

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 -Web: www.FriendsofVSO.org

April 2015 Newsletter - Volume 12 Issue 3

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Where chickens come to roost

Joanne Glah and Steve Fisher have created a whole new industry at Vinh Son 3, as they describe below. The combination of thorough planning and a hands-on approach have resulted in a unique joint venture aimed at adding protein to the children’s diet.

From the success of the Christmas cards grew another project--Chickadee Cards. Knowing the importance of protein, a sustainable egg production project to provide eggs for the children daily was our idea, with the ongoing costs covered through the sale of greeting cards designed by the children. After months of research on the most efficient way of keeping chickens and using them as part of the gardening system, off we went to Kontum, with detailed plans for 'chicken wagons'. Within 48 hours of arrival, we had gone through 3 more plan designs, and finally decided on a more conventional but also more theft resistant building. Sister Gabrielle at VS3 had her builder, Woa, meet us Monday morning and by Monday afternoon supplies were being delivered. Woa and his team of men worked for ten straight days to complete the project during our time in Kontum. The chicken house currently holds 75 chickens, with room for 50 more. There is also an attached room for a guard to sleep in, as theft of livestock at the orphanages is a problem.

The chicken house with the enclosed outside area is a different method of keeping chickens than is usually used in Vietnam. The inside has a thick bedding of rice hull. The chicken manure will be constantly scratched into the rice hull by the chickens, and the water containers will be kept outside so that the inside remains dry. This will eliminate odor and keep flies to a minimum. The rice hull bedding will be removed every four to six months and used as an excellent natural fertilizer and herbicide.

There were plenty of helpers who made this coop happen



Sister Gabrielle provided the historical prospective & project oversight

There are 36 nesting boxes with rice hull bedding where the chickens will lay their eggs. This makes daily collection of the eggs easy. Keeping the chickens contained, with the outside area covered with netting so wild fowl can't come in contact with them, should prevent Avian Flu, as well as provide a healthier environment for the children.

For us, what a fantastic trip this was. We left Newark at Thursday 1AM and were in Kontum by Friday at 5PM. Then, every day for nearly two weeks we arrived at VS3 by 8 in the morning and got to spend the entire morning with the group of the children who had afternoon school, so whose job it was to prepare lunch. It was beautiful being with them, watching them laugh and play through their work. We heard Sister Gabrielle's stories of her time as a nurse at the Kontum Hospital with Dr. Pat Smith. We worked with Woa and his team of builders. We experienced the resilience of a group of people whose allegiance with the American forces has left them marginalized. And maybe the most beautiful part of the day was listening to the children sing their prayers as they gathered before lunch.

And next year, well, we're thinking about wells. It is amazing how with a bit of money and sweat you can see a project through from start to finish. And have the best 'vacation' pictures you could ever imagine. Anyone want to join us?

Joanne and Steve



The children were sad to see Joanne and Steve go, but they excitedly wished them a fond farewell. The outpouring of appreciation and friendship convinced the Americans..."we had done good." Onto the next project!



Christmas Cards That Made a Difference

A huge thank you to all who bought the Christmas cards designed by the children of Vinh Son and sold through Love Without Borders on Etsy. The \$1400 in sales was combined with other very generous donations to build a new bathroom for the girls' dormitory at VS-4.



Announcing our newest Board Member

Steve Fisher has accepted the offer to join the FVSO Board. Along with his wife, Joanne, Steve has truly exhibited love and devotion for the children of Vinh Son.

Welcome Steve!

“The Vietnamese were very friendly toward us, and most helpful in all situations.”

“I recently had the opportunity to visit the Vinh Son 1 Orphanage in Kontum and the Sao Mai Orphanage in Pleiku with two friends of mine who are also American dentists.”

My name is George Schad and I was stationed in the Republic of Vietnam in 1969/70 at Phu Cat AB. I was an Air Force dentist at the time and became involved with an orphanage that was located about 10 miles away from the base in the town of Binh Dinh. That was the beginning of my interest in Vietnam and its orphanages.

Several years ago, I became aware of the Friends of Vinh Son Orphanage (FVSO) and began to offer support through donations to the efforts that the organization was making to improve the lives of the children.

In January of 2015, my friends and I had the opportunity to travel to Vietnam, in order to visit the orphanages and see, firsthand, the work that was being done by FVSO. Through coordination with Dave Chaix and Dennis Coyne, they put us in contact with Mrs. Thien, who runs a taxi service out of Pleiku, and in reality it turns out she runs a very wonderful hospitality service that was instrumental in making our trip a very enjoyable endeavor.

