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Turning women into more than just workers

Since 1982, the Foundation for Professional Training Inc. (FPTI), a duly-accredited private NGO, has been providing scholarships for a two-year vocational-technical course to young women in the country.

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“We want to give better opportunities for young economically-challenged women by

giving them training skills and help them earn a degree recognized by Tesda (Technical Education and Skills Development Authority),” explains Ma. Susana E. Manzon, FPTI’s president.

To date, FPTI runs five schools located in different parts of the country: Punlaan School in San Juan, Maligaya Institute for Culinary Arts and Residential Services (Micars) in Manila, Anihan in Laguna, Habihan in Quezon City and Banilad Center for Professional Development in Cebu.

The foundation’s tagline, “Lifelong Development for Women,” aptly summarizes its mission of providing young girls the knowledge and skills, in the field of food and beverage, and housekeeping services, guided by Christian ideals that will help them succeed in life.

Scholarships are given to deserving girls who meet the requirements set by the schools—female and single, 16-21 years old, high school graduate and belonging to the low-income group of society, among others. They also have to pass the entrance exams and the interview conducted by the school.

Manzon says that FPTI schools have already produced more than 4,000 graduates who are now employed in and recognized by leading hotels and restaurants in the country. Although all five FPTI training centers offer the same program, Manzon explains that each school has its own niche to avoid competing with each other.

“For instance, Aniham’s niche is in the countryside, so it provides livelihood opportunities in the rural areas. They sell the products that the students make. While Habihan provides workers in the

housekeeping services,” she said. The foundation also has a number of industry partners where students obtain their on-the-job-training and eventually, most of them got hired by these companies after graduation.

Values formation

But what makes their graduates stand out, Manzon proudly says, is the values that the school inculcate them with.

“Our mission is not only to give these girls skills but also values,” says Manzon, adding that their industry partners attest to the values and positive attitude their students bring to their work.

“We want them to primarily be a whole person, o isang katauhan . . . with Christian values,” she adds.

To instill these values, the spiritual direction of the schools is entrusted

to Opus Dei, a personal prelature of the Catholic Church. Each school has a chapel and a chaplain to take care of the spiritual formation of the girls.

Although there are donors, patrons and industry partners who support the schools, Manzon hopes that more donors will come to help the school in its scholarship programs and other projects like the planned school in Mindanao. She adds that many of their alumnae who now work abroad send donations to help the schools.

Likewise, foreign governments have also supported the different FPTI schools. Micars, for instance, was put up by the Italian government through Associazione Centro ELIS in 1995 and provided the school with state-of-the-art facilities and equipment.

Ma. Rowena I. Nazareno, Micars school director, says they also have a stay-in program with free board and

lodging to cater to students who are from the provinces.

Short courses

Nazareno adds that aside from courses in commercial cooking, food and beverage services, housekeeping and baking/ pastry production, Micars also offers short courses and programs for a minimal fee to generate income to support the scholars: Negosyong Pambahay is a training program that helps women who want to start a food-related business, while Village Course is a skills training tailored for the household staff employed in the different villages like Dasmariñas Village and San Lorenzo in Makati City.

Micars also services the adjacent Tahilan Residence and Study Center where students from different universities in Manila reside. Instructors are composed of

professionals who are committed to share their expertise to the girls.

"From time to time chefs from hotels also share their time in teaching the scholars. And most of them don't even ask for fees... they really just want to help and there are many chefs who are like that," Nazareno discloses.

She also boasts of the values formation that the school is giving its students.

"We also teach them about life not only how to earn. We go deeper...we help them understand the value of work," she adds.

Nazareno adds that students participate in competitions to showcase their skills, go on field trips and enjoy recreational activities as well. And true to its name, Maligaya Institute has transformed its students

to become happy and successful individuals.

Florinda Lacorte, 21, is from Batangas and is one of the stay-in students at Micars. Now on her second year in Culinary Arts and Institutional Services (CAIS), she shares that she used to be shy, but the school taught her how to deal with others. She likes the homey atmosphere of the school and values the friendship she has forged with her classmates.

“This is like my second home,” she exclaims, adding that “the school taught me to value my work, to have the right attitude, and that in serving others you also serve God.”

Marilou Aguilar, 30, is a graduate of Micars and now teaches in the school’s CAIS program. She says that teaching at Micars is her “way of giving back for the opportunities that the school has given me.”

A native of Zambales and the eldest in a brood of four, Marilou shares that her parents couldn't afford to send her to college. She was drawn to the scholarship program offered by Micars despite not having a keen interest in the culinary arts back then.

But now, Marilou is a proud Micars alumna and even more fulfilled in sharing her experiences to her students.

"I see myself in them, back when I was a student, I don't know anything . . . but Micars gave us the education and values that helped us become better persons," Marilou shares with a smile.

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