

Cagayanos Feel FICOBank's Presence in Tuguegarao

As part of its network expansion program, FICOBank seized, without any delay, the opportunity of extending its full range of financial products and services to the people of Tuguegarao City and its adjacent towns, upon approval by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas of its application to



Photo shows the FICOBank Extension Office along the busy stretch of Luna Street in Ugac Norte, Tuguegarao City, Cagayan.

establish an extension office in the said city last year. After a painstaking preparation by the management, FICOBank Tuguegarao held its grand opening on December 3, 2010. Prior to this, it had its soft-opening rites, which took place on September 2, to comply with the BSP regulation.

During the grand opening, the top- and middle-ranked officials of the Bank, which include Chairman Flordelino Almazan and the other members of the Board of Directors, President Herminio Ocampo and some members of the Management Committee, and BM Ador Espiritu and his branch team, joined heads, hands and hearts together to ensure the success of this momentous event. This special occasion was also attended by some local dignitaries, businesspersons, employees and even members of religious groups of the city. Immediately after the blessing-and-thanksgiving rites, which was officiated by Pastor Ross Resuello, the traditional pouring of rice and coins on the floor of the office, as auspicious symbol and act that will attract good fortune (prosperity, longevity, happiness and wealth) happened next. The

Top 10 FICOBank News in 2010

As the year 2010 is over, it implies that it's time to reflect on the year that was at FICOBank. The year that has just ended was packed with a lot of news stories, but we're particularly interested in what will interest you most. So, we, at FICOnnect, made an easier-to-read "listicle," outlining the high-point events and attention-grabbing stories that have the greatest impact on the corporate being of FICOBank.

Here is a rundown of the top 10 news stories that defined FICOBank in 2010.

10. Rollout of TODA Loan. After six months of pilot testing at the Head Office and Santiago Branch, the Tricycle Operators and Drivers Assistance (TODA) Loan displayed a promising result, as it is generally accepted in the pilot areas. Inasmuch as the necessary system and procedures are already in place, the TODA Loan was officially introduced to a wider market through the simultaneous bankwide product

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FICOBank Bids Farewell to Its Founding Chairman

"Parting is such sweet sorrow." Yes, Shakespeare had said it. Today, hundreds of FICOBankers feel its throb, as the departure of the first-and-longest-reigning Board Chairman of FICOBank, Mr. Pacifico B. Miranda, Sr., is colored with intense sorrow, but juxtaposed with a sense of pleasure and gratitude for what he has left behind and has done to the Bank.

The entire FICOBank family is grieving for the loss of a great man—the person behind the drive that took it from the realm of dream to the solid ground of reality. Bringing the cooperators' aspiration for the Bank to fruition is not an ordinary task. It requires not only breadth, depth and flair, but dedication, hard work and sacrifice as well. The development, growth and success of FICOBank would have not been made possible, if he didn't spearhead the arduous tasks of groundworking and legworking and pave the way for its long-term survival and sustainability.



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In retrospect, Mr. Miranda took the lead in sowing a tiny seed in the field of banking. This tiny seed of FICOBANKING eventually grew and became a robust tree with brawny trunk and sturdy branches. After three decades, it turned out to be a valuable community asset. Indeed, he was a prime mover and a vital cog of today's prominent and premier coop bank in the country. He was renowned for his distinct leadership style and respected for his strong beliefs, lofty goals and firm decisions—personal and organizational-wise. Leaving behind a great and undying legacy, he joined his Creator at the ripe age of 80 on January 17, 2011.

"I wish to be remembered whenever the name of FICOBANK is heard. I also wish to be remembered as the simple and first Chairman of this Bank, who never gave up when the Bank is in need [the most]." These were the last remarkable words and succinct statement that he conveyed to his FICOBANK family through his piece in the first-ever commemorative book of the Bank. Of course, he did not just leave his corporate family with a mere message, but left it with the best-in-its-class legacy—a stronger, bigger and better FICOBANK.

Wherever he is, he's certainly happy and contented with what he had accomplished in his 80-year existence in this world, particularly in his prime years. He was very fortunate to have existed this far to witness the dreams for the Bank turned into reality. Although he's now gone, his memoir will never be forgotten, as it will forever be etched in the minds of all FICOBANKERS and will always remain in the pages of FICOBANK's history and archives.

The members of his FICOBANK family are perpetually indebted to him for giving them once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and privilege to be where they are now—FICOBANK. Their love for the Bank, which he had initiated in 1976, nurtured up to 1986 and supported beyond his tenure as Chairman, will go on through the "sands of time."

The directors, officers and employees of FICOBANK bade their final adieu to their much-loved founding Chairman on January 22, 2011.

—Shyrrill Bilog

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guests, together with the FICOBANKERS in attendance, partook of a sumptuous breakfast afterward.

The Tuguegarao Extension Office, which is located along the busy stretch of Luna Street in Ugac Norte, is administratively and functionally attached to the Solana Branch. It is manned by a team of amiable and approachable personnel, headed by EOM Remedio C. Abes. It serves as the branch and clients' link-up point for information, loan-making, deposit-taking and fee-based services. With it, the distribution strength of FICOBANK for its product-service repertoire in the financial market will surely be bolstered.

As to his thoughts about the newly-opened extension office of Solana Branch in Tuguegarao, BM Espiritu related, "Tuguegarao City is a first class city. It is the city capital of Cagayan and the regional capital of the Cagayan Valley Region. It is also the economic center (commercial, education, trade, health, etc.) of the region. With its population of 129,539, as of 2007 census, we will exert our greatest efforts to penetrate a larger market base and acquire a bigger number of prime clients. We want the extension office to operate and perform just like our top operating units. Thus, we will double our efforts in Tuguegarao."

With FICOBANK Tuguegarao—the 27th operating unit of the Bank—a stronger market presence, a diversified client base and an exponential financial growth are in the makings.

—JM Juan

Care and Share Program Targets Victims of Typhoon Juan

The Care and Share Program of FICOBANK formally started in December 2006, reaching out to the less-fortunate community folks. Those living around the Corporate Office were the initial recipients of gift packs—rice, groceries, clothes, shoes, toys, medicines and the like. Since then, the FICOBANK family showed its caring spirit by sharing material wealth with people who have less in life.

