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The school of dreams

Anihan Technical School - Training center with a heart produces skilled labor for the economy and gives hope to Philippine youth.

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The relative ease with which the Philippines “survived” the 2008-09 global economic crisis has been partly attributed by experts to certain buoyant and resilient subsectors in services, as well as the steady flow of remittances from

millions of overseas Filipino workers, despite the fact that thousands of them lost their jobs in host countries hit by the crisis.

The continued, albeit moderate, growth of business-process outsourcing and the tourism-and-hospitality industry are often cited as examples of how niching in some areas can benefit a small and weak country. Yet few people realize that the performance of the service sector rests substantially on the supply of trained manpower who can compete in often quickly-changing business environments here and abroad.

One such unsung “hero” in this equation has been quietly training thousands of young, ambitious Filipinos to meet the steady demand for trained personnel in tourism services, and the hotel-and-restaurant industry. That it has deliberately targeted the

underprivileged youth has given its mission of nearly three decades the added value of helping ease poverty in both rural and urban centers.

One sunny morning, we toured one of the five training centers nationwide of the Foundation for Professional Training Inc. (FPTI) called Anihan on a 526-square-meter lot in barrio Tulo, Calamba, Laguna.

Young women in white gowns were churning out a variety of goods, sold under the Anihan Goodies brand—walnut brownies and coffee bars to fruitcakes, among others—which helps sustain the scholarship program for the youths. “You will wonder how Anihan supports the program? They get it from the sales of Anihan Goodies and donations from the Amihan patrons, as well as from varied individuals and companies,” explained FPTI president Susan Manzon.

In 2008 Anihan granted full-tuition scholarships to 73 new female high-school graduates, opening up opportunities for careers in the hotel-and-restaurant industry.

With the two-year scholarship grant, the young women will obtain the three national certificates, namely, Commercial Cooking, Food & Beverages Services, and Baking/Pastry Production.

“After graduation, they will be highly employable skilled workers with competencies as hot/cold kitchen cooks, pastry cooks or bakers, food attendants, etc.,” Manzon said.

With help from foreign friends

Susan Manzon, FPTI president, said the FPTI building was set up under a joint development-cooperation program with Istituto per la Cooperazione Universitaria and the European Community.

At first, Anihan introduced a one-year course in Home Management and Basic Technology, and students were on full scholarship.

“The foundation, which has been promoting projects for women-in-development, established Anihan in 1986 in response to a growing lack of opportunities of development for women, and to accelerate responsiveness of education and training in such a way that women could have greater access to income-generating opportunities,” Manzon said.

FPTI was chosen as it is part of the so-called Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon) area, focal point of regional development south of Manila.

Now, Anihan supports 100 to 120 scholars year-after-year. Students pay only P1,200 miscellaneous fees

per semester to finish the two-year course.

A total of 691 graduates of Anihan are now employed in such establishments as The Palms Country Club, Tagaytay Highlands, Timberland Nature and Sports Club, Vivere Suites, Conti's Pastry Shop and Restaurant, Cravings Bakeshop and Restaurant, and Red Ribbon.

Born in Cory's time

Set up to help promote and develop the talents of Filipino young women, mostly from low-income families, FPTI has produced almost 5,000 graduates in just over 20 years.

Kayang Javier, Anihan school director, said their students are chosen based on basic requirements: high-school graduate and with an average of 82 percent, at least 16 to 21 years old, female, and must pass

the written examination and personal interview.

Javier, who has been in Anihan for 20 years, has provided young women in Calabarzon with good counsel and access to education and skills training.

Most students come from Cavite, Laguna and Batangas; but some are from places as far away as Padre Burgos town in Quezon province.

After their on-the-job training (OJT) in the last semester of their second year, the students are ready for hiring by the industry partners where they had the OJT.

Students do their OJT in Amici (Italian restaurant) on Tomas Morato in Quezon City, Aussie Café and Resto, Chowking, Goldilocks, Hans Gourmet, Pancake House Inc., Masuma Food Industry, Cupcakes by

Sonja, Steak House by Tagaytay Highlands.

