

The Banilad Center for Professional Development

Banilad prepares young women for employment or entrepreneurship through skills training and work ethics.

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The Banilad Center for Professional Development (BCPD) is located along Archbishop Reyes Avenue, with its entrance right beside the building of the Bureau of Internal Revenue. The area was once the home and garden

of Dick and Ting (nee Corominas) Boyarski.

The center prepares young women for employment or entrepreneurship through training skills and work ethics imbued with solid Christian values. It is a project of the Foundation for Professional Training Inc. (FPTI), an NGO based in Manila. They have five such schools in the Philippines, four in Luzon and one in Cebu.

Courses offered are for Commercial Cooking, Food and Beverage Services, Housekeeping, Baking and Pastry Production, Bartending, and Front Office Services. Graduates find employment readily as the Hospitality industry which is fast expanding needs these skilled workers.

To qualify applicants must be high school graduates with at least 80 percent average; single, female,

between 16 to 23 years of age; pass the written exams given by the center; and pass the medical exams. It is also important that their families' incomes not be more than P120,000 a year.

A good number of these families earn even much less than that, and it's short of a miracle that they can survive and at the same time send their children to school. The center conducts home visitations to find out for themselves the environment in which these families exist.

Some of their students study at night beneath a lamppost since they don't have electricity in their homes. Homes? Sometimes a small area with a roof may just be it.

The courses last one or two years, the better to inculcate ethics, values, and the proper work attitudes. The spiritual and doctrinal formation at the center is entrusted to Opus Dei, a

Personal Prelature of the Catholic Church. However, the courses are open to students of all religions.

Academic formation is designed to hone the intellect. Communications skills are imparted to enhance interpersonal relations and social maturity. Hands-on training gives actual exposure to the work environment with the global standards of the center's industrial partners. Among these partners in Cebu are the Marco Polo Plaza Hotel, the Shangri-La in Mactan, Plantation Bay, Casino Español, Don Merto's, Café George, and 30 more. Cultural activities also form part of this formation.

The center started with a few trainees; now there is a total of 109. Through the years more than 800 have graduated, and 75 percent of them have found good jobs. Some of them come back to the center to

touch base, to help in some way or another, or to donate funds for the center's projects.

Courses at the Banilad Center are not offered for free. The fees, if we understood right, may range from P6,000 to P15,000 annually. These are paid by sponsors, private or corporate foundations, Philanthropic individuals or entities, and the like. In a way, the students are actually scholars.

My wife Cecilia and I had a most pleasant visit to the Banilad Center, and we partook of an excellent lunch prepared, presented, and served by the students. It was nice meeting Liza Marie Cabungcal, the Fund and Industry Linkage Development Officer; Evangeline Urgello, the Industry Linkage Development Director; BCPD Director Mary Anne Ruiz; and patrons Joy Borromeo and Rica Ouano.

Teresa “Terry” Gallardo, the baking teacher, joined us, too. She informed us that her sister-in-law Peachy Gallardo also teaches at the center. We spoke about many topics and retold favorite anecdotes. We all agreed that English proficiency classes are important for better workplace communications. The industry partners insists on them, as well as computer skills.

Terry introduced us to Rowena Galvez, a graduate of the Banilad Center currently working as the Pastry Chef of the City Sports Club Cebu. In 2004 she took part in “Cebu Goes Culinary,” a project of the Hotel, Resort and Restaurant Association of Cebu. Rowena obtained a gold medal for the on-the-spot cake decorating contest, student category. The four judges only awarded a silver medal to the participants in the professional category for that is what they

deserved. “She’s now better than I”, beamed Terry.

The best proof of how good a teacher can be is being surpassed by her students, we all told Terry. Further proof is that Rowena has been offered to work at Macau’s The Venetian, considered as the biggest hotel in the world. She also has an offer at the soon to be constructed MGM Grand Hotel in Boracay. But Rowena has decided to remain in Cebu, at her job, and helping out at Banilad Center for Professional Development.

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