

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

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Memories made, friendships forged



Early February, 20 American visitors descended upon the Vinh Son orphanages in Kontum, and in the photo above, the group is joined by children and caregivers at Sao Mai orphanage in Pleiku. Dave Chaix (President of FVSO) is top left; Colleen Sands (FVSO Treasurer) is pictured bottom left with new friend.

Dave's summary report of his 2013 visit

Every other year, Dave gathers a group of folks who are interested in touring Southeast Asia generally, and Vietnam in particular. He also invites those who have been continuing supporters of FVSO, who would like to see, first hand, their donations at work. This year, 13 were first-time visitors to the orphanages. Each paid their own way.

We arrived in Pleiku Airport and bussed to Kontum Thursday January 30, 2013, checking in at the Thinh Vuong Hotel, a small family hotel on Nguyen Trai Street in Kontum. Everyone needed a good night's sleep before our big day at Vinh Son.

Visitors to VS-1 will see our story



This sign is now on display at Vinh Son 1, intended to help visitors learn more about the efforts of FVSO

Dave's report continued...

The next day, we started at Vinh Son 1 behind the Wooden Church. We usually visit the Wooden Church first, but services were being held, so off to VS 1. We were graciously greeted by Sister Imelda and Sister Marie Kham in the reception room, which is badly in need of repair from termite damage. We were given refreshments of tea and bananas and had a very nice visit.

Being a Thursday, most of the children were attending government schools, so we toured the orphanage and as usual were impressed by the cleanliness. VS 1 is one of the largest facilities and we've supported it since 2001. It is very gratifying to see the improvements over the years and the many projects completed by us and other charitable groups from around the world.

Dave's report continued...

After lunch we visited the other large orphanage, Vinh Son 2, which is also located in the city of Kontum. Back in 2002, Vinh Son 2 became the second orphanage to receive care from FVSO. We were met by Sister Jeanne and the children singing in English, French & Vietnamese. What a treat!!!

We toured the facilities and, again, were quite impressed with the organization at VS 2. Sister Jeanne, the other Sisters and caregivers do such a wonderful job there. A couple hundred children can be a challenge, but from what we observed, Sister Jeanne and company have it under control.

We had the opportunity to observe the children while they had their lunch. Quite a change from years before, when there were no vegetables, meat or fish in their rice bowls. Another great visit with these wonderful children.

Our Treasurer, Colleen Sands, and I spent some time at the Convent, visiting with Sister Michel, the Mother Superior, a wonderful person. We discussed what is working well and what we might need to improve upon. A very productive meeting but we came away realizing there is always more to do.

As arranged, we returned to Vinh Son 1 at 7PM for the performance put on by the children and narrated by our great guide, Tano. The children did a magnificent job entertaining us. Before we knew it, all of us travelers ended up on the dance floor with the children. A good time was definitely had by all.

Friday January 31 we split into 2 groups with Colleen taking one group to VS 5 and a visit to the Novices field location. I took the other group to visit VS 3, 4 & 6, only in reverse order.



Lots of pictures were taken to chronicle this trip, but for this newsletter, we've chosen the images captured by Arlene. Thanks to her, we have these beautiful images of the children.

Our brave travelers continued the mission

Dave's report continued...

We visited Vinh Son 6 first, the furthest out of the orphanages, on a rutted dirt road off Highway 24, north of Kontum. We have been working at VS 6 since 2010. The children were ready and singing when we arrived, always wonderful. We were able to see the kitchen (being) built with funds from Derek Smith's group in Australia, Diny Jansen-van der Linden from the Netherlands and FVSO. It's an example of a successful joint project, with the added plus of water filtration provided by VietDreams, Milpitas, CA and FVSO. We really have great partners!!! Currently under construction is a new dormitory being funded by Richard Grame and Associates, Walnut Creek, CA.

