

VIETNAM FOUNDATION

Helping Hands from Australia

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E-letter February 2006

Dear members and friends,

This e-letter comes to you as a new Spring is on its way to Vietnam. While the Vietnamese are busy celebrating Tết, we in the Vietnam Foundation are also busy organising a celebration of our own. However, our celebration will be not merely an opportunity for us to catch up with one another and to have some rest and recreation. Our celebration will also be an occasion for us to do our little extra bit so that the needy in Vietnam, who may not have much to enjoy during this festive season, may have a little more joy and a little less hardship in the coming years.

Our celebration is the fund-raising

“Thương về quê Việt” (To Vietnam with love)

dinner on Saturday 25 Feb 2006 for which you would have received a separate invitation letter already.

‘To Vietnam with love’ is indeed the passion of the two distinguished Australians, Professor Bruce G Robinson and Ms Nhã-Ca Margaret Nguyễn, who, as our guest speakers at that dinner, will share with us their excitement as well as heart-ache while visiting or working in Vietnam.

Many talented Vietnamese-born artists living in Sydney will also come to enthrall us with their music, opera songs and instrumental performances. For the benefit of those who are not yet familiar with our work, we will also have a short multimedia presentation of our aid projects in Vietnam over the last ten years.

Some members have already donated us art and craft items for raffles and auctions during the night.

If you have any item that you wish to donate, please contact Hào Nguyễn on 0413 741 959 or at howard.nguyen@ahw.com.au.

Please come along, bring your family and friends for a night out not only for enjoyment but also for making some little contribution to a good cause. As seating is limited please make your booking early so that we can reserve your seats and send tickets out to you in time.

Please drop us a line at mail@vietnamfoundation.org.au or contact the persons nominated on your invitation card if you want to make a booking or want more information about this function.



Professor Robinson with the patron of the Học Mãi Foundation, the Governor of NSW, Professor Marie Bashir.

Professor Bruce G Robinson,

our main guest speaker at the dinner is the founder and chairperson of the Học Mãi (Forever Learning), Australia Vietnam Medical Foundation <http://www.hocmai.org/>. He is an endocrinologist, Associate Dean (International) of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Sydney, Head of the Cancer Genetics Laboratory in the Kolling Institute and Head of the Division of Medicine at the Royal North Shore Hospital.

The Học Mãi Foundation fosters medical education between Australia and Vietnam. Therefore it sponsors and supports medical, nursing, allied health and scientific exchanges between the two countries.

Many Vietnamese doctors and allied health professionals have been brought to Sydney for training. Young Australian doctors and medical students have also been sent to Vietnam to help and get working experiences.

In October last year the Foundation opened the Học Mãi Australia House, a 300-bed hostel for relatives and friends of patients of the Việt Đức hospital in Hanoi.

Due to his long association with Vietnam Professor Bruce Robinson will have many moving and interesting stories to share with us during the 'Thương về quê Việt' dinner.

Nhã-Ca Margaret Nguyễn,

the second guest speaker at our dinner is also a distinguished Australian.

Nhã-Ca Margaret Nguyễn is currently a post-graduate student in Chiropractic at Macquarie University. What is remarkable about this young woman is not only that she landed on Australian shore after a long, perilous boat journey from Vietnam as a passenger in her mother's womb but also that after completing a degree in chiropractic medicine Nhã-Ca Margaget gave up a year of full time study to help newly arrived Sudanese refugees. For this admirable work under a project run by Josephite Community Aid she was recognised and honoured as Fairfield City Young Citizen of the Year 2005. Early last year she spent two weeks in Taiwan to study the injustice forced out on Vietnamese brides and migrant workers living there.



Nhã-Ca Margaret with her mother

Nhã-Ca Margaret will share with us the heart-rending experiences of her first trip to Vietnam last month when she visited many orphanages and leprosy sanatoriums in the country.

The proceeds from our fund-raising dinner on 25/2/06 will be channeled toward our two current projects in Vietnam: the construction of a Rest House for carers of patients at the Tam Nông Medical Centre and the construction of a primary school at Thanh Sơn village, Định Quán district, Đồng Nai province.

Details of these two projects were described in our previous e-letter.

In brief,

Tam Nông Medical Centre

is located in the middle of Đồng Tháp Mười (Plain of Reeds).