One of the major events of FICOBANK's 2010 Christmas celebration is the Care and Share Program. Being a

socially-responsible bank, FICOBANK aimed to provide assistance to communities that are in dire need. Thus, its annual gift-giving activity was directed at the victims affected by super Typhoon Juan. This was an opportune time for the organization to show its concern to the needy families in Northern Isabela, where the said typhoon devastatingly hit. As these households were severely affected, it would always be of great help if they would experience the joy of being loved by people they don't even know, but are there to care and share.

With a sense of purpose, the FICOBANKERS from Tumauni and Cabagan Field Offices, together with representatives from the Human Resource and Administration Department, trooped to the barangay of Santa in Tumauni, Isabela on December 30, 2010. They witnessed the pitiful plight of the residents who were still recovering from the destructions caused by the super typhoon. The group distributed a number of gift packs. Excitements and joys were very apparent on the part of the recipients. On the other side, the sacrifices made and the hassles borne by the FICOBANKERS in preparing and bringing the gift packs to the place were nothing compared to their one-of-a-kind experience.

The barangay officials of Santa, headed by Chairman Orlando Gasingan, expressed their heartfelt thanks to the management and staff of FICOBANK for choosing their barangay as beneficiary of the program.

As has always been, this annual gift-giving program during the Yuletide season brought smiles to the recipients' faces and warmth in their hearts.

—Nicole James

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FICOBank Officers Participate in CFIEP Consultation

On account of the invitation of the DM/Head of the Southern Cagayan Valley Lending Center of LANDBANK, Mr. Victor A. Agorto, the Executive Vice President and COO of FICOBank, Ms. Soledad S. Cabantac, together with the Head of the Business Development Department, Dr. Robert R. Palac, participated in a one-day consultation/dialogue on Countryside Financial Institutions Enhancement Program (CFIEP) at the Crown Pavillion Restaurant in Tuguegarao City, Cagayan on January 20, 2011.

CFIEP is a joint program of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), Philippine Deposit Insurance Corporation (PDIC) and Land Bank of the Philippines. The program was formally launched with the issuance of CB Circular No. 1315 in October 1991. The three-pronged objectives of CFIEP are: (i) to raise the capital base of the countryside financial institutions (rural and cooperative banks); (ii) to reduce the debt burden of eligible CFIs and the financial strain on the government; and (iii) to improve the CFI's long-term sustainability and viability. To provide direction to the program, a Task Force, composed of heads of the three organizations, was created. It is supported by a Technical Committee, which is made up of representatives from BSP, PDIC and LANDBANK. The program, which should have ended in December 1992, was extended several times since then by the Task Force due to the requests of the CFIs.

The recently-conducted consultation/dialogue was intended to solicit feedback for possible enhancement of the program, as well as identify and address issues and concerns confronting the CFIs. It also involved the presentation of the relevant regulations and issuances by BSP and PDIC. BSP was represented by its Acting Deputy Director of the Integrated Supervision Department II, Ms. Flor S. Manawat, while PDIC was represented by its Corporate Executive Officer of the Resolutions Department I, Atty. Ferdinand P. Robes. The participants to this activity were presidents, vice presidents, managers and key officers of rural and cooperative banks from the provinces of Isabela, Cagayan, Kalinga, Apayao, Quirino and Nueva Vizcaya.

In his talk, Mr. Hermeo G. Bautista, Head of the Programs Management Department I of LANDBANK, mentioned the relevant training courses, i.e. Portfolio Management, Corporate Governance, Risk Management, etc., that will be sponsored later by the program to enhance further the viability and sustainability of the CFIs, as agents of change. On behalf of the Technical Committee, he expressed the collegial body's hope that the partnership between CFIEP and the CFIs will continue to bring progress and development in the countryside.

-Katrina Ann Alip

Eight FICOBankers Honored with Loyalty Award



In celebration of FICOBank's 34th Founding Anniversary last September 10, 2010, eight FICOBankers were honored with individual Loyalty Award, in recognition of their 10 uninterrupted years of meritorious service to the Bank.

Receiving their Loyalty Awards were: Ms. Maria Pilar C. Atienza, Manager of Alicia Branch; Mr. Ronald Busto, Manager of Santiago Branch; Mr. Emerson Umayam, Manager of Solano Branch; Engr. Tolentino Tabago, Jr., Manager of Dinalupihan Branch; Ms. Analyn Calacien, Assistant Branch Manager of Head Office; Mr. Allan Jay Santos, Loan Officer of Jones Branch; Mr. Arvin Narag, Loan Officer of Solano Branch; and Ms. Mabelle Grace Pataueg, Compliance Assistant of the Bank's Compliance Office.

In their acceptance speeches, most of the awardees became emotional in showing their deep appreciation to the top management for its initiative in recognizing their humble, but laudable, efforts, which contributed to the attainment of the Bank's short-term objectives and long-term goals. Likewise, they conveyed their profound gratitude to the Bank for the rare opportunity it has given them in advancing their professional growth, as well as in boosting their financial status.

The Bank has given each awardee a 12-karat gold pin, as token of appreciation for their unwavering dedication to their work and unceasing loyalty to the Bank. Chair Flordelino Almazan, Pres. Herminio Ocampo and EVP Soledad Cabantac did the honor of handing over the rewards to this year's awardees.

The Loyalty Award is given to an employee of the Bank who has rendered at least 10 years of dedicated and meritorious service.

-JM Juan

Annual Christmas Party Celebrated with a Twist

For the first time since 2000, FICOBank celebrated the traditional Christmas Party on December 18, 2010 at the Isabela Hotel, with a different concept—from the usual dance-competition-based festivity into pure entertainment—without compromising the joys and cheers of the Yuletide season.

With employees coming from the Corporate Office and various banking units in Cagayan Valley, together with the Area and Branch Heads from FICOBank Central and Northwest Luzon, the first version of the Bank's annual Christmas Party started at 10:00 a.m. through an opening prayer led by Pastor Jay Medrano of the Victory Christian Fellowship. This was immediately followed by the singing of the National Anthem.

Yells and thrills begun to heat up the rendezvous when the event's masters of ceremonies, Mr. Mark Romel Sunga of the Credit Department and Ms. Donna Jane Empania of the Area Office in Central Luzon, individually called in front of the stage all the branch managers and department heads of the Bank. The crowd went gaga when the members of the OPCOM and MANCOM displayed their own ramp-model-like moves—all of which were distinctive.

