

Thailand native thriving Lincoln businesswoman

By DeDra Janssen
Staff Reporter

Every July 4, Sirirat Ruenprom remembers her home in Thailand.

The American holiday reminds her of a similar holiday celebrated in her native country every November.

Ruenprom, a 1984 graduate of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, came to the United States in 1970 from Chiangmai in North Thailand to pursue her education.

Since then, she has received her bachelor's degree in math and her master's degree in industrial engineering from UNL; she got married and raised a family and then opened two successful businesses in Lincoln.

Ruenprom arrived in the U.S. when she was 19 after graduating from high school. Although she was accepted to a university in South Thailand, her mother was hesitant to let her go there.

"They fight a lot. My mom was worried for my safety," Ruenprom said. "She said I better go to the USA."

So Ruenprom left her family to study in the U.S. She spent her first semester learning English at the University of Kansas and then attended a junior college in Kansas before transferring to UNL in 1972.

Ruenprom originally planned to return to Thailand after graduation, but her plans changed when she married in 1975.

Two years later, Ruenprom and her husband opened The Oriental Market in Lincoln and about two years ago opened The Thai House.

Ruenprom said she got the idea to open The Thai House restaurant from an article in Time Magazine about the increasing popularity of Thai food.

"Times have changed. People are trying new items," Ruenprom said. "We thought it would be a good idea to open a restaurant here and see how it went."

And it went well for Ruenprom. She said the businesses started out small but grew tremendously because she bought more items for the store instead of reaping the benefits of profit.

"I never think about salary for myself," Ruenprom said. "I make more and buy more items."

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But Ruenprom is not only successful in business, she's also happy with her life here in the U.S.

"You have more freedom to speak. Even if you're wrong you can say whatever you want. In Thailand you cannot do that," she said.

She said she also enjoyed other freedoms here such as being able to wear whatever she wants to school, being able to leave school grounds during the day and being able to repeat a class if she fails it the first time.

"In Thailand, if you flunk the exam you flunk the whole year," she said.

Even though Ruenprom is happy with her life in Nebraska, she said she missed her home and family in Thailand.

"When you are lonely or have problems, when you need advice, you think about family," she said.

But Ruenprom's family has given her support in every way, she said. Ruenprom visits her family in Thai-



Damon Lee/DN

Sirirat Ruenprom, owner of the Oriental Market and Thai House Restaurant, shows off some of the unique ethnic foods that the market carries. Ruenprom, who is originally from Thailand, is a 1984 UNL graduate.

land once a year, and she will leave in August to spend three weeks there.

The other thing that Ruenprom misses most about her native land is the fruit.

"In Thailand there are many kinds," she said. "In the U.S. there are only

apples and bananas and oranges all year round."

Ruenprom said she plans to spend at least two more years in Lincoln until her daughter graduates from high school. Then she might go back to Thailand.

But for now she is happy right where she is.

"I'm happy in Nebraska," she said. "Lincoln is not big and it's not small; I don't have to worry about crime. I'm happy doing what I'm doing—that's the main thing."

Phones yield false alarms

By Kristin Armstrong
Staff Reporter

Although the emergency phones have helped more than a few people out of a bind, the University Telecommunications Department has yet to overcome some of the phones' small problems.

Since the 36 blue-light phones were installed last September, both the University Police and the Telecommunications Department have had problems with false emergencies.

Most of the false alarms are caused either by water leakage or by people playing with the machines, said Ken Cauble, UNL police chief.

"We've had trouble with water getting in the phones, like on days with heavy rains, and causing problems," Cauble said.

When water leaks into the phones, the blue-light phones ring into the university operator, Cauble said. The operators are required to transfer all emergency calls to UPD, and all calls must be checked out.

Pranksters have also caused a for-

midable amount of false alarms. With numerous camps on campus over the summer, the incidents of prank calls has risen, but no more than any time new students arrive on campus, said Ruth Michalecki, telecommunications director.

"The number of pranks will vary according to when the newness wears off," she said. "I don't think it's malicious, I just think that people are curious."

Cauble said he has seen these actions first-hand.

"The basketball camp was walking from the Devaney Center to Abel Hall, and somehow all the phones in between went off," he said. "I contacted the coaches and asked them to tell the kids to knock it off."

To remedy the problem of false alarms, both telecommunications and the police department are taking steps to prevent them.

"We've had the average installation problems, some with the telephone part and some with the mechanical part, but they are being worked out," Michalecki said.

Cauble said there were preventative steps that could be taken should a prankster be caught, including arrest. He said the police department also considered some sort of warning print-

ed on the phones, similar to other warnings.

"The warnings on fire alarms have cut down the incidence of false fire alarms dramatically," Cauble said. "But I am afraid that a sign wouldn't make much of a difference, and might even give someone the idea to push the button."

UPD has weekly meetings with incoming freshmen and campers, stressing that anyone caught making prank calls will be dealt with. He added that the officers also tell NSE students that they should not hesitate to use the phones at any time.

"If we set up the phones only for emergencies, then I'm afraid that people might not use them when they should," Cauble said.

Both Michalecki and Cauble said that despite the problems with false alarms the phones were serving the purpose they were intended for.

"The phones are always there in case someone feels threatened," Michalecki said.

Cauble also said the phones gave students a sense of security, and acted as a deterrent for people considering committing a crime.

"If I was going to be snatching purses, I wouldn't do it on this campus," he said.



David Badders/DN