



VIETNAM RELIEF EFFORT

July 2006

Greetings friends, colleagues, and supporters of Vietnam Relief

Effort: We hope that you are having a healthy, happy, and relaxing summer! This is a 2006 mid-year newsletter to update you on the progress of our current projects and let you know about upcoming ones. As always, we welcome your comments and suggestions and look forward to seeing you at a future Vietnam Relief Effort event.

We have some exciting projects in the works: We are expanding our school building in needy villages in southern and central Vietnam and forging ahead with medical missions to provide valuable health check-ups, supplies, and follow-up care in central Vietnam. VRE is also looking into opening up an office in Ho Chi Minh City in the next year. Your time and support continue to be invaluable to us as we move forward. As Vietnam Relief Effort expands, we continue to be in need of advisors and volunteers, especially those who have experience with writing grants or planning events. General non-profit expertise is also welcome. If you are interested in helping out, please contact us at:

Vietnam Relief Effort
421 Degraw Street #4L
Brooklyn, NY 11217
Phone: 718-852-4419
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Include your areas of expertise and your availability. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours,

Vietnam Relief Effort:

Chinh Chu, Duyen Tran, Jonathan Wall, Amy Braunschweiger, Steven Nguyen and Mindy Williams

Update on Education Projects:

In 2005, Vietnam Relief Effort completed construction of six classrooms.

In the first half of 2006, we continued building classrooms in Tien Giang province in southern Vietnam; two more will be completed by the start of the school year in the fall. We also started construction on two classrooms in the Tay Ninh province, about 110 km away from Ho Chi Minh City.

In the Tien Giang region, only about 50% of children make it through high school. Shrimp farming is one of the main occupations on the island and many families will pull the boys and girls out of school to help their parents.

The Tay Ninh school will accommodate 79 children, ages 6 to 9. We will also be funding close to 100 scholarships for impoverished students in both these regions. This will encourage families to keep students in school and offset some of the mandatory school fees that are a burden for some of the poorest families.

Tay Ninh's population is over one million people, nearly one third of whom are under 15 years of age. The province, once a primarily agricultural region, is changing to a more industrialized one. As this happens, there have been some reports of young girls being trafficked from Vietnam to Cambodia.

Currently, 268 children attend school in five classrooms; 79 of these students have to travel 8 km or more to get to school. The two new classrooms will cut travel distance for these kids to at most 3 km. Since many of the families are too poor to afford bicycles, we are also looking into buying bicycles for these families.



VRE school built in 2005 in Tien Giang, southern Vietnam



Kids studying in Tien Giang School

Update on Humanitarian / Medical Efforts:

In 2005, VRE funded hundreds of eye and cleft-lip surgeries. So far this year, we have funded close to another hundred cleft-lip surgeries. Also earlier this year, one of our board members, Steven Nguyen, traveled with nuns from St. Paul de Chartres convent in central Vietnam to remote villages to provide 400 to 500 families with much-needed medical check-ups, medicine and provisions.

We are looking into providing further medical check-ups in central Vietnam later this year, and establishing a formal system of follow-up care for these villagers. Currently, many of these villagers get little, if any, medical treatment or provisions, much less follow-up care.



Medicine and provisions brought to central Vietnam villages



Nun helps VRE organize patients in central Vietnam

My View: Nostalgic Reflections on a Visit to Vietnam:

(Editor's note: We will be offering first-person point-of-view features about Vietnam in upcoming newsletters. If you'd like to write a piece for our future newsletters, please contact us at 718-852-4419 or at inquiries@vietnamrelief.org)



Marie Le, her mother, and local kids in Muine, Vietnam

“How are you today Mademoiselle?” a 10-year-old girl asked me with a smile. Kids are unabashedly social, and the ones I recently met in Vietnam were no exception. In April 2005, when I was in Sapa, a stunning mountainous tourist city near the Chinese border, a group of Hmong girls assailed me with questions and comments as I walked past their schoolhouse. “Where are you from? What is that around your neck? What is your name?” After learning that I was from America, they began interspersing accented English phrases into our conversation. I hurried past the school to avoid

bugging the teachers by my presence outside their window, and the group of girls followed me, one even trying to climb on my back. Our bantering continued, and I questioned them about their names, ages, and what their favorite this or that was.

It was my first visit to Vietnam. It's strange, some people told me, that I waited until I was 24 to travel to the country where my family is from and where my ethnic identity is rooted. Well, it took my mother nearly forty years to return to the country that she had left in her teens, so she has an even harder time coming up with an excuse for not going back sooner than me, an American-born Vietnamese accustomed to the laid-back lifestyle of the West Coast.

My first experience in Vietnam was filled with neither shock nor sentimental nostalgia. I was comfortable in the country. I felt at home in the strong, bright sun and the semi-tropical environment. The crowds of people, sweaty from the heat and ready to engage in conversation, were always approachable. Even as a video-camera toting, flip-flop-wearing tourist, I fit in without feeling self-conscious.