The President and CEO of the Bank, Mr. Herminio G. Ocampo, delivered his welcome address with words of amazement and appreciation to the hosting style of the emcees. This was later validated when the Chairman of the Board, Mr. Flordelino Almazan, conveyed his inspirational message. The generosity of the

Central and Northwest Luzon Area in the Spirit of Christmas



The area network of FICOBank in Central and Northwest Luzon has successfully celebrated its Christmas Party on December 23, 2010 at La Maja Rica Hotel and Restaurant in Tarlac City with the theme: "Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in the spirit of giving and sharing love!"

The Christmas Party was indeed a joyful celebration, as it was attended by the managers and staff of the entire area network. The Chairman of the Board, Mr. Flordelino A. Almazan, President and CEO, Mr. Herminio G. Ocampo, one of the directors, Mr. Aurelio S. Joson, HRAD Head, Ms. Carlyn M. Vilorio, and the managers of Santiago (Mr. Ronald Busto), Jones (Mr. Angelo Salvador) and Solano (Mr. Emerson Umayam) branches shared with the area personnel the joy of the Christmas celebration.

Who would have thought that the preparation for the said event was quite short compared to its amazing outcome. The spirit of a united team was revealed when the Area Head, Ms. Zorina S. Aradanas, and her subordinates at the Area Office worked as one in the packing of groceries, designing of tarpaulin, preparation of the program, venue and foods, and all other details of the event.

After putting all things in place, the most awaited night came. Everyone stood amazed seeing the arrival of the participating teams in different costumes. The Cabanatuan Branch was in cowboy costume, Concepcion Branch in Barbie attire, Dinalupihan Branch in Ati-atihan outfit, Paniqui Branch in Filipiniana costume, Malasiqui Branch in Pinoy workers get-up, Mangaldan Branch in hip-hop garb, Umingan Branch in colorful recycled wear, Urdaneta Branch in elves-like form, Lingayen Branch in burning red uniform, and the Area Office in Zorro-concept gear. Every moment was captured in a picture-perfect setting, as each branch team had a fashion show of its chosen costume while bearing inspiring smiles on its members' faces. Prestige and



rollout on October 26, 2010. It was aggressively promoted through the Bank's pull-based and push-based marketing strategies. With FICOBank's TODA Loan, there's no more reason for eligible trikers to worry about their immediate cash needs. They can now avail of the cash they urgently need. It's guaranteed fast, easy, affordable and hassle-free.

9. Client Satisfaction Survey. In full cognizance of the importance of determining the customers' overall impression toward the services of the Bank, a Client Satisfaction Survey (CSS) was conducted throughout its entire network. Based on the overall result of the survey, a whopping number of clients were satisfied with the various banking aspects/attributes of FICOBank. Out of the 8,228 client-respondents who participated in the survey, 8,037 (97.68%) were satisfied while only 191 (2.32%) were still not satisfied. The overall result of the CSS implies that the initiatives of the Bank on corporate and product branding, customer service, and human resource development are heading in the right direction. Moreover, the banking attributes of FICOBank on bank location and appearance, range of products and services, interest on deposits and loans, bank safety and security, service delivery and standards, and quality of employees are all right and may either be "better than" or "same as" the well-known banks.
8. Renovation of Three Banking Offices. The three banking offices of FICOBank in Alicia and San Mateo, Isabela and in Diffun, Quirino underwent major makeover in 2010. The new façade and interior design of the newly-renovated edifices draw an impressive appearance among the prospective customers and passersby, and create a cozy office setting that is conducive to a satisfying banking experience by the clients and employees alike. This corporate initiative improves further the image of FICOBank in the eyes of the banking public. It is expected that this will bring about a better position in the financial arena, in terms of absolute and relative market shares.
7. Learning Visit of Two Cooperative Banks. The Cooperative Bank of Palawan and the Cooperative Bank of Bohol made their four-day study visit each to FICOBank in May and October 2010, respectively. Lecture-discussions on the most efficient and effective ways of managing the various components of coop banking operations were carried out. For the visiting banks, this learning activity brought added value in terms of getting new stimulus for development provided by the expertise and experiences of the host bank and enhancing the motivation and confidence of their officers and staff. And for hosting these study visits, FICOBank gained prominence as the learning "Mecca" of cooperative banks in the country.
6. BSP Approval on FICOBank's Extension Offices. The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas has approved on March 2, 2010 the application of FICOBank to establish an extension office in Tuguegarao City (Cagayan) and convert its existing field offices in Ilagan and Echague (Isabela), Bambang (Nueva Vizcaya), and Diffun (Quirino) into extension offices. FICOBank easily got the stamp of approval of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, inasmuch as, at the date of application, it has: complied with the capital requirement; risk-based capital adequacy ratio of 23.03 percent; CAMELS composite rating of "4"; risk management system appropriate to its banking operations; and no major concerns on safety and soundness.
5. Opening of Tuguegarao Extension Office. The latest in the roster of the Bank's operating units, FICOBank Tuguegarao launched the first salvo of its banking services to the public after its soft-opening rites on September 2, 2010. Although the Tuguegarao Extension Office is directly attached to Solana Branch, it is treated as a branch, as it has the deposit-taking and loan-making operations and fee-based services.

Sure enough, the distribution strength of FICOBank in the financial market is further boosted by its 27th banking unit, which is strategically located at the business hub of the premier and lone city of Cagayan.

