

May 2003

To all,

I am currently in Toledo City, Philippines where I have been working on my "Lingap Center Project". Before I left on this trip, I sent many of you (not all) a note telling you what I hoped to accomplish and I asked for your best wishes. I thought I should send a follow-up note telling you how it has been going and what I have achieved thus far. I also wanted you to know that I have not been "goofing off". This may be a bit lengthy, but much has taken place - so I thought I would send the update to all rather than try to fill you in individually. (sorry for the length). Read only when you have the time.

For all of you who saw the "draft" proposal that I had prepared, you will recall that the one really weak point was on site project management and financial accountability. My friend Phil Wall suggested that I might want to meet with representatives of World Vision International, to bring in an international children's charitable organization - to both assist with the above and to provide some experience in projects such as these. I was a bit skeptical, but I did set up a meeting with Bebeth Tiu, of World Vision Philippines, for Monday of this week.

Meeting with World Vision Philippines

I arrived in Manila late Sunday night, in a driving rain storm (monsoon rains, which turned into Typhoon Chedeng later). I immediately went to Quezon City, where I met with Bebeth Tiu, Program Development Coordinator. It was clear to me that there certainly is some "divine guidance" going on here, because when I asked what World Vision does, she said that they are a faith based, nondenominational organization which provides on-site management of orphanage projects and do financial accounting etc etc. This is EXACTLY the void that I was trying to fill. I described my project to her and she was immediately interested and offered to travel with me to Toledo City the next day (this means an hour airplane flight, plus about 1 1/2 hours over the mountains) to meet with the Mayor and the City Council. We both started talking very quickly about the project and covered a lot of ground in a pretty short period of time. It was clear to me that this was not an accidental meeting - or mere coincidence. By including World Vision (WV) I no longer need to worry about obtaining a 501(c)(3) designation, since they already have it. Donated money can be given to World Vision International, based in Washington DC, where it will be channeled to World Vision Philippines - Lingap Project..... and I don't need to worry about it!!!! Also, I no longer need to worry about onsite management!

Meeting with the mayor and city council

On Tuesday, I went to Toledo City with Bebeth, We met up with Boy Ypon and Leah Diaz (my onsite friends and coordinators who set up meetings etc and acted as translators when needed). We then proceeded to meet with Mayor Arlene Zambo and the rest of the City Council. Again, I described the current status of the project to them. They were all familiar with it, since they have been providing information to me - but I gave a "status report". I also showed them the artists' painting (provided by my friend Jimmy Cabatuan) - which was symbolic of the fact that this has gone from a dream to a vision... and reality is close at hand (hopefully). Some of them had not yet seen the blueprints of the proposed building either, which I went over with them. I then looked them all in the eye and asked what they would do to support it. They are going to expropriate the additional land needed for the facility and they will commit their current annual Lingap Operating budget. Arlene committed the assistance of all of her staff to it, (eg. the city engineer, architect, DSWD etc etc) and said that it was not a Priority Project, rather it was a Top Priority for them. I have seen the result of this commitment already as they have been more than responsive. Additionally, she and the City Council are meeting to determine what additional support they might be able to commit, such as mobilizing the combined forces of the local Lions, Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs for example. I believe that I will be surprised and pleased at the amount of support I receive from these groups - you will see why later. Arlene is drafting a letter to me, which will summarize and immortalize their commitment to me.

We had a considerable discussion about the relationships that would exist between myself and the DSWD (Dept of Social Welfare and Development), the City Council and World Vision. The way it will work is that there will be an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) between Toledo City and World Vision. This is a standard form that World Vision uses in such situations, however it will be modified to include the elements that are important to me [Kevin Thomson, this takes care of the issue that you and I worked on...WV has taken your draft to include parts as I requested]. In turn, I will have an MOU with World Vision, which will ensure that they manage the project in accordance with MY standards and desires. Day to day operation of the facility will be the responsibility of the DSWD and ultimately, the mayor. Bottom line is that the one setting the standards for the operation of whole thing is me... they will do all of the heavy lifting in accordance with my direction through WV.

Everyone was pleased with the outcome of the meeting. Before leaving, I asked if anyone had any further questions, and the two raised were, "is this project for real???" and if it is, "how soon will it happen"? My answer was that it is as real as their ability to fulfill their promises. I told them that I was confident that I could raise the needed funds - the rest was up to them.

