

A Humanitarian Non-profit Organization Approved by IRS Code 501(c) 3 & California Section 23701D

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## July 2016 Newsletter - Volume 13 Issue 6

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### Summary of the June 21<sup>st</sup> Semi-Annual Board Conference Call

There isn't room in the newsletter to cover all the topics we discussed in 3 hours, so I'll give you some of the highlights. Sister Marie Dominique gave us a detailed recap of the status of both Vinh Son (Kontum) and Sao Mai (Pleiku). All is well. Sister Superior from Vinh Son is on a temporary assignment to Saigon. Sr Marie Kham is acting in her place. Sister Khiet is still working hard in Pleiku for the kids at Sao Mai but has turned over administrative duties to younger sisters. With the note that all administrative costs are paid by Board members, we reviewed the administrative budget. Thankfully, no surprises.

The dental clinic project was thoroughly reviewed since we've taken a new direction this year. After years of FVSO hands-on participation and organizing hundreds of dental visits, this year we've handed over the logistical responsibility to the Sisters. Coordinating care for all the orphanages is a daunting task, but it appears all is working fine. We believe that is a big step. FVSO will continue to provide partial funding for the project.

While our mission priority remains the same, **Basic Needs** (food and medicine), we do have some funds earmarked by donors specifically for higher education. Some of our Board members are independently sponsoring students who wished to continue their education. Most recently, Buch Thuy of Sao Mai, has finished a 3 year program in medical technology in Hue, and is most thankful to FVSO for her support. No word on a job yet, but we are hopeful for her. There are 29 students currently enrolled in higher education programs. FVSO and individual Board members are able to support or partially support nine of those students. We had a good discussion about how education fits into our mission statement. Today, however, regular donor contributions are still dedicated to **Basic Needs**, while we also accept directed funds that support higher education.

As I reviewed the first 6 months of the year, I noted all of the activities undertaken by the Board. Travel to Vietnam, finance and accounting, fund raising, the dental clinic, education, marketing, web site management, donor relations, communication with the Sisters and much more. We are blessed to have such an active Board. We could not have the success we have without their hard work.

**Pat Leary, FVSO President**

## Proud of her brother

**Jan Chaix recently surprised her brother with an article she wrote for the Bogle Winery newsletter. Bogle, located in the Sacramento area, is a favorite brand of Jan and Dave. In fact, they have carried a bottle or two with them on Vietnam visits. Below is Jan's desire to share her brother's dedication.**

When my brother, Dave Chaix, was stationed in the Central Highlands area of Vietnam during the war in 1967-68, he spent time at one of the orphanages in Pleiku. When our mother (who, coincidentally, knew and worked with Fran Bogle) sent Dave care packages, Dave would share the contents with the orphans.

After Dave retired, he wondered what had happened to the orphanage, so he and a friend, Pat Mckee, returned to Vietnam and looked for the orphanage near Pleiku, where they found some caretakers for the orphans, Montagnard nuns, begging for food for the orphans in the marketplace. This was in 2001.

Dave and Pat gave the nuns almost all of the cash they had on them at the time and when they returned to California, decided that something should be done to raise money, so they started an organization, which they named Friends of Vinh Son Orphanages, and started raising money to help.

They conduct fundraisers and are now helping support several orphanages over there (7 total), returning almost every year to visit and check on the progress of some of the projects they help fund, such as building kitchens, providing water systems, sustainable farming projects, etc.

About every other year, a group of donors travel there to visit the orphanages. I feel honored to be a part of this and this trip marks my third. Dave has been there numerous times. It's very rewarding to visit the orphanages, see all the progress that has been made and play with the children, distributing supplies, clothing, school supplies, etc.



**Jan and Dave enjoy one of their favorite beverages**



## Christine & John Ho take a break from their English lessons



**In 2012, Christine Yardley and her children spent their summer at Vinh Son (see the July 2012 newsletter). They have never forgotten that experience and continue to find ways to help.**

## Students Helping Students

With bright smiles and loving hearts, the children of Vinh Son always leave an indelible mark on visitors and volunteers. Four years ago, my children Elizabeth, Josh, Rebecca, Zachary, and I volunteered at the orphanages in Kon Tum, and we have never forgotten the children.

We visited all the orphanages, but spent most of our time in the baby and toddler area at Vinh Son One. From the moment we entered, there was a special connection, as the children played together and held hands. The bonds children make, despite cultural differences and language barriers, are amazing. For three weeks, we fed, changed, held, and played with the kids. I also helped teach English classes with John Ho, and I loved working with the older students as well.

I teach Spanish at Souderton Area High School in Pennsylvania, and recently had the opportunity to choose a charity for a school fundraiser called "Stall Day." The premise was simple: students brought money to class, and participating teachers could not start teaching until they finished counting all the money. I chose FVSO, and after showing photos and telling stories about the orphanages, my students were excited to raise money for the children of Kon Tum and stall class.

Over 60 teachers participated and, as a result, FVSO received a check for \$732. Fittingly, the money will buy books and supplies for Mr. Ho's English classes.