4. FICOBank President Proclaimed as Party-List Representative. By an act of Divine Providence, Mr. Herminio G. Ocampo, President and CEO of FICOBank, was proclaimed as Party-List Representative of the 14th Congress of the Philippines by the Commission on Elections, as successor of the late Butil Farmers Party Rep. Leonila V. Chavez, in an en banc resolution unanimously signed by the six commissioners on February 3, 2010. He took his Oath of Office on February 5, 2010 before Judge Janice Yulo-Antero of the Regional Trial Court of Sta. Rita, Pampanga.
3. Breaching the P1-Billion Mark in Deposit. On January 19, 2010, FICOBank was able to reach the billion-peso level of deposits after its 30-year deposit-taking operation. Hitting the one-billion mark signals a historical achievement in its three decades of existence. It is truly a yardstick of excellence and success. The Bank could not have done it without the trust and confidence of the banking public and the dynamism and prudence of the management team and operations group.
2. Loan Volume Up 26% to P5.94 Billion in 2010. With the books closed on 2010, FICOBank posted a double-digit growth in its loan volume. In fulfilling its institutional mandate to address the multidimensional credit needs of its multisectoral clientele, despite the challenging economic climate and natural disturbances, the Bank continued to increase its loan releases for its products, which include: small and large agricultural loans; instant-access and standby-line, small and medium, short-term and long-term commercial loans; individual-based microfinance loans; and other loans for professionals, employees, pensioners, drivers and operators, and bejeweled individuals. To make sure that the credit requirements of its loan clients are adequately met, a total of P5.94 billion loans have been disbursed. It surpassed 2009's record of P4.73 billion by P1.21 billion or 25.58% and beat the 2010's loan volume target of P5.87 billion.
1. Approval of FICOBank's Conversion into a Thrift Bank. The double-digit growth and fast-paced development of FICOBank necessitate an enormous equity build-up. Paradoxically, the Bank cannot expect capital infusion from its common stockholders (all *samahang nayons* and cooperatives), as most of them are now defunct. With it, there is a compelling need for fresh equity from individual investors in the open market to ensure its continued growth. FICOBank's pursuit of growth and quest for bigness are constrained by its organizational category as a cooperative bank. Thus, the Bank will not only need to draw on the flexibility and adaptability it has developed over the years, but, more so, to transform itself into a better form of banking institution. The thrift-bank route is the most appropriate option for so many good reasons. The conversion/upgrading of FICOBank from a cooperative bank to a thrift bank—the sought-after development and significant milestone in its corporate journey—got a glimmer of hope when the Monetary Board of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas approved, in the fullness of time, its application on July 8, 2010. With it, FICOBank will become a more privileged bank, carrying out higher, broader and more sophisticated levels of business.

At FICOBank, that was the year that has been—2010. Year 2011 will be another.

—RR Palac



Service to Clients: The Heart and Spirit of FICOBanking

Throughout our history, at FICOBank, we have always been sharply focused in fulfilling our mission to bring about the economic ascendancy of the many people in our geographical areas of operation. We have also been able to adapt quickly to the complex environment that beset our Bank, and we continually evolve to be proactive and competitive in providing relevant responses to the constantly-changing needs of our multisectoral clientele, as evidenced by the huge volume of our annual loan payouts and rapid growth of our deposit-and-loan portfolios.

After more than three decades, we take honor, pride and joy in significantly contributing to the improvement of the economic and social well-being of our clients and their families and communities within the compatible limits of our Bank's field of business activities and development supports. Our clients lie at the heart and stay behind the spirit of everything we do, and being able to provide them with fast and reliable service and satisfying banking experience is our top priority. Our Bank also does all it can to make a difference by being a socially-responsible corporate citizen through its various programs and other initiatives on corporate social responsibility (CSR).



At the front of FICOBanking are the 27 strong and responsive operating units (branch, extension and field offices) of our Bank, which are tied closely to their respective clients. Driven by the Bank's core values, our banking units, along with our support departments, represented by over 300 employees, are among the relevant economic forces in the communities where they operate. They provide a comprehensive selection of financial products and services to over a hundred thousand of clients, and offer the best-in-class solutions that are adaptive to the clients' multifaceted financial needs, regardless of their financial means. With a sense of purpose and collective responsibility, they work tirelessly to ensure sustainable prosperity for our clients and their respective communities. In full accord, our branch network and the banking public are central to the success and continuity of FICOBank as a valuable community asset—its distinctive mark that sets it apart from other financial institutions.

Firmly focused toward the future, and mindful of our corporate mission, with worthy intent, we rationally consider the long-term development of our banking constituency. Thus, we're trying to do everything within our mantle of authority to create sustainable prosperity for our clients and their communities. And as always, we, at FICOBank, are open to new clients, new communities, new needs, new ideas and new services.

Flordelino A. Almazan

The Making of a New FICOBank: A Business Outlook in Light of Recent Development in Banking



We ended 2010 with a big bang and we start 2011 with a bigger bang, as we unfold the making of a new FICOBank with brighter outlook, better philosophy, bolder business model, bigger resources and higher performance standards.

As the business environment in banking is becoming more competitive and challenging due to continuing globalization and technology advancement, most of the countryside financial institutions have experienced a downward-spiraling effect on their financial margin. Being cast into intense competition, they're forced to compromise their credit standards to some extent, so as to accommodate borrowers with apparently high risk, just to generate volume. Our Bank is fully aware of this predicament that is plaguing the hardcore financial institutions with conventional or "balance-sheet" banking approach. And since we

want to get out of the box, we are compelled to redefine our business, chart a more vibrant future, and try to do things beyond the usual.

Most of us are already aware that we are on the threshold of converting/upgrading our Bank from a cooperative bank to a thrift bank. We were able to get off the ground last year after the Monetary Board of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) has approved our application. And as soon as we get the authority from BSP to operate as a thrift bank, after complying with its SEC-registration requirement, we will immediately start the ball rolling.

Our corporate transformation paints a brighter business outlook. As a corporative thrift bank, we have a well-built organizational form and ownership structure, and a well-crafted corporate personality—a brand image—expressing what we stand for and how we intend to make an impact, with clear value added, on the industry we are into. We have an ambitious, but doable, future direction guiding all our future plans and programs.

We are, by and large, a Bank that makes a difference. Our Bank, as a people's bank and a "grand-winning product" by itself, with a unique and sustainable competitive advantage in the financial services industry, can do many things now for the many small people who are its customers, investors and owners—all rolled into one. We are committed to bring about the economic ascendancy of the many people in the countryside by harnessing their untapped savings and investment resources, providing loans and other financial services, and rewarding everybody who fully participates in our banking activities. As such, we are all the more resolved to grow our owner-clients like we grow our Bank.

We will develop our new business through four major avenues, namely: targeting hundreds-of-thousand corporative members; pursuing a two-stage network expansion; providing new financial products and services that are tailored to the needs of the market; and establishing allied undertakings that will complement FICOBANK's growth. As a corporative bank, we will professionally manage our Bank like a banking corporation and continuously practice the essential principles of cooperativism.

Knowing that service delivery is the most important part of our "grand-winning product," we will be establishing better service-delivery standards at our operating unit level for making loans, taking deposits, handling withdrawals, providing fee-based services, recruiting corporative members, reeducating existing clients, and promoting the corporative ideology. We recognize that to accomplish this, every FICOBANKER should make a valuable contribution. The way we value our customers is the same way FICOBANKERS are valued in the organization. Our excellent public customer service starts in our private halls of treating each other with dignity, respect and fun. We believe that this is extremely important for us to be successful in all our undertakings. With better service delivery, the better we build the implicit intangibles, like what we want to be known for and what our clients will tell others about us.

As a new FICOBANK, our Bank will not only be banking with a HEART, but will even be soaring like an EAGLE.

