



The Faces of HMEA - August 2004

Hatsady Saengdara was born in Laos, a country in the same area of the world as Thailand, China, and Vietnam. He speaks the official language of Laos, which is Lao, and continues to participate in his native cultural traditions. Those include participating in Festivals, gatherings with friends and relatives and attending a Buddhist Temple in North Smithfield, RI. He meditates nightly to keep his Laotian spirit alive.

Hatsady has great memories of his childhood in Laos; memories of being with his grandparents, friends and extended family, partaking in festivals, and having community gatherings on a daily basis. "Family" is the cornerstone of Laotian culture and most of his early life was spent congregating with his relatives and extended family to eat, socialize and assist each other in any way possible. In Laos, there are no names for diseases or disorders; rather the Laotians hold the belief that every person is different and that's simply just the way they are. A person's family will assist in taking care of these "differences" and people will count on each other for support.

In 1987, Hatsady's family made the decision to move to the United States due to the lack of economic development of their country. They originally moved to Michigan, but relocated to Woonsocket, RI. After graduating from Woonsocket High School, Hatsady went to the University of Rhode Island where he earned a Bachelors of Arts in Human Development and Family Studies. He always felt connected to the social services field and enjoys helping those in need. He feels that his own family's values of having a strong work ethic, respecting each



other and taking care of oneself is a perfect match to human services. Hatsady began working for HMEA in 2002 and presently holds the Assistant Manager position at Reservoir Street in North Attleboro. He loves working at HMEA and especially enjoys how every day is different and full of surprises.

His parents, sisters, and brother moved back to Michigan while he was in college, but Hatsady decided to stay in Rhode Island to pursue his education and career. All of his siblings and their children live together in his parent's home in Michigan and remain quite close to Hatsady.

They talk by phone every day. His family members are very passionate about their personal well being and the daily phone calls usually consist of questions about Hatsady's health and diet. When he was recently recuperating from a broken ankle, he was diagnosed with strep throat as well. His Mom came to Rhode Island for five weeks to assist him in his recovery.

Hatsady feels he will never return to his home country of Laos. He thinks that it would be too painful to go back because he wouldn't want to tarnish the wonderful childhood memories of being there. His grandparents are no longer alive, and most of his family resides in the United States. Even though he will probably never return to Laos, Hatsady upholds his family traditions, his Buddhist religion, and Laotian culture. He also feels rewarded to work in this field and respects the challenges HMEA sets forth for him every day.

*Thanks to **Kevin Salera**, Diversity Committee member who interviewed Hatsady. ◀*