

Tahanan News

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Tahanan News is the bi-annual newsletter of Save A Tahanan, Inc.

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2007: STI Resilient Year

by Freddie Esteves
Staff Writer

In his book **Poor People**, William T. Vollmann traveled around the world and asked the question “*why are you poor?*” Surprising, the two most popular answers he got were: it is their destiny to be poor and being poor is a punishment for transgressions in a former life. The outcome of his interviews showed that most underprivileged people were resigned to what their faith and fate dictates.

STI beneficiaries defy these analogies. It is a fact that most of our beneficiaries are Catholics and their faith in



STI officers, members, and volunteers on a planning meeting. Nov. 15, 2007 Fremont, California

God is immeasurable but they also believed that they need to do their part in creating their destiny. As the old Filipino saying goes “*nasa Diyos ang awa nasa tao ang gawa*” (God provides the blessings and

man needs to work for it). Year 2007 indeed tested their perseverance and faith.

The first half of the year was fruitful. Everything was in place and on the
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Invest in the Future

by Freddie Esteves
Staff Writer

Good education is very vital in every Filipino family. No matter how hard it is to send their children to school, parents see to it that their children obtain degrees to hold on for the betterment of their lives. Many see education as ticket out of poverty. With the fast changing technology, Philippine public educational system, unfortunately, cannot cope due

to limited resources. The Department of Education’s budget is not enough to sustain the demands for technological capability of thousands of public schools, particularly elementary schools, nationwide. Statistics show that the ratio of computer availability for students is 25,000 to 1. Instead of dealing with technological upgrades, the De-

partment prioritizes other issues such as building shortage, lack of textbooks, insufficient teachers.

Amado M. Villanueva, a staunch supporter of various Filipino organizations, joined one that spearheaded the selection process and distribution of computers to hundreds of schools in the Philippines. Joining him in

the effort were a number of community leaders in the Bay Area, including former San Francisco Consul General Rowena Sanchez. On the other hand, Philippine Congressman Hermilando Mandanas, pledged his support and in fact provided warehouse and technicians at his own expense. For the last two years, over 1200
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A Woman of Substance

by Freddie Esteves
Staff Writer

What do Princess Diana, Mother Teresa and Casilda Ramos have in common?

Generous and compassionate hearts

These three admirable women dedicated their lives to public service. Although Casilda did not hug the lime-light as the other two, she definitely made a huge impact on a lot of people.

Born in Calabanga, a poor fishing village in Camarines Sur, Philippines, Casilda grew up in a close-knit middle-class family. The fourth of nine children, she was not a stranger to sharing. Vicente and Florentina Falcon inculcated in their children the art of sharing and to giving back whatever graces they received. The Falcon children brought that invaluable lesson so they grew up aware of their surroundings. They kept in their hearts and mind the worthy lesson of contributing something no matter how small.

“You learn to be a man by sharing and by keeping promises” was her guiding principle. From the start, she was devoted to being an instrument helping the other become a better person. Her home was a place where friends and strangers alike could find a meal or a place to rest. She gave her last centavo to those who needed it more. Having a family did not stop her from her commitment to public service. Her husband, Cipriano (Maning) Ramos, supported her and stood beside her in all her endeavors.

Casilda had a long career in public service working for the Philippine Rural Construction Movement (PRRM). PRRM, is an agency that aims to empower economically and socially marginalized groups find their potential and assists them in fulfilling it through programs suited for their capabilities,

resources and profitability. At PRRM, she was comfortable living among the people, learned their ways, and spoke their language. She became experienced at community building. She further enhanced her skills in planning and strategy and this worked hand-in-hand with her generosity. Her extensive experience made her a vital part in the establishment of Save-a-Tahanan, Inc. (STI).

Twenty-one years ago, Casilda and Antonio Santiago, a colleague from PRRM, established Save A Tahanan Movement using funds received from the Calabanga Association of America and started the first STM Chapter in Camarines Sur. Now, there are 11 chapters throughout Southeastern Luzon and 2 in Northern Luzon helping over a thousand underserved families become active and self-reliant members of their communities.

She was the trusted steward of the hard-earned endowments from equally civic-minded Filipino-Americans who never renounced their faith and commitment to struggling fellow Filipinos. She traveled rain or shine on small boats, tricycles, jeepneys and sometimes water buffalo driven coaches to fulfill her obligation to STI and its beneficiaries. A woman who have a soft spot in her heart to those in need, Casilda could not help giving her own money to mothers who needed to take their children to doctors, and to families who needed food on the table. She faced all adversaries during her site visits and consultation trips to STM Chapters and never complained. Her ability to remain objective contributed



to the success of many STM Chapters.

