



A Humanitarian Non-profit Organization Approved by IRS Code 501(c) 3 & California Section 23701D

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March 2014 Newsletter - Volume 11 Issue 2

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2. An update for the A Ga Ney saga
3. Rhythm Riders concert was a huge success



### *"Who are we, what do we do?"*

As the Secretary of Friends of Vinh Son (FVSO), I often get that question via the web site, email, or phone calls. I also hear: "Can I volunteer at the orphanages?", "Can I adopt a child?..." and many other requests for information. I also hear, "I want to help, what can I do?" This is part of what I do as Secretary. Duties have evolved over time from writing thank you letters to donors, contributing to the newsletter stories, printing & mailing them with the help of my wife Pat. And then there is the web site document posting and maintenance.

All the board members contribute their talent in some way - Finances, Colleen Sands - Project Administration, Bart Ruud - Newsletter stories, Mike Little, - overall direction, coordination, and guidance, Dave Chaix, etc. We all work together. What keeps us focused? The children. It is not about us, it is always about the FVSO children. That single focus is the glue that holds us all together.

We started informally collaborating in 2003 with our own **East meets West** - that is the group in California working with folks like me in the Eastern time zone. About one year later, we realized if we were to have a real impact and make a difference, we needed to be a recognized 501(c)3 charitable organization by the Internal Revenue Service. That allowed us to recognize donations as being a charitable deduction for your income tax returns.

Plus it allowed us to show you and others our tax returns via the web site so you would know exactly how funds were spent and that administrative expenses are paid by board members. Our official IRS recognition came July 26, 2005. Our goals and objectives are listed on the web site.

In the beginning, our financial goals were modest, but you, the donors, greatly exceeded all our expectations in a very short time. As the January Newsletter stated, 2013 was a wonderful year for the children - over \$162,000 in donations. That equates to about \$16 per child per month. Your generosity has fed, sheltered, and educated these very special children. In addition, you have provided medical and dental care to improve their quality of life. You have improved water and sanitation. Approximately 800,000,000 to 1 billion people do not have safe drinking water on planet Earth. For 850 children at the FVSO and Sao Mai sites, that is not the case. We work these issues on a continuing basis.



## ...Making connections...here and abroad...

From my home in the Greater Cincinnati area of Northern Kentucky, Vietnam is over 9,000 miles away. Connecting with the children there can be a challenge; and we need to make that connection work for you too. In addition to the distance barrier, we deal with cultural and language barriers (between English, Vietnamese, and local tribal dialects). But these kids are special. They demonstrate a love for each other and happiness that transcends all barriers. We see it every time we go there. We do our best to convey that to you in newsletters like this, thank you letters, pictures of the children, and videos.

When I reflect on my Vietnam visit last April/May with Clyde Lewandowski, a few things stand out: Gratitude by the children and the Sisters who care for them; loving kindness they show to each other and all those who visit/help them. Our goals for the trip were to bring dental fluoride treatment to reduce tooth cavities, and assess the overall conditions at the 7 sites. As we reported last May from Kontum in our email report, we had an Abbott and Costello encounter of "Who's on First?". Nothing like humor to lighten an adventure. But more poignantly, at another meeting, a sister from a distant site asked the question why we came so far to help them. In a moment of clarity, we just simply responded "because Jesus said so" and hoped the translation got through. By the smile we received back, we think she understood.



No child feels alone at Vinh Son & Sao Mai

More good things will happen in 2014 - that is for certain. Sometime this year, the total donations for the children over the last 11 years will hit the \$1 million dollar mark. While that is a tremendous accomplishment, there is always so much more to be done. For me, sometime this year, I will have written my 5,000th thank you letter to a donor. Communicating with donors is an honor and privilege for me. I feel like we know most of you. You come from Eagle Creek, Alaska to Miami, Florida. Internationally, we have donors from Australia to the United Kingdom and all places in-between. We have a global effort that helps those in need. The Board and the FVSO children thank you for your continued support and generosity.

**Dennis Coyne - Secretary**



Sister Imelly Y Tis feeding lunch to little A Ga Ney

*There is a premature baby at VS1 who has been of concern. This is the baby who was "cut from the mother" and the mother died.*

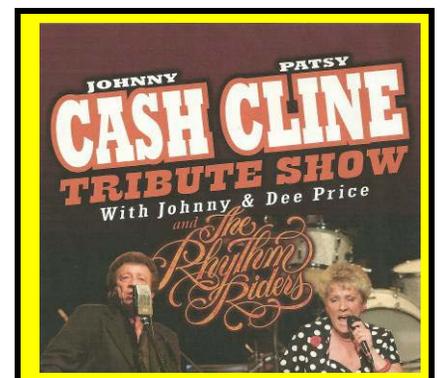
That was the headline back in March of 2012. See how far **A Ga Ney** has come! Godfather, **Pat Leary**, gives us an update.