Visit to Lingap Center

It was important that Bebeth saw the existing Lingap Center before she returned, so this was our next stop. Since my last visit, it has become more crowded (there are now about 27 children there) and sadly, the facility has not improved with time..... it is worse. (Chuck Hammond and Chuck Bassett, I took a few more pictures which should be most helpful). In short, it was abysmal. On the happy side of it, one little guy was so proud of the fact that he had received an academic achievement award.....and his friend had not!!!!

Visit to the DSWD

Bebeth headed back to Cebu City and I proceeded to meet with Milagros (Emem) Espera, the Director of the DSWD and her staff (Gina Gadiano & Tita Figuracion). We discussed the proposed relationship that will exist between them and WV, and then went over my DRAFT proposal in detail, paying particular attention to the cost estimates. They are going to carefully review the estimates, but we believe that I was not far off. There will be some additions, such as the need for a psychologist on staff (which I had overlooked) and the budget for furniture was woefully inadequate (Dave Fleming, this is what you had pointed out). So, these will be added, but at the same time, some things will be taken out, such as legal fees to obtain 501(c)(3) designations, so at the end of the process, my bottom line estimates will probably be close to the same. The staff is truly excited about the project and are also happy that WV is involved to help guide them. They were also excited that Bebeth Tiu is a Cebuana!!!! (coincidence?)

We worked out many questions and little details and they are now busy providing more accurate estimates and gathering more information to answer my endless stream of questions. We also discussed in great depth, the need for background screening & drug testing for all personnel involved. They do have systems set up to do this and Boy Ypon is also going to oversee it and personally interview all potential employees. I am now comfortable regarding this issue.

Meeting with the Superintendent of Schools

We next met with the Jose Cabantan, the Superintendent of the Toledo City School system. This was necessary because I want to ensure that all of the children, regardless of whether or not they have certified birth certificates, are able to attend the public schools (this was a major problem at King's Garden, in Bataan, which forced them to build their own school, which they were then unable to get accredited!!). Also, I wanted

Mr. Cabantan to provide for me, a development plan for the children, which will demonstrate how he will assess them for placement in the school, the program they will follow to prepare them to be viable citizens after completing the educational process and/or put them in a vocational program depending on their abilities and interests. Mr. Cabantan is working on this plan for me and will provide it to the office of the mayor, and it will be included in the City's commitment letter to me. With regard to the birth certificate issue, this is a problem. Philippine law says that they must have such documentation. So, Mr. Cabantan and I called Dr. Carolino Mordeno (Mr. Cabantan's boss), Regional Director of Schools for Region 7, which includes Cebu, Negros, Bohol and Siquijor. Dr. Mordeno has agreed that for "my children" specific exemptions will be granted on an as needed basis. This commitment will be included in the commitment letter to the mayor. It should be noted that on Thursday and Friday, there is a National Children's Council meeting (representatives from children's groups and schools from all over the Philippines) taking place, at which both Dr. Mordeno and Mr. Cabantan, the mayor and many others, including WV will be in attendance. They have put this issue on the agenda to be discussed at that level.

Mr. Cabantan has also offered (and I quickly accepted) to send me routine progress reports for each of the Lingap children. In summary, I am convinced that my educational concerns are completely met to my satisfaction and frankly, the commitment of Mr. Cabantan (with the support of Dr. Mordeno) has exceeded my hopes!

Meeting with City Engineer and City Architect

My next stop was with the City Engineer and the City Architect to review the blueprints for the proposed building and to determine why they had not included the renovation of the existing facility. (Dave Fleming, this is your part). When I told the architect that you were impressed with the completeness and quality of the drawings, his face beamed like the sun. This was a tremendous compliment to him. We then discussed in exhaustive detail, the location of water faucets, gfi electrical outlets, sanitation systems, the perceived inadequacy of electrical load the placement of the trusses, construction materials and on and on. He had excellent responses to all of your (Dave) questions, and in some cases, said that he had not considered it - but he would rework the drawings to include some of your suggestions. He will have them finalized and in the mail to me within 3 weeks.....both hard copy and CD. He did point out that the renovation estimates WERE in fact included in the detail, but he had not done a separate drawing of the existing building, since it (the building) already exists. I said that due to the amount of work that will be required on it, I really wanted to see those drawings too, so they will be forthcoming as well. At the end of the meeting, I again asked if he had any questions,

and he had only one.... He said, "I have seen projects like this before and have worked on them, only to have them disappear. Is this for real??" I told him it is.... it has to be.