She had a driver and a car meet us at the Phu Cat Airport which now serves as the civilian airport for the town of Qui Nhon. The driver took us on a rather challenging 4-5 hour ride along Highway 19 from the airport to the Kontum area. We secured a nice hotel, the Thinh Vuong, in the town of Kontum, where we stayed for several days while we visited the orphanages.

On our first visit to Vinh Son 1, Sister Marie Kham met with us and showed us around the orphanage. She introduced us to a number of the younger children, and then to many of the older children who returned home from their day at school. We were able to talk with the Sisters to some degree and with an older man who was there and who taught English to the children. We got to see them prepare their evening meals, and see how all of the kids played their part and did the various jobs to make everything come together. Their teamwork was impressive.

We were able to look in the mouths of a number of the children and were impressed with the good dental condition we saw in most of them. The next day, we traveled to Pleiku and visited the dentist and dental office there where the orphanage children are taken when they have some sort of dental emergency or urgent care needs. The dentist and his office appeared to be clean and neat and the dentist seemed to have a distinct interest in helping and assisting the children from the orphanages. We also went to the Sao Mai Orphanage in Pleiku, and met the nuns and children who are living there. The Sao Mai Orphanage was very nice and all of the sisters and the children were quite welcoming to us. It was truly a memorable experience.

FVSO have made arrangements for a dental organization/clinic out of Da Nang, "East Meets West", to make annual trips to the Orphanages for the past several years in order to treat the dental needs of the children. It's obvious that these visits have been responsible for the good dental care that the FVSO have been able to provide for the children.

The orphanages we visited were clean and well cared for, the children very friendly. The nuns working there all seemed to be totally committed to the kids, and always working for their best interests. I don't know what the conditions were like 10 years ago, but it's clear to me that without efforts made by groups like FVSO and East Meets West, conditions at Vinh Son would be quite different.

45 years ago, I would never have dreamed this possible.

George Schad

One of the dentists accompanying George was Ed Chow, an Endodontist from Sacramento, CA, pictured here with some kids at Sao Mai orphanage. Look Doc, “No Cavities!”



April 19 – 25, It's Back to Kontum and Pleiku

Board Members, Clyde Lewandowski and Pat Leary, begin their visit with a few days in Quang Tri where they will meet up with Thanh Le and his wife Van, who are board members of Marie Tran's group, Children of Vinh Son. They will travel together while in Kontum. In Quang Tri they plan to visit the East Meets West Dental Office and the clean water treatment installer who works with Viet Dreams to assure the drinking water is safe at all 6 Vinh Son locations.

They will also visit Duc Tri University where Clyde's friend Y Lyly (sponsored by the Lewandowski's) and another girl from VS-2, Y Hoi, (sponsored by Janet Wheatley and Sue Zwinger) are studying to be nurses. Y Hoi will graduate in about a year, while Y Lyly has just over two years remaining in the program. It is interesting that they begin their hospital rotations about 7 months after beginning the program. The team is anxious to learn more about post-high school education in Vietnam in hopes of understanding the entry process and university requirements. With the knowledge gained, they hope to find other contributors who may be interested in sponsoring a university student.

The Pleiku airport is closed for renovation, so Pat and Clyde hope to ride from Da Nang to Kontum with the East Meets West (EMW) dental mission group. Upon arrival in Kontum, they can help the EMW group unload, set up, and get started. EMW offers week-long dental clinics throughout Vietnam and with participation from FVSO and Children of Vinh Son, they hold an annual mission in Kontum, the only place in Vietnam where they have been more than once. During this week-long mission, volunteer dental staff from around the world care for nearly 700 children, many who are seen by a dentist for the first time.

Pat and Clyde plan to visit each of the six Vinh Son locations, as well as Sao Mai in Pleiku, to assure that all is well and to learn what their needs are for the upcoming year. On a side note; the original orphanage in Pleiku was named Tu Tam, and Patrick Leary's army aviation unit, the 189th Assault Helicopter Company, begged borrowed or stole nearly every bag of cement and stick of wood they could find to build most of the buildings there in 1967. When Pleiku fell to the communists in 1975, the buildings were commandeered, all the records burned, and the sisters and children tossed out. However, the enterprising sisters would not give up and eventually started a new orphanage, Sao Mai, across the street from the Tu Tam location.

At the end of the week the guys will assist EMW with the cleaning and loading process and make the 295 km road trip back to Da Nang. After a night of rest, they travel to Saigon and begin their return home.

Pat and Clyde will share their informative trip report and orphanage photos as soon as they recover from all the smiling!

Long-term supporting organizations

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



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