Herminio G. Ocampo

Standpoint

Soledad S. Cabantac



The Dynamic Think-and-Action Tanks of FICOBank

Inspired by the visions and aspirations of the Bank's pioneers and succeeding leaders, and driven

by the corporate mission and core values of the organization, the best and the brightest, committed and principled individuals devoted the prime years of their lives in bringing fruition to what FICOBank is today—a leader in the Philippine cooperative banking industry. The Bank owes almost all of its remarkable achievements to these people who serve as its think-and-action tanks.

It has been often said, "Excellence is doing ordinary things extraordinarily well." FICOBank's continual pursuit of banking excellence, which is coupled by its commitment to ingenuity and progress, brought about exceptional results, such as effective business framework, innovative financial products and services, continued network expansion, better operational outcomes, greater financial strength, and long-term resiliency of its entire banking network. Consequently, these enabled the Bank to be given heaps of awards and recognitions. Of course, these were made possible due to the creative ideas, intensive researches, in-depth analyses and macro-level strategies of the management team (the think tank), in tandem with the on-the-ground

campaigns, micro-level approaches and market dominance by the operations group (the action tank). The respective members of the think-and-action tanks, who serve as the vital cogs of the Bank's management and operations, have the intrinsic ability to think and act "outside the box." FICOBank's fame has grown to iconic proportions because of them.

Through the collaborative efforts of the management team and the operations group, with the full-of-zip support of their respective staff, FICOBank was able to serve large segments of the market with an array of services and solutions that rightly meets their rapidly-increasing financial needs. By combining a passion for creative thinking and getting things done right, the Bank—as a long-term player in the business of banking—is assured to create a sustainable value for its shareholders and other recognized stakeholders.

As the story of FICOBank is the story of its people, it would be important for us to discover the accounts of personal information, which include the commitments, difficulties, delights, challenges, achievements and aspirations, of the members of the think-and-action tanks—the dynamic forces behind the growth and stability of the Bank.

We can take a look at their inspiring stories in the coffee table book of FICOBank that is to be launched not far off from now.

Legal Matters

Atty. Hubert E. Molina



Prenuptial Agreements – Part 4

(Regime of Separation of Property)

Aside from the first two (2) regimes, future spouses may choose the more

liberal regime of separation of property. Of course, our conservative members of the community will raise some eyebrows on this arrangement since it would be against the long-enshrined and practiced custom and tradition that was passed on by our ancestors. But, *as they say*, time has changed. Before making any judgment, let me discuss to you what and how this regime works.

Under the Regime of Complete Separation of Property, each of the spouses shall own, dispose of, possess, administer and enjoy his or her own separate estate, without need of the consent of the other. To each spouse shall belong all earnings from his or her profession, business or industry and all fruits, natural, industrial or civil, due or received during the marriage from his or her separate property—"capital property" of the husband and "paraphernal property" of the wife. Depending on the agreement of the parties, separation of property may refer to present or future property or

both. It may, likewise, be total or partial and, in the latter case, the of absolute community of property, which is the default regime under our existing laws.

Apparently, there seems to be no issue about the matter of each spouse owning one's respective properties or earnings. The problem begins when family expenses will come into fore. Despite the separation of earnings, both spouses shall bear the family expenses in proportion to their income, or in case of insufficiency or default thereof, to the current market value of their separate properties. Further, the liability of the spouse to creditor for family expenses shall be solidary or both spouses shall be answerable.

What if one of the spouses is not earning although he/she has a property? It is not uncommon that one of the spouses, *be it the wife or the "houseband,"* is left at the house tending the household and the kids. Undeniably, such a scenario is preferred to some than to leave the household and the kids to a nanny. However, his/her contribution to the family does not count for he/she is still required to contribute to the family expenses. This matter can easily be ironed out in the prenuptial agreement, if such a scenario was contemplated when the agreement is being drafted.

From My Notes & Files

Emilio U. Rico, Jr.



Why Banks Fail?

Data from the Philippine Deposit Insurance Corporation (PDIC) show the number of rural banks that closed shop and were placed under receivership and liquidation of PDIC from 1970 to 2008 stands at 430 and counting. Former Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) Governor Rafael Buenaventura cited that the common ground for their demise is that the respective board of directors of these banks had failed to exercise their oversight role "in the face of insider abuse." In addition, weak corporate governance is also considered as one of the culprits blamed for the fall of these banks. The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines corporate governance as: "A set of relationships between a company's management, its board, its shareholders and other stakeholders. Corporate governance also provides the structure to which the objectives of the company are set, and the means of attaining those objectives and monitoring performance are determined." Other causes of bank failures are political climate, regulatory framework and domestic and international competition. It is also a given fact, that bank failure happens when a bank is unable to or does not pay adequate attention to credit standard requirements.

Instability of the rural banking industry is a growing concern of the regulatory bodies nowadays due to the critical role it plays in

the economy, providing access to credit in the rural areas. Rural banks deliver sustainable and market-driven financial and non-financial services to the agricultural sector, MSMEs and enterprising poor households in the countryside. World Bank Chief Economist Justin Lin also underscored the importance of rural banks, saying that: "Smaller domestic banks are much better suited to providing finance to the small businesses that dominate the manufacturing, farming and services sectors in developing countries."

In the global market, Basel I (known formally as *International Convergence of Capital Measurements and Capital Standards*) came into existence due to the liquidation of Bank Herstatt in 1974. A Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (BCBS), composed of eleven nations (referred to as G-10), based in Basel, Switzerland was formed to "harmonize banking standards and regulations within and between all member-states" (Balin 2008). Adopting a pillar framework, Basel I focuses on the risk-based capital ratio of banks, providing a ceiling and a uniform computation of capital requirement among banks across countries. As the global economic environment changes, Basel I then evolved into *A Revised Framework on International Convergence of Capital Measurement and Capital Standards* (commonly referred to as Basel II). This is a more comprehensive capital adequacy accord, which incorporates operational risk and other risks on top of the credit and market risks accounted for in the Basel I. In response to the recent global economic crisis triggered by the US housing bubble, BCBS is conducting a consultative forum for a Basel III Accord, which

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Proud to be a FICOBanker

Carlyn M. Vilorio



Why FICOBank?

