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## **In the Heart of the Home**

The goal of the recent Art of Living Conference in Manila was to help people see "work in the home as a service to their family, which can be professionalized and brought to the level of an art."

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Due to the rapidly changing work and social landscape, stress management has become vital. Modules and sessions on coping with tension are growing in number.

Ultimately, stress is relieved by the feeling of security that comes from knowing one is loved and accepted for what he or she is and not for what one can deliver, and this happens in the heart of the home.

This is the premise of the Art of Living Conference or AOL. Putting the home back on center stage has been its mantra since it began five years ago. “We hope to help the girls see work in the home as a service to their family, which can be professionalized and brought to the level of an art,” AOL co-founder Joy Schallenberg says.

With cooking made more adventurous and housekeeping turned into a challenge, AOL participants learn that keeping their families happy begins with the little details, that keeping house is showing care, and showing care makes and keeps people whole.

This year's AOL was held in April at the Makiling Conference Center in Calamba, Laguna. The participants' profile showed a wide range of backgrounds, with students coming from private, public and parochial schools in Metro Manila and the provinces. Among the winners in the various categories were students from Bulacan, Cavite, Cebu and Bacolod – proof that the talents of making a house a home cut across social classes and backgrounds.

### *Fringe benefits*

The AOL 2018 Conference also addressed current youth issues. Given that “our young girls were born in the age of high-tech digital technology, we wanted the Art of Living program to provide an alternative activity where they could forge meaningful friendships, be challenged to learn skills which they could apply in their own homes, and

develop virtues such as respect for others, patience, discipline and tenacity,” Schallenberg said.

*“Homemaking is about celebrating each other, and about caring for each other, as well as for your friends and extended families and even the occasional stranger. Homemaking is majoring in (...) relationships,”* wrote Jill Savage, celebrated American author on marriage and family. AOL wants to instill in the participants the value of fostering good family relations.

Thus, in every AOL, parents are invited to be with their children to support them in the various events. Activities are designed to foster interaction among the girls who meet each other for the first time. Mentors attend to the needs of each one. The participants expand their knowledge and skills in an atmosphere of camaraderie.

Fruit of each AOL is the health benefit. Schallenberg reports that “chronic illnesses in children such as diabetes, cancer, heart disease and obesity are on the rise due to the proliferation of what young people call happy foods or comfort foods.” To address this, AOL has designed culinary and baking sessions to instill in the girls a taste and preference for healthy foods. As a bonus, this new competence of preparing healthy foods has served well in building their personality and self confidence.

AOL is more than just cooking, baking and keeping house. It's about learning to nurture what is at the core of every person: a happy and healthy home.

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