

THE REV. KONG CHHEAN. 1945-2011**LB Wat Willow abbot was 66****By Greg Mellen Staff Writer**

LONG BEACH — For more than 30 years, the Rev. Kong Chhean helped give Cambodian refugees a spiritual sense of home in a foreign land.

Chhean died Friday at Long Beach Memorial Medical Center after battling a series of ailments. He was 66.

Chhean was the head monk or abbot at the Khemara Buddhikarama Temple, popularly called Wat Willow, Long Beach's largest Cambodian Buddhist temple.

Born in 1945 in Cambodia, Chhean was ordained as a monk after he entered the temple at the age of 12. He studied Buddhist religious thought at Benares Hindu University in India, receiving a doctorate in 1975.

The Buddhist monk came to the United States in 1979 with the first wave of refugees, who fled Cambodia after the Vietnamese drove the genocidal Khmer Rouge from power.

Upon arriving in the U.S., Chhean set up his first temple in an apartment on Clarkdale Avenue in Hawaiian Gardens and his second in a Lakewood home. When the Lakewood site proved too small, Chhean

The Rev. Kong Chhean was known for aiding Cambodian refugees.



began holding services at El Dorado Park before moving to the current site, a former union hall on the industrial Westside border with Wilmington.

The building was renovated and decorated with distinctive Khmer artwork and architecture, including signature curved spires and red tile roofing.

In addition to leading his congregation, Chhean worked as a mental health counselor and earned a master's degree in psychology from Pepperdine University in 1986 and a doctorate in clinical psychology in 1989.

He worked for the Long Beach Asian Pacific Mental Health Program, part of the Los Angeles County Mental Health Department.

Because of his background both as a Cambodian and a monk, Chhean was uniquely suited to treat Cambodians suf-

fering from mental disease and trauma, such as post traumatic stress disorder and depression.

"He helped a lot of Cambodians with mental problems," said Borann Duong, a member of the temple and its board of directors. "He was on call all the time, and he was very good when we had problems."

Describing his approach to therapy to the Press-Telegram about nine years ago, Chhean said, "Rational living creates balance in the mind and body, but for many people suffering from mental illness, medicine and therapy must also be used. There is no reason for the spiritual and medical treatments to be mutually exclusive."

In its early years, Wat Willow also offered a variety of social, community and cultural services, including weekend basketball tournaments for Khmer youth and adult day care for the elderly parents of working adults.

Recently it has been more concentrated on religious activities.

Buddhist ritual services will be held at Wat Willow, 2100 W. Willow St., daily between 9

a.m. and 1 p.m. and 5 p.m. until 7 p.m. through Thursday. Viewing and Buddhist memorial services will be held at the Wat on Friday and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

A funeral service will be held Sunday from 1 until 3 p.m. at All Souls Mortuary, 4400 Cherry Ave. The service will be followed by a funeral procession to Wat Willow where the final Buddhist ritual service will be held. The cremation will be staged at Stricklin Snively Mortuary, 1952 Long Beach Blvd.

Anyone wishing to make a donation in Chhean's memory can make it to Khemara Buddhikarama Temple, 2100 W. Willow Street, Long Beach, CA 90810. A Khmer language announcement of services is at www.presstelegram.com.

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