

# Elephantine charity



Submitted photos

Lamchok (left), the young female elephant adopted by Perry and Carolyn Butler of St. Helena through the Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation, is a surrogate mother to the baby elephant pictured here. The Butlers can check in on Lamchok at 4 p.m. each day via a real-time computer connection to a camp in Thailand.

One of the elephants in the Golden Triangle program in Thailand gets a welcome bath administered by a mahout.



## The Butlers donate special wine, proceeds from designer shoes to aid Asian pachyderms

By John Lindblom

STAFF WRITER

If charities, like wearing apparel, had tags with a size on them, the one that Perry and Carolyn Butler, a St. Helena couple, contribute to would be labeled "XXXXX Large."

... Elephant-sized, in fact.

In the Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation, the Butlers are supporters of one of the more unique causes of the multitude that receive funding from the philanthropic Napa Valley.

Almost as unique are the methods the two are employing to provide their \$1,000-a-month support for the Asian pachyderms of Thailand — and more important to support the families of their caretakers (mahouts). Perry is contributing 100 percent of the proceeds from 40 cases of a premium boutique cabernet blend he had produced at his Juslyn Winery. Carolyn's contribution comes from 60 pairs of Italian-styled designer shoes at her Footcandy women's footwear shop in downtown St. Helena.

The Butlers, both of whom were born in London, are globetrotters to an extent. But where on earth and why on earth did they get involved with supporting elephants? Good question — and Perry has an equally good answer.

"We were in Bangkok on a vacation and out to one of the temples with our guide," he recalled. "Then we saw this mother elephant and her baby going through traffic, just weaving in and out between the cars and we could not believe it. It was a busy street.

### Out-of-work elephants

"So, I said to the guide, 'What's going on?' and he said, 'It's really quite sad because the Thai government's logging industry peaked about two years ago and put 2,000 elephants out of work,' he added. "They basically said 'no more logging and goodbye.'

"So, the elephants had no work and the people who owned the elephants had no money."

What do you do with 2,000 unemployed elephants? Some went to villages where tourists would pay to have their pictures taken sitting astride them. The idea was that elephant owners would live off the meager amount tourists paid to buy sugar cane and bananas to feed to the elephants.

"Because they like alcohol, one (caretaker) kept his elephant drunk to raise money. People would pay to see him," Butler said. "The elephant actually became an alcoholic. After seeing one of the performances, the Thai government confiscated the elephant and put him in a special camp, which was basically like detox.

"The elephants went around the country just so they could be fed. But then they started to get sick and things started to get serious because they didn't have any veterinarians."

At that point, Butler continued, the Thai government stepped in and created an account to aid the elephants and the families of the caretakers. But it was far from enough. The Thai private sector, resort hotels, provided some aid that gave the families shelter and sustenance.

The funding that the Butlers contribute to aid the elephants and their mahouts and their families began 10 months ago after a close-up encounter with a group of the