

2006 Trip Report - Dave Chaix - President VSO

Last Fall Pat Keegan and I began planning our 2006 trip to the Central Highlands of Vietnam to visit our cherished orphanages, Vinh Son 1 and Vinh Son 2. I had visited the orphanages 3 times in the past 5 years, but this trip called for a much longer stay - 6 days in the Central Highlands, with at least 4 days at the Kontum orphanages. So with this in mind we organized the projects to be accomplished.

We arrived at Vinh Son 1 the morning of February 27th and were greeted by Sister Angela (head of VS 1) and Mr Nanh (secretary of VS 1). We were soon joined by Sister Juliana (assistant to the Mother Superior) and Sister Marie Katherine. Sister Marie Katherine is the oldest of the nuns at Vinh Son and was one of the original founders of the orphanage after it was re-organized in 1975. And what a wonderful person she is. She oversees VS 1's fields near the scenic Dak Bla River during the day, then rides her bicycle back to VS 1 (about 6 km) to be with the babies at night - every night!!!



Figure 1, L to R, Sr. Juliana, Sr. Marie Katherine, Dave Chaix - Figure 2 Sr. Juliana, Dave, Sr. Jeanne, Sr. Pauline, Mr Nanh, Pat Keegan

We received the traditional warm welcome of catching up with bread, tea, and sweet wine; we then began a tour of the facilities at VS 1. This is always a treat with the highlight being a visit with the youngest through about 3 years old. They always try to climb your legs to be held. The caregivers do such a great job with so little. Here we gave the donated medical samples provided by **Dr. Mark Deutsch** (Cincinnati), to the physician that happened to be present. He was very appreciative. Next stops were the computer room (see focus article), bakery and kitchen, classrooms, cow sheds with pigs, gardens and dormitories. All were well kept, but as we observed much could be done to improve the conditions overall.

Our visits to VS 2 and the convent were similar to VS 1: the tour was very moving. VS 2 is off the main road and receives fewer visitors than VS 1. Thus they do not receive the same amount of donations, and it shows. They do a great job with what they have, but as always it isn't much. Most support for both orphanages comes from donations given by individual and organizations such as ours. At VS 2 we discovered the bakery had been destroyed by fire and the children didn't have any bread (**see focus article below**).

After we left VS 2 we visited the sewing classes (**see focus article below**) and called it a long day 1. What a wonderful first day with the promise of more to come.

We worked the next 3 days to complete our projects. Computers and sewing machines were purchased and set up. A chainsaw, large wood splitting hammers, small tools, English books, sewing equipment and material, printers and workstations were purchased, delivered and installed.



Figure 3 New computers

Figure 4 chainsaw to provide wood for the fire stoves

As always, the largest portion of our contributions goes for the basic needs of the children. The money envelopes were distributed throughout our visit, as were the vegetable seeds, donated thread, toothbrushes and toothpaste, balloons, candy and toys.

Ah yes the toys!!! What a great hit. Pat McKee received donated propeller toys (**Aero-Motion Inc.**) for all the children. Try as we did, it was impossible to capture the excitement in pictures. Not only did they play endlessly with them, but they became a cherished possession. The children have very little of their own and these toys had great personal value. It was important that all children receive these gifts equally. If a small child was overlooked, an older one would come and ask if they could take them one. Really a family feeling. What a great job by these Sisters!!!



Figure 5 & 6 Children playing with the Propeller toys donated by Aero-Motion

As our days came to an end we are already planning our next visits. Mike Little and Mel Potter are both visiting in March and April. Pat and I are putting together a larger trip for next year.

My thanks to all the donors of VSO. You are really making a difference in the lives of the wonderful Montagnard children and their caregivers. There are still great needs, but your generosity improves their lives daily.

All expenses at VSO are borne by the officers and 100% of your contributions go to the children and their caregivers. You are truly appreciated.

Dave Chaix

Vinh Son 2 Bakery Rebuilt with VSO Funding

While visiting Vinh Son 2, Pat Keegan and I noticed there was no fresh bread that is a staple of the children. This bread is made in wood-fired ovens and is found at most meals at both orphanages and the convent.

Sister Jeanne told us that the bakery had burned, and they did not have the funds to rebuild it. So off we went on an inspection tour. The roof replacement had begun, but construction had stopped due to lack of funds. What a mess we found. All the ovens and the shelving had collapsed and were destroyed. It looked hopeless.

