

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

P.O. Box 9322 Auburn, California 95604-9322 - Email: [info@FriendsofVSO.org](mailto:info@FriendsofVSO.org) -Web: [www.FriendsofVSO.org](http://www.FriendsofVSO.org)

May 2015 Newsletter - Volume 12 Issue 4

## In this issue

### Pat and Clyde's Excellent Adventure

Pat Leary & Clyde Lewandowski are pictured with traveling companions, Thanh Le & Van, & some of the kids at Vinh Son 5



One of the most important things we do as Board Members of FVSO is make annual visits to the Vinh Son and Sao Mai orphanages. Not everyone can make the trip, but for those who do, it's always a memorable experience. Valuable information is gathered, which helps us identify the highest priorities and major challenges facing the orphanages. It was no different this past April, when Pat and Clyde traveled halfway across the world to be the "face" of FVSO. A project list will be developed in the weeks ahead.

Of course, it helps when the kids already know you (there are no strangers here) and they embrace you with loving appreciation. They were ready for you, Pat and Clyde. Such a blessing to find yourself among these wonderful children!



Where smiles come easily

## These images would make everything worthwhile



### Pat and Clyde's Excellent Adventure April 2015

This was more of an adventure than usual, for two retired guys anyway. We stopped in DaNang to check on advanced education opportunities for our kids. The airport in Pleiku is closed for an upgrade to allow bigger aircraft. So the route to Kontum involved a 7 hour car trip. The roads are paved and mostly wide enough to accommodate two-way traffic although we did not see a center line the entire length. Traffic includes cars, trucks, motorcycles, cattle, water buffalo, dogs, pedestrians, ox carts and the occasional two wheel tractor pulling a wagon.

Our route, down Hwy 17 passed by the beautiful Ngoc Linh Nature Reserve as well as some names from days past...Dak Pek, Dak Bo, Dak Tuc, Plei Can and of course Dak To. Oh ya, Hwy 17 also has numerous road signs identifying it as the Ho Cho Minh Trail ...47 years ...who would've thought!

We arrived in Kontum mid afternoon and immediately adopted the local custom of a mid-afternoon nap. Temperatures were in the 90's, humidity was not bad but it was the burning season where they clear croplands, so a bit smoky.

We do not have enough room to hit all the many highlights of the week. Our mission was to review the results of our past donations and look for opportunities where we can continue to help. It was marvelous and most rewarding. We stopped at each of the 6 Vinh Son orphanages and made the trip to Pleiku to visit Sao Mai and Sister Khiet.

This trip was Clyde's 8<sup>th</sup> trip in nine years. It was my 5<sup>th</sup> trip in eight years, and my last trip was three years ago. The changes at the Vinh Son orphanages over the years have been noticeable, significant and most positive. You have made a difference, a big difference. In our early days we had little guidance or input where to start. Over time we have focused on a specific task for FVSO of basic necessities. This has allowed us to coordinate with other charities to focus on their core missions of infrastructure construction, education and other needs. It has been a most successful collaboration. There is still a lot that is needed but the path forward seems clearer.





## Everyone looks forward to seeing Mr. Pat and Mr. Clyde



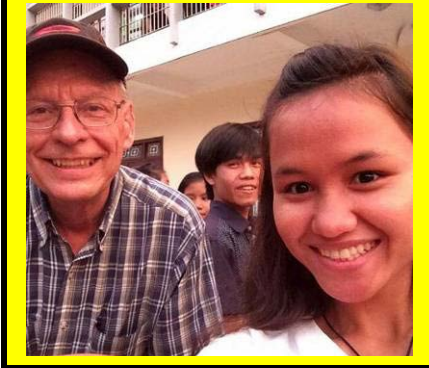
Overall, the kids are healthy and the sisters are happy with the reduction in medical bills.