Children connect with children regardless of ethnicity, language or background. My hope is that we have helped the children of Vinh Son, and that students in Pennsylvania learned they really can make a difference in the lives of others.

## A Culture Remembered

Mike Little, a long time Board member and VP of Friends of Vinh Son, has recently been recognized with a significant honor from the North Carolina Museum of History and Wake Forest University. Mike served with the U.S. Army in the Central Highlands in 1967-68 and developed a strong bond with the Montagnards and their culture. Over the years, Mike has collected a significant amount of art, artifacts and historical pieces from “family” contacts during his many return trips to Vietnam since 1992. Most of the collection contains items given to Mike as gifts from the tribesmen he befriended during the War, although he often reimbursed them as a way of showing his gratitude.

Awhile back, I had the privilege of visiting Mike at his home and saw his collection. It occupies an entire room of his home. It is displayed professionally. It is simply beyond words. As time marched on, Mike became concerned about keeping the legacy of his collection. After doing some research on the Internet, he contacted the North Carolina Museum of History to see if they were interested in exhibiting his collection. The museum is located near FT Bragg and has strong ties with the Special Forces community (a special bond was formed between the Montagnards and Special Forces during the War). There is also a large Montagnard population in North Carolina, who resettled there after the Vietnam War. With those kinds of strong local connections, the museum was more than excited when Mike approached them about donating his collection.

Currently, the museum registrars are busy cataloging all of the items Mike has shipped to them, as well as researching the Montagnard culture. In addition, the professor of anthropology from Wake Forrest and the curator of the Greensboro Historical museum are also studying the collection of items Mike still has available for their use. They have plans to incorporate the collection into a possible traveling exhibit commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1968 Tet Offensive. The North Carolina Museum of History is hoping to create a permanent exhibit next year that tells the story of the Montagnards.

Throughout the years, Mike has been dedicated to the orphanages in Kontum and Pleiku. He also personally sponsors independent projects to support the Montagnard villages he protected in 1967-1968. He was their guardian yesterday and the guardian of their heritage today.



Top left: Mike and his wife Marion pose with a few Montagnard “family” members during their 1998 visit. Villages have been off limits since the 2001 protests, which makes this collection that more valuable. Except for a few tourist villages, the old ways are disappearing. The Montagnard people are challenged to find a way forward in the face of harsh realities. Soon, the items you see above will no longer be the backbone of their society.

## Founding Member to Resign

FVSO Secretary, Dennis Coyne, has submitted his resignation from the Board of Friends of Vinh Son Orphanage. I have talked to Dennis over the last week and it is with understanding, but also great sadness, that I acknowledge his resignation.

Dennis is truly one of the founding fathers of FVSO. His contributions to both our mission and operation have been beyond value. We, and the children, have all been fortunate to have Dennis as part of our lives. We will miss Dennis and will keep him in our thoughts and prayers.

Please join with me to extend our thanks for a job well done over the last 13 years. Also, join with me to wish Dennis a blessed and happy future.

**Pat Leary, FVSO President**

### Dear Dennis,

Needless to say, I am greatly saddened by your decision to resign. You have been the heart and soul of our organization from the beginning and we certainly would not have been as successful without your selfless contributions of time, effort and expertise.

What has been accomplished over the years is nothing short of a miracle. Without you, this could not have happened.

We will continue on, but this is a huge loss, both professionally and personally.

Thank you for all you have done.

**Dave Chaix**  
Former FVSO President



Dennis was loved by the children, another Vietnam veteran who never forgot what he'd seen during the War...the mission to help.

#### Long-term supporting organizations

- 189<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company
- Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 535, Nevada Cnty, CA
- Counterparts Association
- 14<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineer Btn. Assoc.
- MilSpec Tours (800-953-5812)
- Fr. Luke Tran (VN-SHEP) Social Health Education Projects
- Fr. Relihan, Sacred Heart Church, Lone, CA
- Rotary Club of San Juan Capistrano, CA

**“Go into the world and do well. But more importantly, go into the world and do good.”**

— Minor Myers

**“Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does.”**

— William James

#### Vinh Son & Sao Mai Orphanage Facts

- Population – approximately 830 Montagnard children in seven orphanage facilities
- Administered by the Sisters of the Miraculous Medal & St. Paul Chartres
- Location – Kontum/Pleiku, Vietnam
- \$12 feeds, shelters, and educates one child for one month

#### Officers

**President** – Pat Leary  
**Secretary** - Open  
**Treasurer** - Colleen Sands  
**Senior VP** - Pat McKee  
**1st VP** - Sr. Marie Dominique  
**2nd VP** - Michael Little

#### Board of Directors

Hank Gonzales  
 Rich Lahey  
 Clyde Lewandowski  
 Bart Ruud  
 Dave Chaix  
 J. Glah & S. Fisher

#### Advisory Board

John Scott  
 Bruce Herron

#### Donation Information

Please make checks payable to FVSO or Friends of Vinh Son

Donations are gratefully accepted year round

100% of administrative costs are paid by the Board and Officers