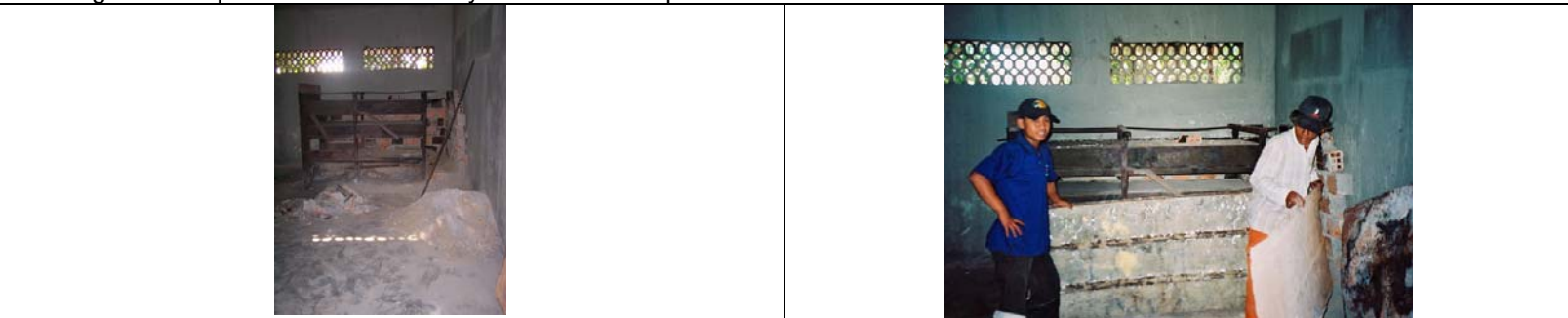


Figure 7 left - Burned out Bakery at VS 2

Figure 8 right - Repairs underway with the dollars from VSO

Back in the reception room we asked Sister Jeanne what it would take to rebuild the bakery. After consulting with Mr Nanh our trusted secretary, they came up with a figure of 15 million Dong. After a quick conversion this came to about \$1,000 USD. We told Sister Jane that we would have to think about this and would talk to her the next day.

PK and I held an emergency meeting that evening (with ourselves) and counted our available funds. The VSO board of directors had entrusted us with \$1,000 USD in discretionary funds to be used if we found a great need. Was this a coincidence? We had a vote and after the count it was 2 for and 0 against for building a new bakery.

The next day we passed Sister Jeanne an envelope with \$1,000 USD for the bakery. What a very happy smile she returned to us.

The next day we returned to VS 2 to say goodbye and I told PK we should look in on the bakery. To our surprise we found 2 workmen busy clearing the debris. Sister Jane said the children would have bread in 6 days. WOW!!! What a little funding can do.

Our thanks to you generous donors that truly put bread on the tables of Vinh Son 2.

Dave Chaix

Computer Project

Thanks to the generosity of Colour4Kids, we were able to purchase 2 complete computers (monitors, keyboards, mouse, and desks) for both VS1 and VS2 during our visit earlier this month. **(Colour4Kids is a Non Profit based in Amsterdam, The Netherlands - a group of free lance decorative painters by profession moved by the need of the Vinh Son children who set a goal for themselves to improve the lives of underprivileged children worldwide.)** In addition, we purchased a printer for each location. This brings the total classroom computers at each location to eight. The sisters, teaching staff and students were delighted to receive the additional equipment!

In addition, we observed an opportunity to increase student levels and improve the utilization of the current equipment by adding additional instructors. We will be working with the sisters to understand what this would cost (salaries) and will report back in a future newsletter.

Pat Keegan



Figure 9 "Same day furniture delivery via Nguyen's Mayflower Moving & Storage" -

Figure 10 Students at new PCs

Sewing Machine Project

In our last newsletter, we told you about the need for sewing machines at both orphanages. We believe that this project will teach life skills while providing clothing and income for the orphans.

During our visit we discovered that 3 different entities are supporting sewing classes. Vinh Son 1 and 2 both have small classrooms, while the convent has a much larger endeavor. Our charter is for the support of orphanages, but sometimes these lines become blurred and overlap.

The majority of our support this trip went to the 2 orphanages, but small donations were made to the larger sewing class. Children from the nearby villages attend this class as well as the orphans.

We pretty much max'ed out the smaller orphanage classes this trip. Sewing and boarder machines were purchased along with their supporting tables. Equipment such as different size scissors, chalk, rulers and other basics were provided. We left the thread that was provided by **Alan and Janice Stephens (Styles By Janice - Erlanger KY)** - value almost \$3000) for the small classes. This was very much appreciated. The sewing machine project will be on-going, and for the time being it's up, running, and stable.

Thanks to all that earmarked their donations for this very worthwhile project.



Figure 11 Sewing Class

12 Figure New Sewing Machines & Boarder Machines

Web Site Project

VSO authorized the creation of a web site at our January 2006 Annual Meeting. The VSO board members are providing the funding for this project. No donated funds will be used for the web site creation.

The web site will tell the Vinh Son "story" and the need of support for the children and the caregivers. For web surfers who know nothing about VSO, it will provide information about the children, the caregivers, the non-profit status, board members, some background data, etc. This interactive website that will function as a tool to help us educate potential donors and benefactors about the Orphanage and to generate financial support for the ongoing work in Vietnam. The site will allow on-line contributions plus encouraging people to donate by check, etc. The site will also function as an online brochure to promote the work of VSO and to help us establish and cultivate relationships with other organizations to benefit the orphanage.

We hope to have the site operational April 2006. We will keep you informed of its progress.

Dennis Coyne

Donations are always appreciated and can be sent to VSO at PO Box 9322, Auburn, CA 95604-9322