

US to start deciding on vets' claims in April-Kenney

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The US Department of Veterans Affairs will pay around US \$198 million to about 18,000 veterans who will each receive a one-time payment of \$9,000 for non-citizens and \$15,000 for US citizens. Kenney said

they expected more applications to come in. The JFAV is anticipating problems about the matter with a large number of applicants. 46,000 veterans are expected to apply. The Money allotted for the veterans is only for 18,000 veterans. ■

CNN hero teaches literacy with pushcart

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But Peñaflores himself is surprised how DTC grew into a group that now has 2,000 active teenager members all over Cavite province.

"We asked ourselves what causes the creation of gangs and we found that most of their members are teenagers who live in the slums," he said.

In its early years, DTC visited children in the community where Peñaflores himself grew: The town's dump.

More than empty stomachs

The group initially brought food for the children, getting funds from selling junkies they collect, but the problem was more than just empty stomachs.

DTC started to grow and soon, members decided to start literacy classes every Saturday. To carry books and a blackboard, the group bought a bike with a sidecar.

But once in a while, the tires would run flat and the chains fall off, so high school senior Emanuel Bagual, the current president of DTC, proposed that the group use a pushcart instead.

Peñaflores almost had to drop out of grade school. His parents had told him, being the middle child among three siblings, that he had to give way to his elder brother who was finishing high school.

But a community volunteer helped Peñaflores get a scholarship from the World Vision, a group which matches sponsors to needy children, when he was in Grade 5.

Thanks to his good grades, his sponsor from Australia agreed to finance his education until he finished a two-year diploma course on computer technology.

Club 8586, a volunteer group based in the city, also helped Peñaflores in his studies and in setting up the DTC when he got into high school.

Calling

Being with street children most of the time, Peñaflores felt that his calling was to be a teacher. He went back to school and completed a degree in education in 2006.

He knows that he could earn more if he tried his luck working abroad. He now works as a high school teacher in a private school in nearby Bacoor town.

Although Peñaflores received his greatest gift when CNN aired its feature on him on his birthday on March 5, his parents were not able to watch the live broadcast and his live interview with journalist Larry King. They did not have cable TV at home.

Peñaflores also knows he could give more if he earned more. To buy food and school supplies for the street children, DTC just depends on the commitment of its high school members for their fund-raising activities and donations.

But he said: "I have faith that the Lord will provide."

He may not have much money, but he and the teenagers joining the DTC have their time and commitment to share.

At first, Peñaflores's family was not excited about his project. "You are just wasting your time," he recalled what his parents had told him.

He could have spent time studying or finding part-time jobs to help the family instead of serving other people.

But now, even his youngest sister Glenis May is a proud volunteer of DTC.

Lives touched

Peñaflores measures the success of the project not only by the enthusiasm of DTC members, who have pledged to spend their Saturdays teaching street children, but also by the young lives that the wooden pushcart has touched.

One of the children who attended

the weekly sessions at the dump was Michael, who sniffed rugby and stole power wires when he was 7. Now 16, Michael is now a volunteer of DTC.

He knows better and regrets the way he spent his childhood. He wants to make sure other children will not make the same mistakes again.

"I found my goal in life," Michael said.

Michael and the other members hold three sessions every Saturday. One group goes to the public market and another goes to the dump in the morning. In the afternoon, a group goes to the cemetery.

About a hundred kids join each session and they are grouped according to age.

The volunteers not only teach street children how to read, write and count, but also proper hygiene. They would bathe some of the children and give them clothes. They also instill faith among them.

Change

"You are the change that you dream," Peñaflores would tell the teenagers who join DTC.

In a country where many things go wrong, he said: "We are the change that we seek."

The pushcart and the teenagers behind them have been reaping recognition, too. In 2008, DTC was cited as among the 10 accomplished youth organizations in the Philippines.

If the attention he and DTC have been getting makes Peñaflores happy, it is because of the opportunity to inspire others.

"I hope other youth organizations will have their own pushcarts in other parts of the country," he said.

Many children still need guidance and help, Peñaflores said. This was the reason the DTC had just built its second wooden pushcart. ■

Former RP Pres. Ramos is Asingians' Guest of Honor

by DAN E. NIÑO

NORTH HOLLYWOOD—Former Philippine President Fidel V. Ramos will be the guest of honor and speaker during the grand reunion and dinner-dance of Asingians at the Beverly Garlands Holiday Inn on 4222 Vineland Ave., North Hollywood, on May 23, 2009.

The main objectives of the event is to bring together former natives of Asingan residing in North America and establish a stronger bond, rapport and unity among them, according to officials at One Asingan Unity & Coordinating Council (OAUCC).

Chairman of OAUCC Raphy Aagsalud is spearheading the event. Aagsalud was former president of Asingians of California organization and a cousin of the former president.

As a follow through, a picnic will take place the next day (Sunday) at Lake Balboa Park in Encino.

Asingians from all corners of the US and Canada are expected to attend this One Asingan Unity huge gathering, a first of its kind in the history Asingan.

The Pangasinan Brotherhood-USA, an umbrella organization of all Pangasinan town associations in Southern California of which Asingan of California is a member, is also expressing its eagerness and enthusiasm to meet Ramos, its favorite son from



Former President Fidel V. Ramos

Pangasinan province.

Ramos was the 12th President of the Philippines. Born in Lingayen, Pangasinan, the former Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, and later Secretary of National Defense served the country as President for six years before being succeeded by

Joseph Estrada.

Proceeds from the event are earmarked for the Puericulture Center of the town.

For more information and reservation, interested parties may call Raphy Aagsalud at 818-830-3263. ■

Deployed OFWs up 27% - POEA

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Recruitment leaders, however, reported an increasing number of OFWs who have been laid off or facing retrenchment in the coming months because of the economic crisis.

"We have been getting reports of OFWs whose contracts are no longer being renewed so the number of rehired is now declining," said recruiter

Lito Soriano.

Records of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) showed that the crisis has already affected a total of 104,284 Filipino workers in the country and abroad.

The same data indicated that 6,366 OFWs were displaced as a result of the economic crisis since October to February. ■

UP instructor wins conducting competition in the US

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The first prize (graduate level) was awarded to Beverly Shangkuan of Yale University, with second prize going to Glen Thomas Rideout of the University of Michigan.

Shangkuan is currently in the first year of her masteral studies as a full merit scholar in the MM Choral Conducting program at the Yale School of Music.

Shangkuan taught music theory at the UP College of Music from

2006 until 2008. She graduated summa cum laude there with a bachelor of music in choral conducting, and was also the college valedictorian and a recipient of the dean's medal for academic excellence. ■



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