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Foundation hones tourism service skills

The Banilad Center for Professional Development in Cebu City has produced over 2,000 graduates for hotels and tourism establishments in the country. It is a project of members of Opus Dei in the Visayas.

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CEBU CITY—For 14 years, Mary Catherine Gallardo has seen young

women enter the school's gate with dropped heads and awkward smiles, and leave surefooted and confident.

Gallardo or "Madame Peachy" teaches personality development and front office service at Banilad Center for Professional Development (BCPD), a technical-vocational school that offers programs in hotel and restaurant services to young women from low-income families.

Since it was established in 1992 as a project of the Foundation for Professional Training Inc., the school has produced over 2,000 graduates who now work in hotels and tourism establishments in the country. Others have found jobs abroad.

It was a response to the call of providing employment opportunities to young women, according to BCPD director Elizabeth Lopez.

The school offers a two-year hotel and restaurant management course and teaches skills in commercial cooking, food and beverage, service housekeeping, baking and pastry production, front office service and bartending.

Success stories

“You see them enrolling here with that shy look and then leave (after graduation) with confidence in themselves. My greatest accomplishment is to see them visit BCPD and tell us their success stories ... that they are able to help their families with their jobs,” Gallardo said.

Gallardo had worked for an airline company for over two decades until her retirement. She later signed up as BCPD instructor because she knew that she could positively contribute to the lives of the students.

April Estomaguio, 25, is now a sous chef at Cebu City Marriott Hotel. She enrolled in BCPD in 2005 because her parents could no longer afford sending her to a private university, where she was taking up business administration.

Since she loves cooking, Estomaguio pursued a course in hotel and restaurant services after she got accepted at BCPD.

“The students here are trained to be workers even if we are still studying. That’s why we already know what to expect when we have our on-the-job training,” she said.

She recalled that some chefs were surprised when they noticed the way she was holding a knife and slicing vegetables. “They asked me, ‘Where did you learn that?’ I told them I learned it in school,” she says.

Praises for graduates

BCPD's bright spot came in the growing tourism industry.

Owners and general managers of these tourism establishments sing praises for the young women, whom they described as "loyal, committed, always happy and hardworking."

Jill Urbina Viado of the Laguna Group of Companies, which operates Cafe Laguna and Lemon Grass in Cebu, said BCPD students have good work attitude and stay loyal to the restaurant.

In 2008, former Tourism Secretary Joseph "Ace" Durano gave scholarship grants to BCPD students after witnessing "the competence of graduates coming from a technical-vocational school."

Lopez said a first-year student can have her internship three months after the start of classes. "They are not spoon-fed. They are taught what

the industry needs because we are in constant dialogue with our industry partners,” she said.

The graduates are given assurance of direct employment because the program immediately connects them to the industry through its theoretical exercises and practical training.

Students may pursue a related college degree later as BCPD has adopted the ladderized educational program. University of San Carlos and University of San Jose Recoletos accept BCPD students.

Positive outlook

Asked why their graduates have developed a positive outlook in life, Lopez explained that most of them come from families who know the difficulties of finding a good job.

“Studying in BCPD is not all for free. There is a contribution on the part of the parents or the family members. We do that so that parents commit to send their children to school. After all, the family is the reason why their daughter applied at BCPD,” Lopez said.

Daisy Inso, 19, said she and the other graduates are currently working on strengthening the alumni association.

“We hope to establish an alumni fund and support the education of potential BCPD students. This is our way of paying it forward,” she said.

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