About six years ago, someone I know well told her boss that she'll be transferring to FICOBank. After a

few minutes of silence, the President and CEO of that big group of companies asked, "Why FICOBank?" Very spontaneously, she answered by asking another question, "Why not FICOBank Sir?" The last question was never answered. She just heard later from former colleagues that their big boss got so irked by the "question-answer" to his question, that he told everyone, "What kind of such an impertinent and absurd answer is that?" Years gone by, the answer to the two questions—"Why FICOBank?" and "Why not FICOBank?"—slowly and clearly unfolded.

Why FICOBank? Let me count the ways.

First, here in FICOBank we offer a stable job. Yes, compared to other big players in the banking industry, we are relatively not that big. But for the last few years, FICOBank has been a fast-growing bank that had expanded tremendously and more than doubled its manpower. For about 35 years of cooperative banking,

FICOBank doesn't show any signs of stagnation. Recognizing this, the Monetary Board of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas has approved its upgrading from a cooperative rural bank to a thrift bank. This show of confidence by the main regulatory body of the country will just speak for FICOBank's stability and potential for greatness in the whole banking industry of Philippines.

Second, FICOBank has a unique culture. I had a privilege of interacting with people who had worked for other banks. You see, people from other rural banks and even commercial banks are transferring here in FICOBank. Reason? They say they heard of FICOBank's famous working environment of combining hard work while working and hard laughs (till you drop) after a job well done, especially on outings and parties. Everyone has a chance to be just their funny or most funny self after work. Such a stress buster! Also, another way of life in FICOBank is its familial organizational structure. The FICOBank is not just a company, it's a family. Here, we care and we share. Of course, all families are not perfect. So does us. But it is through these imperfections that give color and challenges to each FICOBank family member to strive better in pursuing excellence in everything we do. Most of the time, money isn't everything. There are far more important things that matter.

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Why Banks...

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strengthens capital and banking regulations to promote a more resilient banking sector.

Domestically, BSP has adopted the recommendations made by BCBS that is incorporated in its Risk-Based Capital Adequacy Framework, aimed at strengthening banks' capital base and preventing bank failures. In 2001, BSP had enforced the implementation of Basel I and shifted to Basel II in 2007 to account for operational and other risks. With the advent of falling rural banks, a separate capital adequacy framework, referred to as Basel 1.5 Framework, was made for stand-alone thrift banks, rural banks and cooperative banks to take effect in 1 January 2012, as per Circular No. 688 dated 26 May 2010.

Meanwhile, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, in partnership with the Philippine Deposit Insurance Corporation, created the Strengthening Program for Rural Banks, which encourages mergers, consolidations and acquisitions of eligible rural banks through a financial assistance to eligible strategic third-party investors that are capital-deficient. This program is available for two years and a fund of P5 billion was already put up by BSP and PDIC.

As the regulatory bodies are doing their mandate to put in the brakes to falling banks, I believe that our Bank should, as well, make

its contribution to this endeavor. Our Bank should operate its business within the parameters prescribed by the regulatory bodies. We must have to ensure that our exposures are properly managed. Every risk, which we are exposed to, should be within our capacity to absorb it. In short, there is no substitute to a properly studied and well planned business endeavors. Everyone in our Bank should do his/her own share by following the basic dictum in personal finance, wherein "you have to live only within your means" through a more responsive and prudent disbursement of funds and/or by minimizing unnecessary expenses. In addition, fixed-asset investments should be decided on the basis of urgency and necessity. If it cannot be avoided, the best price or project cost should be of paramount consideration. More importantly, credit standards should be carefully crafted to safeguard our loan investments.

However, the foregoing measures will not be realized in the absence of cooperation within the institution. The teamwork and support of each FICOBanker to one another is an important ingredient for the recipe of success. I then enjoin the participation of each one of you to be able to achieve our common goal of staying in business. Together we can do this!

Prenuptial Agreements...

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Then there is the issue of trust as to whether the other spouse is reporting his/her actual earnings in order to lower his/her contribution to the family expenses. Another is the issue of professional jealousy, especially if the wife is earning more than the husband. The psychological impact of the disparity will be more depressing to the husband although some may enjoy the situation or even abuse it. Spouses must be able to settle amicably these issues; otherwise, these will just spark a misunderstanding, which could lead to a disastrous ending.

Some people, especially the liberal ones, view the regime of separation of property as the regime of choice. To some, putting a hard and fast rule on the issue of money will strengthen their marital relationship. This regime is applicable only if there is a prenuptial agreement duly executed by future spouses adopting this regime to govern their property relations. In some cases, however, i.e. even if no prenuptial agreement was agreed upon, the regime of separation of property may still be enforced, provided that there is a judicial pronouncement imposing it in any of the following cases:

- (1) The spouse of the petitioner has been sentenced to a penalty, which carries with it civil interdiction;
- (2) The spouse of the petitioner has been judicially declared an absentee;
- (3) Loss of parental authority of the spouse of petitioner has been decreed by the court;
- (4) The spouse of the petitioner has abandoned the latter or failed to comply with his or her obligations to the family, as provided for in Article 101;
- (5) The spouse granted the power of administration in the marriage settlements has abused that power; and
- (6) At the time of the petition, the spouses have been separated in fact for at least one year, and reconciliation is highly improbable.

In the cases provided for in numbers (1), (2) and (3), the

presentation of the final judgment against the guilty or absent spouse shall be enough bases for the grant of the decree of judicial separation of property.

Subsequent to the aforesaid judicial decree, however, the spouse may file a petition in court for the revival of the previous regime before the separation of property, in case any of the above causes is no longer existing like in the following cases:

- (1) When the civil interdiction terminates;
- (2) When the absentee spouse reappears;
- (3) When the court authorizes the resumption of said administration, after being satisfied that the spouse granted the power of administration in the marriage settlement will not again abuse such power;
- (4) When the spouse who left the conjugal home without a decree of legal separation resumes common life with the other;
- (5) When the parental authority is judicially restored to the spouse previously deprived thereof;
- (6) When the spouses who have separated in fact for at least one year, reconcile and resume common life; and
- (7) They agree to the revival of the former property regime when after voluntary dissolution of the absolute community of property or conjugal partnership has been judicially decreed upon the joint petition of the spouses. No voluntary separation of property may be granted thereafter.

Indeed married life is not a bed of roses; it is not for everyone, BUT almost everyone is craving for it. It is a challenge that anyone may choose to take and endure the consequence later. Be that as it may, everyone should be aware of the heroic task and obligation of raising a family being the foundation of society. On the second thought, would this be the reason why some choose to have "live-in relationships" instead of getting married? Sounds interesting. I might tackle this appealing topic on the next issue.

