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LEARNING

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Happy to receive, happier to give

By Tarra Quismundo

FOR 73-year-old Japanese businessman Katsutoshi Shimizu, weekly visits to—and relentless offers of *merienda* (snacks) at—Batangas schools meant higher sugar levels.

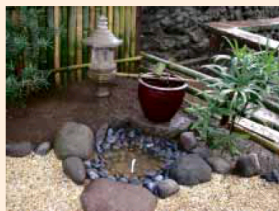
“I’d tell [the teachers] I just had my snack or still full, but they still encouraged me to eat or even taste the food, since this is to show Filipino hospitality. So I ate and ate and ate each time I visited their school,” said Shimizu. “What happened to me now? My diabetes got worse. As part of your hospitality, please give me also medicine each time I eat,” joked the used ships trader, who has been doing business in the Philippines since 1969.

Such is a happy consequence of the brand of



hospitality in the land that Shimizu considers his second home. And he has made a vow to reciprocate.

As a storm battered Batangas with the rest of Southern Luzon on Wednesday last week, Shimizu and representatives from the Japanese Embassy handed over a six-classroom single-story school building to Philippine education officials at the Venancio Trinidad Sr. Memorial High School in Talisay, Batangas.



DISASTER-resilient desks and chairs from Nagasaki prefecture (top) and a Japanese garden, among others things, in donated school

Building more

Shimizu promised to build at least 20 more school buildings in the next three years. Two-classroom buildings are now under construction at the Carretonan Elementary School and Carlota Elementary School in Calatagan, Batangas.

“Three years??? I can read your mind now... [you’re thinking] hurry *na*, hurry *na*, no more time *na*... Is this correct? Don’t worry. Even after *I patay*, my son will take over. He will continue what I have started,” Shimizu said in half jest.



SHIMIZU’S six-classroom building at Venancio Trinidad Senior Memorial High School in Talisay, Batangas



SECRETARY Luistro presents Shimizu with framed copy of INQUIRER where he said he would never forget Shimizu. (Left) Shimizu’s son Jun, Japanese Ambassador Toshinao Urabe, Luistro, Shimizu and his wife Ritsuko



The schools were built through a P7.4 million grant from Shimizu’s R.K. Shimizu (Nagasaki) Foundation, Inc., with labor and construction assistance from the Armed Forces National Development Support Command’s 51st Engineering Brigade.

It had been Shimizu’s birthday wish to hand over the schools in his birth month (he turned 73 on July 13).

“Usually we are happy if we receive gifts like these schools ... But you will realize that you are happier if you are the one who gives. So, if you are happy to receive my gifts, then I am

the happiest man in the Philippines today,” said Shimizu.

His donation came with disaster-resilient chairs and tables from Shimizu’s native Nagasaki prefecture. The businessman also gave the school six LCD television sets.

“When you build a classroom, you also build the foundation for lasting friendship between our two countries,” said Education Secretary Armin Luistro in accepting the donation.

The official especially admired Shimizu’s resolve to make good his word to help

Batangas schools even as his homeland reeled from a triple disaster that struck in March.

“I told Mr. Shimizu that the Philippine government would understand if he’d have to help rebuild his country first,” said Luistro.

Working with limited funds, the education department is struggling to address a classroom shortage of roughly 60,000, and has been tapping the private sector and local government units to do their share in curbing the backlog.

A commitment to education and vocation

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.
Contributor

COLUMBIA, Missouri—For six years, Rene Tacastacas juggled his time as a student and as a priest in the United States.

He read the Bible and his university books and, besides celebrating Holy Mass and ministering to the faithful, he was participating in class discourse or conducting research for his dissertation.

“The experience was very enriching,” Fr. Tacastacas said of the time he was pursuing a doctorate degree in rural sociology and at the same time organizing, in remote Missouri villages, Catholic communities where he became well-loved.

His devotion to his studies and his vocation has brought blessings. In May, he received the Outstanding Graduate Student Service Award upon his graduation from the University of Missouri-Columbia. The annual award is given to a graduate student who brings the ideals of the academic community to the world outside the class-

Jesuit finds lessons in and outside school

“I needed... the know-how... to pursue rural development, especially involving work with small farmers in the countryside,” agreed Father Rene who, by that time, already had a master’s degree in sociology (1996) on top of a management engineering degree (1986) from the Ateneo.

When he flew to Missouri in August 2005, his mission was clear: Study hard so he could help in the Jesuits’ mission to assist Filipino farmers. Tacastacas specialized in food and agriculture.

In his first few weeks in the U.S., he spent his time celebrat-



he found his purest joys as a priest and as a student in the far-flung communities.

Tacastacas would drive out of Columbia on weekends, the trip sometimes taking several hours. It was exhausting but also fulfilling for him to visit American farms, as he had long been interested in agriculture.

First-hand experience

At the farms, he played around with the machinery and gained first-hand experience in American farming that helped him put into shape his doctoral research’s focus on small vegetable farming.

Doing poorly in Filipino? This Library can help

By Rima Jessamine M. Granali

WITH BOOKS starting to lose ground against the Internet, e-books and other new media, a group of book lovers has built a library to spread the love for reading.

That library is not just a place for reading today but also a learning center that teaches students from preschool to high school to love the Filipino language, literature and culture.

Vanessa Bicomong says The Learning Library (TLL), when it first opened in Loyola Heights, Quezon City, was the realization of a “dream to have a library of our own where we can store books and make them widely available.”

But Bicomong, TLL general manager, says they later saw a need to teach reading and writing in Filipino.

The Wika’y Galing program was developed after a mother asked if the TLL group could offer a program that would help her children improve their grades in Filipino. Bicomong



KIDS have an extensive selection of books to choose from at TLL.

says most students enrolled in the program because of low grades in Filipino or Araling Panlipunan that kept them from being included in their schools’ honors lists.

Like strangers

Many of the students really did not know Filipino, she adds. She recalls a 13-year-old who did not even know what *medyas* (socks) meant when asked during assessment.

Raissa Cortez-Calunsag, TLL head teacher, found out that

common words like *tumalon* (jump) and *pumalakpak* (clap) were also unfamiliar to students. When the reading coach said, “*Ang sabi ni Mang Simon pumalakpak* (Simon says clap),” the students jumped, turned or lay on the floor. Nannies laughed as the kids struggled to execute the commands in the Filipino version of the game “Simon Says.”

Calunsag says it is a sad reality that today’s Filipino youth, particularly those in the upper class, do not know the Filipino language. (It’s not only

SHEI Daedagan