In 1992, while continuing its one-year course in Home Management and Technology, Amihan started to accept the first batch of the two-year Residential and Institutional Technology Course with 37 high-school graduates.

In May 1995 the two-year Food Service (Major in Baking) Course was started, revising the old course.

The government of Belgium and the Association for Cultural, Technical and Educational Cooperation (Actec) approved on January 20, 1999, the cofinancing of the four-year Anihan expansion, which includes a new school building and a livelihood center.

Manzon recalls with pride the visit on November 24, 1990, of then-President Corazon Aquino to the

school, where she noted the role of Amihan in the development of Calabarzon. Mrs. Aquino was then accompanied by the ambassadors of Italy and Switzerland and former finance secretary Jesus Estanislao.

Since then, FPTI has put up at least five training centers—Punlaan School in San Juan, Metro Manila; the Maligaya Institute for Culinary Arts and Residential Services; the Banilad Center for Professional Development in Cebu City; the Habihan School for Residential and Institutional Service and Management; and the Anihan Technical School in Calamba City.

These centers have produced at least 5,000 skilled young women from poor families, now gainfully employed.

Raquel Salvador, a graduate of Anihan in 2007, expressed her gratitude to her alma mater. “As a fresh graduate, I only had my OJT

experience. I first had my training in Mt. Malarayat Golf and Country Club, then in Canlubang Golf and Country Club. Later, I was employed in Canlubang Golf as a pantry woman and food dispatcher. I am no longer a student. I am assistant cook and, at the same time a cost controller in Riverview Resort and Conference Center in Calamba City,” Salvador said.

Another 2007 graduate, Genalyn Salvatus from San Pedro, Santo Tomas, Batangas, stressed the importance of learning the right work ethic besides the skills. “The school sent me to Mt. Malarayat Golf and Country Club in Lipa City, Batangas, as well as to Cravings on Katipunan, Quezon City, for my OJT. The Cravings Bakeshop Commissary absorbed me for employment.” She still works there.

“I owe to Anihan what I have accomplished and will accomplish in the future. Actually, my Chef de Partie told me that my work is polished, meticulous and done well,” Salvatus said. Karen Landicho, a freshman, from barangay Lumanglipa, Mataas na Kahoy, Lipa City, Batangas, learned about Anihan from a cousin who is also a student.

“I have been here in Anihan for eight months now. I am gaining lots of knowledge not only in academics but also about spiritual development.

“With academics, I have experienced different trainings and practical examinations. I have experienced successes and failures during our kitchen laboratory work. They help us [become] better Christians who live with operative faith,” Landicho said.

“I wish lots of donations will be given for the sake of the next batch of

students. These donations will be a great help for those who want to study and be successful professionals,” Landicho said.

Angeline Argana, 16, from General Emilio Aguinaldo High School in Cavite, said her father is a driver. “I am the second child. My family is simple. My siblings and I know and understand that my parents earn just enough for us to buy food every day, pay rent, give us allowance, and pay monthly bills, so we do not ask our parents to buy things that are not important. Because of them, I am inspired to study to achieve my dreams and help my family.”

Jelly Anne Manzon and Mary May Mabalot, both graduates of Anihan from Canlubang, Laguna, said they learned of the school when they were about to graduate from high school.

Today Mabalot works at The Palms Country Club in Ayala, Alabang, Muntinlupa City, by making salads, sandwiches and appetizers. Manzon works at the Makiling Conference Center, supervising the laundry using big washing machines.

Other centers

FPTI's Banilad Center in Cebu City has gained recognition from the community and the Tourism department because the graduates are considered tourism professionals.

The graduates of Punlaan School in San Juan City were hired by UCC Coffee. Hubert Young of UCC is known as an ardent supporter of the work of Punlaan School.

Anihan and Punlaan are apt names for two of FPTI's training centers—Punlaan is planting season in Filipino and Anihan is harvest time.

It's been nearly three decades since foreign friends and a few Filipino visionaries planted the seeds that the nation is now reaping—in the harvest of thousands of young, productive citizens hopeful of a bright future and eager to do their share to make it so.

Paul Atienza // BusinessMirror

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