Why FICOBank...

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Third, FICOBank values well its most important asset—the FICOBankers. Someone I know well (again) had an experience working for a company where the 15th and 30th day of the month are like August 1, 2010. You know, the day Cory Aquino died when the whole country suddenly felt a gush of sadness. No kidding. Every salary day there, she felt the heaviness all over the corporate head office, as if management doesn't want to pay its employees. She initially thought that she is the only one having this feeling until people from the treasury themselves shared to her their same sentiments of having a difficult time to let their bosses sign the payroll (without her asking them by the way). Imagine that! Here in FICOBank, we give our salaries in advance (every 13th and 28th). And salary dates have festive moods in all corners. Management doesn't scrimp on salary. When the payroll was still with us in HRAD (now it's with the Accounting Department, as with other companies), I personally experience the high spirits of top honchos here in FICOBank while signing the payroll of the employees. Well, what is up goes down. I am sure, all FICOBankers feel that same way. Another area that FICOBank is focusing on is on its staff development. Training activities are conducted almost every Saturdays to make sure that all FICOBankers are not only competent in their assigned task, but also masters and experts in their fields. We want people to be happy with what they're doing because they are very good with it. Again, unlike in the erstwhile company of someone I know, each training (every single one take note) will have to be covered by a training contract. At that rate, if FICOBank implements the same in

all training conducted, all FICOBankers will have to work here for more than their lifetime and maybe even their after life. Whew! When we say that, it's not just lip service. It's a fact.

Lastly and most importantly, FICOBank focuses on God as the center of all its activities, decisions and direction. Yes, we put God first in everything. We believe on the bedrock principle that, when we seek God first, ALL these things will just be added unto us (Matthew 6:33). It's something we are proud about. It's something we can't live without. This is one of our most publicized messages, in our calendars, annual reports, newsletters, etc. God's role in our operations is embedded deep in the hearts of all FICOBankers, from top down. In these times of economic uncertainty, crazy climate changes all over the whole world, and other very fragile world systems, only an unchanging and all-powerful God can be the greatest source of assurance for us all. Even just for this, FICOBankers can have the great sense of security and confidence working with a company that trusts and takes faith in an Almighty God who, as was before, will surely carry it through in good times and in bad, in surmounting great difficulties and overcoming them triumphantly. We will be the David in every Goliaths that will come our way. We are assured of success because God has promised (and He is faithful) to give victory to those who fear and acknowledge Him.

For that alone, "Why FICOBank?" Well, "Why not FICOBank?" The answers to the question make us more proud to be a FICOBanker!



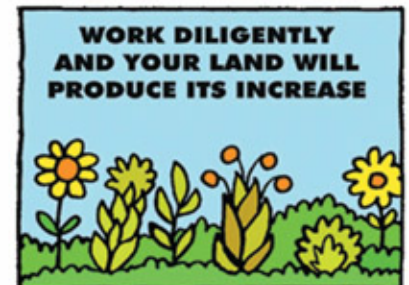
Diligence versus Laziness

The book of Proverbs (in the Bible) makes it clear that diligence—being willing to work hard and to do one's best at any job given to him or her—is a vital part of wise living. We work hard, not to become rich, famous/popular or admired (although those may be by-products), but, to serve and please God with our very best during our lives.

The Diligent	The Lazy	Reference in Proverbs (chapter and verse)
Become rich	Are soon poor	10:4
Gather crops early	Sleep during harvest	10:5
	Are an annoyance	10:26
Have abundant food	Chase fantasies	12:11
Gain many rewards		12:14
Will rule	Will become slaves	12:24
Prize their possessions	Waste good resources	12:27
Are fully satisfied	Want much but get little	13:4
Bring profit	Experience poverty	14:23
Have an easy path	Have trouble all through life	15:19
	Are like those who destroy	18:9
	Go hungry	19:15
	Won't feed themselves	19:24
	Won't plow in season	20:4
Stay awake and have food to spare	Love to sleep and grow poor	20:13
Make careful plans	Make hasty speculations	21:5
	Love pleasure and become poor	21:17
Give without sparing	Desire things but refuse to work for them	21:25,26
	Are full of excuses for not working	22:13
Will serve before kings		22:29
	Sleep too much which leads to poverty	24:30-34
Reap abundance through hard work	Experience poverty because of laziness	28:19

Source: Application Study Bible (Zondervan)

ENJOY THE FRUITS OF YOUR LABOR!



A Lecture on Financial Intermediation and Current Banking Trends



Thru the invitation of the graduating class of the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) of the Quirino Polytechnic College in Cabarroguis, Quirino, the Branch Head of FICOBank Maddela conducted a lecture on Financial Intermediation and Current Banking Trends. In attendance were almost 300 participants, who are graduating and junior students of BSBA.

The seminar was very timely for the graduating students, especially for those who are planning to secure a career in the banking industry. The lecture dealt on financial intermediation, as a prelude to their desire to know what banking is all about and what to expect should they eventually prefer to work in a bank. The students were very thankful to gain knowledge on the origin of banks, the concept of banking and the core business of banks. The discussion on the different types of banks, according to their respective scopes of authority, was the highlight of the seminar. Many questions may have been asked had there been enough time for an open forum. Nonetheless, the organizers requested our availability should a similar seminar in the future will be conducted. Surely, a seminar on Proactive Customer Service and Selling Skills will be another point of interest that may further hone their skills and upgrade their knowledge in banking, thus, preparing them well for the future.

The invitation was a big boost to our Bank's presence in Quirino, particularly in Cabarroguis and Diffun, in terms of exposure and name recall because not all of the invited speakers showed up. Had they come, it would have been an opportunity for them to introduce their operation, products and services. Mr. Sylvester Galvez, the Departmental President of BSBA, made sure that the lecture had provided enough benefits to the participants, who did not notice the passing of time. An open forum was supposed to follow, but we no longer have the luxury of time. It would have been an opportune time for the students to raise questions about the topics that were not discussed. However, should they want to know more about the product and service offerings of the Bank, an invitation to visit any office of FICOBank in Quirino was extended instead.

Before we parted, we expressed our thanks to their Dean for selecting a representative from our Bank to impart knowledge on financial intermediation and the current trends in banking. It was indeed fulfilling to be part of the students' preparation for the future. To see a few of them in our workforce one day is an indication that we have succeeded somehow in the conduct of the seminar.

