO, the Asian Pacific American

Student Union, Students of the Indian Subcontinent and the International Student Association joined forces to put on yesterday's event, which included tables set up across campus during the day and a vigil in the EMU Amphitheater in the evening.

Woodard said the tables she organized generated less interest than expected, but people were generous. In total, the day raised \$650.33.

"Yeah, I'm so excited," Woodard said. "I think it was really wonderful."

OSPIRG Statewide Programming Director Kit Douglass said OSPIRG had raised about \$1,000 at the tables on campus before Tuesday's event, only a tenth of its ambitious \$10,000 goal. But Douglass added that other fundraising events are in the works.

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LAUREN WIMER | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Tears come to sophomore Remi Nagata's eyes as she recounts her experience in a disastrous earthquake 10 years ago, relating her experience to the recent tsunami.

Tsunami: Sam Nicols narrowly escapes being swept away in tsunami

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the clear blue sea on the beach of Tonsai. He had vacationed for a short time in Thailand previously and was excited about the extended time to spend climbing and vacationing.

The earthquake hit at 7:58 a.m., but Sam, in an e-mail to friends and family sent out the day after the tsunami, said he didn't feel it. He thinks he was walking to the beach when it happened. As he walked down to the beach, he commented that the tide had gone out extremely fast, but didn't think twice about it, he wrote.

Around 11 a.m., waves started rolling in over the horizon.

"When I first saw them they were about 1km from the beach," Sam wrote. "We had quite a bit of warning. It must have taken about one min or more from the time I saw them to when the first ones starting coming in to the beach, but the tide was so extraordinarily low that it took 7 or 8 waves until the water was really reaching up towards the buildings. I had just packed up my backpack with all of my stuff when I saw them."

Sam started running up the beach. Then he stopped, put his bag down, took out his camera and started snapping photographs. The pictures

almost cost him his life.

After taking a few pictures, he realized the waves were coming faster and would hit the patio of the bar where he was standing. Grabbing his bag, he turned and ran up a path toward the hills.

He only made it two meters before the first wave hit him. The wave slammed into him, sweeping his feet out from under him and washing him into the bar.

"I remember chairs banging into me," Sam wrote. "I got to my feet after having been under for only one second or so, and I was struck again from behind by another wave which pushed me up against the bar. Without thinking I jumped up into the DJ booth."

He had lost his camera and the things in his bag, but he was safe and above the water level, he wrote. As he evaluated his perch above the water, he realized the Internet cafe and massage parlor next door had washed away and the roof of the Freedom Bar he was in was beginning to sag.

Luckily for Sam, the worst of the first waves had already hit, and he was able to climb down from the booth that had saved his life.

For the next 15 minutes, people gathered on the beach to begin assessing the damage, he wrote. Then the second set of waves rolled in. Sam ran

up the beach, made it to a ladder and climbed to a platform above Tonsai Wall, about 15 meters above the sand. From there he and 10 other people safely watched as the waves wreaked havoc on the once serene beach.

The Nicols family didn't know any of that until the next morning as they watched news reports begin to flood in.

"We got the message and turned on the TV that night but didn't see anything, and we weren't sure exactly what Sam was talking about," John said. "Then the next morning we saw the news and realized what Sam meant."

By the time the family knew what had happened to Sam, the worst was already over, and people were beginning to work on relief and reconstruction.

"Huge numbers of climbers/tourists are helping the locals sift through the rubble, rear down broken buildings, and start to clean up," Sam wrote. "They are saving gas for generators so the Thais have been giving away food that has been spoiling, and in general a very positive atmosphere is present."

While Sam was keeping his family informed, he also informed the nation about what was happening. A friend who Sam met on Tonsai last year used to work at CNN and passed on Sam's

story. Sam did a phone interview on CNN's Larry King Live on Dec. 28.

"I was one of the few who decided to actually stay around at the place that I was," Sam said on Larry King Live. "When you just look down the beach, there's a bunch of longtail boats that are being repaired, but otherwise life is getting back to normal, the restaurants are open again, the swimming pools are out of order, but yeah, food is back in, people seem very relaxed, and it's a very positive outlook that I take from it today."

Sam and the rest of the people in Tonsai were lucky. The water purification systems were far enough inland that they were not damaged. The same night that food began to run out, more food started arriving.

Within two days of the tsunami, life began returning to normal for the vacationers and locals of Tonsai. Debris was quickly picked up off the beaches. Flattened buildings were cleared, and usable materials were separated and saved for rebuilding. The rest was burned.

"We have been watching CNN and BBC a lot," Sam wrote. "And it's quite obvious to us that we got incredibly lucky here in Tonsai."

"Clean water was never a problem,"

Sam said in a telephone interview from Thailand Tuesday. "Food got a little tight, but never bad enough that it was something I worried about."

Weeks later, Sam is still in Tonsai enjoying the end of his vacation. Within the first two days, almost all of the beach-going tourists had left, but most of the rock climbers stayed, both to help out with relief and to continue to enjoy their vacations.

"For climbers, the beach wasn't a big deal," Sam said. "We didn't want to go swimming for a few days because there could be a dead body washing up, but after the first few days that wasn't a problem. We helped clean up for a few days and then started climbing again."

Sam said this is the perfect time to take a vacation to most parts of Thailand, especially in Tonsai.

"Beaches are clean, bungalows and restaurants are working. Now is actually a great time to vacation here. Everything is up and running and clean and really cheap," Sam said. "If the tourists don't come back, then 50,000 people will lose their jobs."

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