It was built in the early 80s with about 20 beds. It has since been modified and expanded to become a hospital.

The demand for its service is huge. As many patients come from isolated villages, family members of the patients normally stay at the hospital to look after their sick relatives. Since there is not enough room in the hospital even for patients these carers have nowhere to stay but in the open air. They are thus subjected to all the ravages of the elements: sun, rain, mosquitoes etc. Consequently 20% of these carers get sick themselves and become extra burden for the hospital.

We regard the construction of a rest house for these carers is a very practical and effective preventative medicinal undertaking. Therefore we will support 50% of the construction cost of that new shelter.

Our director Mai-viết Thủy is currently in Vietnam to discuss with the Centre and local authorities the final design details of the building.

Many members and friends living as far as Perth, Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne have sent in their donations to this project.

Please accept our sincere thanks and appreciation for your contribution.

Định Quán School

The current primary school at ấp 2, Thanh Sơn village, Định Quán province consists of two dilapidated buildings resembling animal sheds more than classrooms for six and seven-year old children.

We have therefore pledged to rebuild a new brick and tiles three-classroom building as replacement.

Since our last e-letter, we have learnt that due to the Vietnamese government's new development plan, the current ground of the school will be used for some other purpose. The school therefore will be moved to some other location.

Our representative in Vietnam, Professor Nguyễn Thiện Tổng will soon visit Định Quán again to evaluate the new school site.

Vetiver Grass for waste water treatment

In addition to the above two projects, we have also been supporting the University of Cần Thơ in a three-year pilot project which uses Vetiver Grass Technology for the treatment of waste water discharge from a seafood processing plant. Preliminary results from this study were very encouraging. They were presented at a Conference on the use of Vetiver Grass Technology for mitigation of natural disasters and protection of the environment held at Cần Thơ University on 19 to 22/1/2006. The conference attracted many international experts on this subject.

PCs for IT training

With the generous support from one of our supporters we are in the process of obtaining and sending to Vietnam more than 100 slightly used PCs to be used for IT training at two universities in the Mekong delta: the Cửu Long University and the An Giang University.

Vietnam Children's Project

During our last BOD meeting, we were privileged to welcome Thanh Cherry from the Vietnam Children's Project (VCP).

Thanh came to Australia in 1962 as a Colombo Plan student. In 1997 Thanh went back to Vietnam for a visit. She was deeply moved by the deprived conditions suffered by many orphanages and the orphans under their care.

So when Thanh was back in Australia VCP was born. VCP is based in Mittagong, NSW, and is dedicated to the health, welfare and education of disadvantaged children in Vietnam.

VCP's first project in 1998 was to find sponsorships for orphans at the Diêu Giác orphanage, run by Buddhist nuns in District 2, HCMC. Thanks to Thanh's dedication and relentless efforts, most of the 130 children in the orphanage, aged from 0 to 18-year, are now sponsored by kind-hearted Australians. With the support of many generous benefactors VCP also helped rebuild the orphanage's run-down dormitory.

VCP then expanded its work into the establishment of the Diêu Giác kindergarten in 2002. Other kindergartens in Củ Chi and then in Bình Chánh followed in 2003 and 2005. Through these kindergartens 120 children of poor families are now given free daily care and Waldorf education (which is based on the humanist education philosophy of Rudolf Steiner).

VCP is holding a special dinner 'giọt sữa cho bé thơ' (Each Drop of Milk) on 11/2/1006 to raise more fund to maintain and expand its work at the Diêu Giác orphanage and the three kindergartens.

If you wish to sponsor a Vietnamese orphan (AUD 240 per year), a kindergarten child (AUD 120 per year), attend the 'giọt sữa cho bé thơ' dinner or give the tireless, extraordinary Thanh Cherry some help in any way, please drop her a line at thanh@hinet.net.au or thanhcherry@hotmail.com or contact VCP's Sydney Representative, Phương Lu, on 0413 187 886.

AGM

Just a reminder to all our members that our AGM will be held on 5/2/2006. Details of this meeting have already been sent out to you some weeks ago. Please come along and take an active part in the running of our Foundation. We love to see you and your active participation.

Last but not least

We wish that the New Year will bring you much joy, peace and happiness.

Looking forward to seeing all of you at the 'Thương về quê Việt' dinner on 25 Feb.