Overall, the meeting was in my view, very successful. He will be carefully reviewing his initial cost estimates - especially in view of the higher standard that I am asking for - but again, generally speaking, while the initial estimates are low, I do not believe that they are too far out of line. (Dave, he was very comfortable with the 5% contingency and did not want to change it.... however, I may factor that in).

Meeting with the Parish Priest

Next, I met with Fr. Raul Galliego (spelled wrong). He too was familiar with me and the project. I told him that his part of the equation was twofold.... first, I wanted to ensure that he would minister to the spiritual needs of the children. To do this, I asked him to commit to conducting a children's mass each Sunday at the Center. He has agreed to do this and this will be included in the letter to me from the Mayor. Secondly, I asked him to help the mayor to rally the support of the local community to the project - which he will also do. I believe that he was a bit skeptical that this will become a real project, but I do have his commitment and total support.

To Underscore the Need (or a final push from above)

Most of you have seen the poem (I didn't write it) that I have been using to describe why I need to do this project. It's short, so I will provide it again below - you will see why:

"On the street I saw a
small girl cold and
shivering in a thin dress,
with little hope of a
decent meal.

I became angry and
said to God
"Why did you
permit this?
Why don't you do
something about it?"

For a while God said
nothing. That night
He replied

quite suddenly:
"I certainly did
something about it.
I made you."

I had finished most of my meetings and was making a final visit to the mayor's office to tell her of my progress and status. I also stopped by the DSWD office. That morning, they had taken in Melcris Marane, age 10. Melcris had just escaped from an abusive father that morning and was absolutely terrified. I have seen cases of child abuse in the past - but this one was particularly horrifying. Standing before me was a small girl shivering out of fear in a thin dress. It was obvious that she had not eaten in a long time and her clothes were filthy. She is a beautiful and smart little girl.... and I thought of my poem above. Was it coincidence that I met Melcris just as I was about to leave??? I don't think so. We took her out to the Center and along the way, she thought we were taking her back to her father (I can't even begin to describe the look on her face). She then told us a little of her story - which you don't want to hear so I will spare you, but I will say that the Lingap Center (such as it is today) was certainly a haven of safety and refuge for her. I MUST now do something about it..... and SOON! The "thinking about it" stage has passed.

Chuck Hammond and David Bassett, please start the presses. I am ready to begin. To the rest of you, I need your help. I will be happy to meet with interested individuals in the evenings or on weekends to make this happen. Please give some thought to who those individuals might be. My initial estimate was \$268,500. This would renovate the existing building, and build the new one and provide for the entire first year's operation (when I add in the city's operating budget). I think to be safe, at least until I get more accurate figures, I am going to up this amount to \$300,000. I will worry about future years operating expenses after I get things going.

The mayor had been concerned about when to start the expropriation process for the additional land. I had told her to wait until I had at least the majority of the money raised before beginning the process. After I met Melcris, I called the mayor and told me to begin the expropriation process IMMEDIATELY.... there is no time to lose.

I apologize for making this so long, but each of you has expressed interest in different aspects of it all. There are things I have left out (believe it or not). It has been a very busy trip (I'm starting to get tired).... but most productive. All of the obstacles I have been facing seem to be falling by the wayside. All I have left is the small matter of raising \$300,000.

I am about to begin the return leg of the trip. I have a follow-up meeting with World Vision (Bebeth and her boss, the head of WV - Philippines) on Tuesday morning at 10:00 in Manila. At this meeting, we will work out some of the remaining administrative details. I will then be in the U.S. on Wednesday. Again, thank you for your interest and see you soon.

John Drake

PS. World Vision is an outstanding organization - and they have a very impressive and effective individual child sponsorship program going. If any of you would like information - let me know.... it is very inexpensive but highly successful. I suspect that I may even sponsor one...!! or two.....