As we worked our way back toward Kontum, our next stop was at Vinh Son 4 and a visit with Sister Lien and the children – this was the orphanage we visited in August and were so impressed with all Sister Lien had accomplished on her own, like the new fish pond that raises fish for use at the orphanage as well as for sale. There have been many improvements since we began working here in 2007, with our good partners mentioned above, along with another partner, Colour4Kids from the Netherlands, who have worked with us at most of the orphanages.

Our last stop of the day was Vinh Son 3 and Sister Gabriel – what a wonderful person. VS 3 is one of the smaller orphanages, very well run, which we also started supporting in 2007. We have another joint project (new kitchen) at VS 3 with our good partners Derek Smith's Group from Australia and Diny Jansen-van der Linden from the Netherlands. We have also worked here with Dorinda Cavanaugh's Group from Canada and the 189th Attack Helicopter Association.

This completed our visits up Highway 24 and we returned to the Convent for a wonderful lunch with the Mother Superior and some of the Sisters. After lunch, we traveled to Pleiku, visited the central market and checked into the Hoang Anh Pleiku Hotel for the night.

Saturday morning, February 2nd we started the day with a visit to the Sao Mai Orphanage, which FVSO has supported since 2011. This orphanage was known as Tu Tam Orphanage in the 1960's and many of our supporters and some Board Members worked there during their tour of duty. We were greeted by Sister Khiet, who will be retiring in August at the age of 82. (the children were present to welcome us since there is no school on the weekend) We were entertained by them and very much enjoyed our visit. Along with FVSO, Sao Mai also receives much support from the 189th Assault Helicopter Association.

I should mention here that all 7 orphanages have filtered water provided by systems funded by VietDreams, Milpitas, CA and FVSO, Auburn, CA. The installation and maintenance is done by MK Company, Da Nang, VN.

End of report



Chance meeting leads to a local on-line news article (partial transcript below)



Gia Lai Online

CƠ QUAN CỦA ĐẢNG BỘ ĐẢNG CỘNG SẢN VIỆT NAM TỈNH GIA LAI
TIẾNG NÓI CỦA ĐẢNG BỘ, CHÍNH QUYỀN VÀ NHÂN DÂN CÁC DÂN TỘC GIA LAI

Late this afternoon, we accidentally met a group of foreigners who are here for a long tour and shopping in Pleiku. At first glance, they appeared to be just visitors who were older and taller, but when we approached and talked to them, we felt the closeness and warmth from them, who choose to travel to our country this spring to understand our people and culture.

For nearly 10 years, members of this group of FVSO supporters have been helping the children at the Vinh Son orphanages in Kon Tum and for the past 2 years have been helping orphans at Sao Mai here in Pleiku. Each year some of the FVSO members visit Vietnam, to help the orphans with medical and dental care, food, shelter and education.

Note: GiaLai is the Province name

The good Sisters at VS-1 had much to smile about



VS-1 was in bad need of a new walkway (pictured above) that connected the upper and lower levels, where two dorms are located. For some time, this unpaved path has been noticeably eroding, causing mud and sand to be tracked into the buildings. Footing has been dangerous as well. In January, 2013, FVSO committed funds to make the needed repairs.

Above, steady progress can be seen on roadway repairs. At a cost of about \$2,500, this simple project will have a big impact on the inhabitants of Vinh Son.



I have often been asked how I became involved with the Vinh Son and Sao Mai Orphanages.

In 2001, Pat McKee, our Senior Vice President, and I went on a 4th & 25th ID tour of Vietnam organized by a company called MilSpec Tours, of Flourtown PA Owner, Butch Sincock, introduced us to Vinh Son 1 and the rest is history. Butch and his wife support FVSO through donations and also by directing his tour groups to the orphanages, which often leads to more interest in helping the children.

Thank you Butch!!!

Organizations supporting FVSO

- 189th Assault Helicopter Company
- Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 535, Nevada County, CA
- Counterparts
- 4th Infantry Division Association (NY & NJ Chapter)
- 14th Combat Engineer Btn. Association
- [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
 Alan Brooks

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