All of these endeared her more to a lot of people. Her untimely death on October 12, 2007, left a gaping hole in STM. She was an inspiration to numerous STM beneficiaries and volunteers. They looked up to her for wisdom and hope for brighter future. Hundreds of people flocked to her wake every night, bringing food to partake and sharing kind words about her.

“In her lifetime, Tita Cas, (as she was fondly called) was the light that showed us the way in our dark path. As a leader, she was an example; as a mother, she was a model; as a friend she was true...in totality she was really great” a grieving Goa member uttered. Many such stories were told.

Her interment was one of the best attended in Calabanga. Fourteen priests concelebrated her funeral mass in a packed church. This was a to her legacy as a Woman of Substance. ☼

Invest in the Future *(continued)*

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computers have been donated to numerous public schools and institutions. Unfortunately, various impediments aborted the initiative, although hopefully this is only temporary.

Inspired and encouraged by people truly committed to the cause both from here and the Philippines, and to keep the momentum going, Amado sought the help of STI to further broaden his prospect to serve more schools. During the initial meeting with STI officials, Amado easily convinced the group of the potential of the project. He in fact already had met with Rina Lopez-Bautista, president of Knowledge Channel, who has expressed interest in the program. Knowledge Channel provides TV in remote areas in the Philippines to

enhance public education. Amado has also met with Vickie Gatchitorea, president of Gilas, a group that provide computers to high school students, about the possibility of linkage to the project. Marisa Robles, STI's Chairwoman, saw that this project is in line with the organization's thrust of providing opportunities to marginalized families in the Philippines, particularly the youth. "We are giving public school students the avenue to be abreast with private schools in terms of technology," she added.

This year, YES or Youth Empowerment Synergy was officially made part of STI's programs. Honesto Tria, STI President, said "Education is an important component of bringing changes to the lives of the underprivi-

leged families in the Philippines that is why STI decided to widen the scope of its programs by including scholarship plans to deserving students. And now this -- it is a magnificent way of advancing the technological aspect of public schools by providing them with resources like computers."

"Good education is the best legacy we could give our children," said Amado as he gets busy contacting some Bay Area school districts and other private companies. He will again head back home some time this year, as soon as computers are available.

If you have both desktop and laptop computers that you do not use or know a company upgrading their systems, please do call us.



**Fourth STI Charity
Golf Tournament**

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WE NEED YOUR HELP

Your Contribution Will Make a DIFFERENCE

Be a Donor of SAVE A TAHANAN, INC. (STI) and help provide opportunities for our underprivileged *kababayans*

- \$ 100.00 will sponsor a family with 5 to 6 children
- \$ 50.00 will start up loan for a mother or father with 1 or 2 children
- \$ 20.00 will help with other family development cost

Any amount will help.

Please make your check payable to *Save A Tahanan, Inc.*
Your donation is tax-deductible.

Save A Tahanan, Inc. (STI) is a tax exempt, 510(c)(3) non-profit charitable organization founded in 1986 by a group of Filipino-Americans based in San Francisco, California, a group of seven families originally from Calabanga, Camarines Sur.

Its mission is to mobilize resources to improve the lives of families through training and micro-financing and to empower them as responsible members of the community.

Its vision is to promote self-sufficient and stable families, leading communities to develop opportunities and collective solutions to issues of poverty, and upholding respect for all people of economic levels. STI believes that a self-sufficient tahanan (home) is the foundation of a strong society. It is guided by the principles of sharing and participation that instills accountability.

STI works in close partnership with its target beneficiaries, community leaders, and other stakeholders to implement its various programs in the project areas.

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2007: STI Resilient Year (continued)

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positive note. Everybody was optimistic that a good year was ahead of them. Every chapter members were diligent in their duties and responsibilities not only to themselves but to the community as well.

Even with a slow economy, our fundraising activities were picking up. The golf tournament generated a decent amount to help set up two more chapters one in Dila-dila, Sta. Rita, Pampanga and other one in Oas, Albay. These amounts were able to sustain the other chapters. Monetary donations and gift of time from friends kept coming.

That perfect scenario was abruptly disrupted by typhoon Milenio. Bicol Region, where most of our chapters are situated was the hardest hit area. The devastation was so

intense that livelihood, dreams, hopes and even lives were mercilessly taken. A great number of families were displaced.

Milenio may have taken everything from them except their resilience. It is amazing to see how they use the rebuilding process as an opportunity to improve their lives and strengthen their community. The way they are bouncing back from even the toughest calamity is a testament to their resiliency. It's great to see people so full of life and spirit. Despite what happen to their community, they have managed to turn things around.

All of these springing back were made possible with the support of all you, our valuable sponsors and friends. Good-hearted people who never cease to extend helping hands to somebody in need and because of these expect success to keep growing in 2008.☀