### Small Packages, Big Miracles

In March 2012, I visited the orphanages in Pleiku and Kontum. Little did I know the incredible journey I was about to undertake. While visiting Vinh Son 1, I discovered the tiniest little person I have ever seen. He was about the size of my hand. The nuns had wrapped him in delicate swaddling clothes. His dad and grandmother had just that hour brought him to Vinh Son with hopes and prayers they could take care of him. Recently I learned more of his story.

A Ga Ney is the last of 5 children. His mother had a very difficult time with his pregnancy. His father literally sold the farm to pay medical bills for his wife. He sold his ox and his few chickens. A Ga Ney was 5-6 weeks premature and his mother died in childbirth. The nuns were A Ga Ney's only hope.



### Another Huge Success!

Over 900 people attended our annual concert at the Thunder Valley Casino. We made \$11,000 from the event, which is the most yet. Thanks to their desire to help the children, Johnny and Dee plan on continuing the show in 2015.

**Thanks To Everyone!**

## “I feel privileged having played a small part in helping him.”

Although I knew the little guy needed help I had no idea what to do. Fortunately there was a French lady, Michelle Hedouin, visiting Kontum and she was of immense help. Between the two of us we procured special formula, bottles and instructions for special care from a church dispensary nearby. The nuns were most grateful.

When I left, the sisters sent periodic reports on A Ga Ney's progress. The news was usually not good. Premature babies have all kinds of developmental issues.. His lungs, his heart, etc all seemed to act up. He was taken to the local hospital several times. Mind you, a local hospital in Kontum is not your vision of a hospital. It is 3<sup>rd</sup> world. The technology we take for granted does not exist there. Many natives think of the hospital as we do a hospice; it is the last place you want to go, or perhaps the last place you will go.

Through all this the little guy struggled and continued to win over hearts. The nuns sent him to Ho Chi Minh City when his pneumonia was considered terminal. The local staff and volunteers in the Ho Chi Minh hospital were won over. The nun that escorted A Ga Ney to the hospital contracted pneumonia shortly after her arrival as well. A Ga Ney was “adopted” by the staff and volunteers and cared for until the sister was healthy enough to care for him.

When he returned to Kontum he was “healthy” but still had a number of problems with his lungs and developmental issues.

In the summer of 2013 Carmel Excell-Cole was visiting Kontum. Carmel is an Australian who is part of an organization that also helps us at the orphanages. She fell head over heels for A Ga Ney and started to look for extraordinary ways to help him. She wanted to adopt him and bring him back to Australia. Australia does not have the adoption issues we have in the US. She started working hard. She returned in December full of hope only to be met with bureaucracy. On Christmas Eve, her visa was about to expire and she was ready to return home disappointed but determined to continue the fight.

A Ga Ney and his new family



Then a small miracle happened. At the last minute, A Gay Ney was approved for a 6-month medical visa to Australia.

He arrived in Australia shortly after the New Year. He has been welcomed into Paul and Carmel's family. He has had several physicals and various therapies are underway to strengthen his heart and lungs. He also has some hearing problems.

By all reports he is a most intelligent youngster, learning the difficult Australian version of English and responding well to his new environment.

### Organizations supporting FVSO

- 189<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company
- Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 535, Nevada County, CA
- Counterparts
- 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Association (NY & NJ Chapter)
- 14<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineer Btn. Assoc.
- MilSpec Tours



### Vinh Son & Sao Mai Orphanage Facts

- Population – approximately 830 Montagnard children in seven orphanage facilities
- Administered by the Sisters of the Miraculous Medal & St. Paul Chartres
- Location – Kontum/Pleiku, Vietnam
- \$12 feeds, shelters, and educates one child for one month

### Officers

**President** - Dave Chaix  
**Secretary** - Dennis Coyne  
**Treasurer** - Colleen Sands  
**Senior VP** - Pat McKee  
**1st VP** - Sr. Marie Dominique  
**2nd VP** - Michael Little

### Board

Hank Gonzales  
 Rich Lahey  
 Clyde Lewandowski  
 Bart Ruud  
 Patrick Leary

### Donation Information

Please make checks payable to FVSO or Friends of Vinh Son  
 Donations are gratefully accepted year round  
 100% of administrative costs are paid by the Board and Officers