



Pitsuwan's first English teachers were Peace Corps volunteers who "tutored me, encouraged me, fed me, and taught me how to pronounce 'eether and neether.' For a boy who didn't own shoes until he was 11, the world suddenly expanded underfoot his sophomore year of high school when he moved to Minnesota as an exchange student. Mastering public speaking, he won medals for his delivery of poet John Donne's *No Man Is an Island*. The meditation now seems a foreshadowing of his future career in civil service.

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He's been called the voice of moderate Islam in Southeast Asia. But Surin Pitsuwan '72 calls his business as Secretary-General of 10 politically, socially, and economically diverse countries "the business of inspiring people to cooperate"—the business of uniting for the greater good.

BY ALISSA SANDFORD

Less than 24 hours and three international time zones after watching Hillary Clinton sign a treaty of cooperation in Phuket, Thailand, in July, Surin Pitsuwan '72 spotted two rainbows in the skies over Denver, Colo. "They were big stripes with colors—American stripes," he notes, convincing you that nature, too, has a sense of patriotism. A night later he toasted marshmallows with CMCers attending the College's inaugural Alumni Atheaneum Retreat at Beaver Creek, and ate his first s'more. He mountain-biked, and joined the world of Twitter. Yes, with help from a current CMC student, Surin Pitsuwan—Secretary-General of Southeast Asia's top political and economic grouping—now Tweets. He also listens to Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra, and calls upon his children to load his iPod with "classic, easy-listening"—songs to keep him company on the many flights in and out of Thailand.

If there is more than a whiff of Americana in the above, that's because Pitsuwan is not unlike the many international students who've bounded regional challenges and limitations by way of a global education. Young and determined, and surrounded by academic resources in the United States, he rose from the ancient, rural town of Nakorn Sri Thammarat, in Southern Thailand, to become a polished, award-winning speaker in high school, a *cum laude* graduate of CMC, and a Harvard alumnus with the letters "M.A." and "Ph.D." trailing his name.

Pitsuwan's rising arc in global leadership is a hybrid of native interests and Western opportunities, history well suited for a diplomat building bridges between cultural landscapes. His role with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations puts him at the helm of members Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam—an international market



THAILAND

between China and India with more than 500 million people in 10 countries.

“My business is the business of inspiring people to cooperate,” he says. “We are all planning and dreaming of creating a community called the ASEAN community by the year 2015.”

It’s not an easy job convincing countries with such extreme political and economic variances to work together—these territories include the communist regions of Vietnam and Laos, and Brunei’s monarchy, as well as burgeoning democracies, and the powerful democracy of Indonesia—the fourth-largest democracy in the world. Gaps in natural resources and country wealth are all over the map, too, so to speak. The lowest per capita income in one ASEAN member country might be about \$500, Pitsuwan explains, and \$50,000 in another.

Within his sphere of influence, Pitsuwan is neither shy about waving the banner of CMC, nor quiet about the torch he carries for the United States. Throughout his diplomatic career, he’s drawn upon his CMC education for relevance in current affairs. “I try to begin any negotiation with an ice-breaker from my survey of the widest intellectual breadth of humanity, which I learned from CMC,” he says.

One of Pitsuwan’s favorite professors then was Alfred Balitzer, and years later, Balitzer can draw on examples of Pitsuwan doing just that—reaching into his liberal arts toolbox. “I saw him putting his CMC education to work in Paris during a meeting with Koichiro Matsuura, who was then the Secretary General of UNESCO,” recalls Balitzer, now professor emeritus. “Surin conversed broadly and easily about human rights, drawing on works from Plato, Al Farabi, and Thomas Jefferson, discussing the sources of terrorism, a model curriculum for madrasas, and a society that was tolerant of diverse views while faithful to religious belief and practice.”

It was the same when Pitsuwan met with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton when she flew to Thailand in July to sign pacts with the ASEAN countries for the U.S. accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia. At one point, Clinton asked Pitsuwan how he intended to implement the charter, knowing that the document was, by her terms, far reaching, very progressive, very democratic, and very protective of human rights.

“I said, ‘Madame Secretary, we all have to make it a living document—much like your Declaration of Independence, and much like your Constitution,’” Pitsuwan explains. “At the time when Jefferson wrote that all men are created equal and are endowed with unalienable rights—among them the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—he didn’t include women. Certainly he didn’t include the slaves, or people without property. But,” Pitsuwan continues, “every generation of Americans keep appealing to it, referring to it in their struggles and negotiations, in their dialogues with



After hearing Jeff Klein '75 P'08 P'11's talk on The Internet Revolution during the Alumni Athenaeum in Colorado this past July, Pitsuwan was curious about Twitter. “He wanted to understand its purpose, uses, and how it worked,” says Victoria Din '11 (pictured here, with Pitsuwan, at the event). “On the morning of the last day, I brought my computer to breakfast . . . We set up a Twitter account, found some of his old friends, and posted his first tweet.”

the states and government, in order to make it a free society, a freedom that is enlarged; a space that is wider than the previous generation.

“When I finished my monologue,” Pitsuwan says, smiling, “she replied, ‘Yes, professor.’ So again, I had to go back to my CMC training in order to get along with her, in order to convince her that we deserve the attention and support of the United States, and that we deserve your presence.”

In Professor Ward Elliott’s *American Government 20* and *Political Modernization and Decay* classes at CMC, Pitsuwan earned B’s and was an outgoing honor student. “He contributed not only a keen analytical mind,” recalls Elliott, “but first-hand experience with his own significant emerging third-world country—Thailand. In those days, as later, he served as a kind of ambassador for his country, and his talents as a scholar and diplomat were already well developed at a very young age. I was only in my early 30s then, just starting out at CMC. Surin was one of many indicators that the College and its students were going somewhere remarkable, and he certainly did. And so did the College.

“I’m glad that preparing for the job that I’m doing now, part of that prep was at CMC,” Pitsuwan says. “I am forever grateful and I will do my utmost to carry the emblem and the name of CMC forward in the global theater whenever I have the opportunity to do so.”