Since my last trip 3 years ago, we found that there are a larger number of kids in higher education than we thought and the sisters are able to arrange this. Each of the locations has a bakery that provides bread for the kids as well excess to sell on the market to actually turn a small profit. That is new. The bakers are the kids and we were treated to fresh HOT baguette loafs at VS4. They were delicious. Also new is that each location has a small farm operation with pigs, chickens and some veggies. The operations are small and supplement their regular diet. To be sure with 6 locations, 4 of them in remote villages, the operations are not equal and there is a lot of room for improvement, but the progress they have made is significant.



Sao Mai, in Pleiku is an urban location and does not have opportunity for agriculture, although there is a small flower and herb garden. Although Sr. Khiet is officially "retired," she is still a significant presence and a wonderfully dedicated Sister. Most of the kids were in school but we did get an opportunity to see and interact (play!) with the little ones.

Where do we go for improvement? We have provided the sisters with a secure foundation of life's necessities. This safe foundation has allowed them to take the risks of growing and developing their own resources. First consider that the sisters operate on a 25-30:1 ratio. One nun for 25-30 kids. That is a heck of a management load!



They need to learn to use their resources more effectively: agriculture, bakeries, water management, hygiene.

They need much more support in getting to high level learning opportunities. Health care (dental and physical), is always a concern. By maintaining our mission of providing a secure subsistence level, we are helping them help themselves in many other areas.

So, now a couple of highlights. At Sao Mai we were treated to an A cappella performance by a young man with hopes of a scholarship to music school. We certainly think he has the talent.

I brought plenty of balloons and a pump to make simple balloon animals for the kids. Balloons by nature sometime break. I was delighted to see the creativity of some of the boys. They filled the broken pieces with water and made small water bombs!! I loved it. I also learned that travelling with Clyde is a unique privilege. When your balloon air pump breaks, who else would have duct tape in his back pack for an instant field grade repair!!

At the end of the week, we learned that for the most part the kids do not know their birthdays. So once a year, April 24<sup>th</sup>, they have a big birthday party and all celebrate being one year older! The party was great and sponsored by our friends in Seattle, The Children of Vinh Son Orphanage.

When you visit next time, the children are most eager to sing for you. They sing local songs as well as a few popular English songs and are always eager to learn more. You may hear a pretty good rendition of "On Wisconsin", my home state.

## **“We are honored to be the reporters.”**

In cooperation with VietDreams, we have installed clean water systems at all locations. VS2 is one of the larger locations and the older kids are responsible for kitchen duties. The bigger kids were upset that the little kids were making a mess at the water fountains. So naturally, to prevent the mess, the big kids turned the system off, of course. We discussed with the nuns and now we have some adult supervision!

Sister Gabrielle, VS3, continues to be most amazing (as all the sisters are). She was trained as a nurse back in the 60's by Dr Pat Smith. Sister Gabrielle is about 5 foot and not more than 90 lbs of compact determination. She not only takes care of 100 kids but she also provides a medical clinic for the local village. She has finagled 3 water systems, one for the kitchen, one for the dorms and one she maintains for the local village. I am in awe of her determination.

We were caught in a late season rain storm....and reminded us of what monsoons really are!

It was a privilege for us to represent FVSO. The good FVSO has been able to do through your generous donations is something in which we should all take great satisfaction. We are honored to be the reporters.

**Pat and Clyde**



**From balloons to bread rolls**

**They love to sing!!**



### **End of Trip Summary**

Pat and Clyde have outlined a number of opportunity areas that the Board will discuss during its upcoming meeting in June. We're grateful for their willingness to travel great distances on behalf of the children who mean so much to each of us.

#### **Long-term supporting organizations**

- 189<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company
- Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 535, Nevada County, CA
- Counterparts Association
- 14<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineer Btn. Assoc.
- MilSpec Tours
- Fr. Luke Tran (VN-SHEP) Social Health Education Projects

### **Semi-annual Board Meeting**

**June 11, 2015  
10:00AM – 1:40PM  
339 45<sup>th</sup> Street  
Richmond, CA 94805**

**Please contact us for call-in information**

**Supporters are welcome!**

#### **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  
 Steve Fisher

#### **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