If given the chance to speak again to a group of students of the Quirino Polytechnic College, even with other courses, then we shall gladly oblige. I guess it is an honor. Of course, my sincerest thanks to Ms. Soledad S. Cabantac, EVP/COO, who allowed me to spare a time from my hectic schedules at FICOBank, Maddela Branch and Diffun Extension Office, just to be with a group of aspiring students.

To the organizers and students, my congratulations!

-Johnson B. Pascual

FICOBank Roxas Holds Groundbreaking Ceremony for New Building



In its desire to bring-in stages—the Bank's "reconstruction" and image-building plan to the realization point, the management has officially signaled the start of the construction of the new FICOBank-Roxas building through a simple, but having an important effect, groundbreaking ceremony on January 5, 2011 at the corner of Leal and Jara Streets (in front of the present branch site) in Bantug, Roxas, Isabela.

This significant event, which was done in less than an hour, has been attended by the Bank's top officials, along with some employees and guests. The dedication and blessing of the new branch location was officiated by Rev. Sarex Binwag of the Roxas Alliance Christian Church.

In his simple message, the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Bank, Mr. Herminio G. Ocampo, said that the move of providing a fully-owned building for the branch would mean better service and greater satisfaction to the clients and employees alike. He also added that with the construction of the new building of FICOBank-Roxas Branch, the Bank will definitely enhance its prominence, as a reputable financial institution. Naturally, the greater-than-ever and long-term trust, patronage and loyalty of the depositing-and-borrowing residents of the locality to their first-choice bank are just among its expected impacts.

The Chairman of the Board, Mr. Flordelino A. Almazan, led the foundation-stone-laying and soil-shoving rites. He was assisted by Vice Chairman Florentino Somera, Jr., EVP/COO Soledad S. Cabantac, BM Jimmy Parongan and other officials. Cheering them on were a number of onlookers who were gathered at the construction site to witness the said groundbreaking ceremony.

Chairman Almazan expressed his satisfaction at this groundbreaking ceremony and his hope for the successful construction of the new building. He also shared a bright and breezy outlook—that the new building of the branch will significantly boost the Bank's competitiveness in the financial market, as he saw in his mind's eye that it will be a Mecca for more deposit-placement and loan-availability opportunities, as well as other banking and non-banking activities.

The end of the groundbreaking ceremony marked the start of the construction work. Project Engineer Angelito L. Perez said that the construction of the two-storey building is slated for seven months and its completion is expected by early or mid August, this year.

-Dodilyn Saltarin

FICOBank Maddela Breaches the P200-Million Mark in Deposits

With just about three months after turning over the branch management to Mr. Johnson B. Pascual, FICOBank Maddela breached the P200-million mark in deposits. The new branch management strove toward this end by keeping a laser-sharp focus on building deposit base.

There is an old Confucius saying that goes: "If you chase two or more rabbits, you catch none." This is especially true to FICOBank Maddela in its desire to create a dramatic impact on its banking operations. As they recede in putting their attention in so many directions and spreading their energy too thin, the branch management and staff members focused their sales efforts on deposit generation. They steered the branch toward reaching the P200-M level of deposits by: communicating the importance of deposits; using a compelling data to state the case; improving customer service; building relationship with existing and would-be clients; and making deposit as a "nice-to-have" complement to loan payout.

With a sense of purpose, and having no trouble in staying focused at a goal they are passionate about, BM Pascual and his staff have successfully wrapped up their deposit-generation task on August 18, 2010. Reaching the P200-million deposit level is no small feat. It is a sought-after development and a high-point achievement in the 12-year operational existence of FICOBank Maddela. In the entire branch network of the Bank, FICOBank Maddela is the second branch (along with FICOBank Santiago) that has reached the P200-million level in total deposits.

At that juncture, the branch is six-percent beyond standard with reference to the Bank's prescribed deposit mix. Actually, the newly-found focus on low-cost deposits is the most striking aspect of its earnings. Current and savings accounts (CASA) are vital to the Bank's profitability, particularly at a time that it cannot raise its lending rates due to intense competition. So, the best way to keep the net interest margin intact is to bring down the cost of deposits. FICOBank Maddela has made this possible by rapidly expanding its CASA portfolio. Among the banking units of FICOBank, the said branch owns the distinction of having the highest portfolio level of savings and current accounts.

Ditto about these deposit accounts, medium- and high-networth individuals, as well as local government units, business entities and even some non-commercial banks, keep their respective accounts with FICOBank Maddela and make numerous transactions with it during its daily banking hours. For the record, it has a total of 4,440 deposit accounts (as of end-August 2010), which represent 53.02 percent of the total household population of Maddela. With this data, it is quite obvious that FICOBank holds the biggest market share as to deposit-taking in the area.

To complement its deposit-taking activity, FICOBank will soon launch its first-ever ATM in Maddela Branch. As soon as it kicks off in dispensing cash, a high-volume of convenience banking transactions is in the offing. The people in the locality have been looking for this 24/7 banking service, as they are expected to get more out of it—account information flow, greater speed, more convenience and, possibly, even greater movement and management of their money.

With these developments, the branch team of FICOBank

Maddela is more inspired to turn its focus on the other key result areas, particularly on loan-making operation. As the branch's team leader and members have the intrinsic ability to think and act "outside the box," heaps of greater things are yet to come for FICOBank Maddela.

—Gigi Nueve

FICOBank Alicia Owns Better Edifice



After holding a temporary office in other location for few months, the management and staff of FICOBank-Alicia Branch are back to their original place, with a newly-renovated building that has an imposing appearance and size. Having an impressive office setting, the branch is now more conducive to a satisfying business deal and banking experience.

The Alicia Branch, being one of the oldest operating units of the Bank (established in 1996), proudly occupies its well-furnished building on November 3, 2010, through a simple, but memorable, blessing-and-thanksgiving rites. The occasion was graced by Mr. Flordelino A. Almazan, Chairman of the Board, Mr. Herminio G. Ocampo, President and CEO, Ms. Soledad S. Cabantac, Executive Vice President and COO, other officers of the Bank, and some guests from the local government unit and the business sector.

The renovation, which lasted for almost seven months (from February to August 2010) has resulted into a two-storey structure, with blue-tiled walls matched with one-way glass panels, projecting a classy image. A wide parking space is one of the add-on components of the said renovation. It provides the clients a better expediency and security for their vehicles. A built-in garden in front of the building, with geometrically-trimmed ornaments of plants and garden figurines, is also a pleasing sight to everyone.

The newly-refurbished building also boasts its most important feature—the interior design. Today, a cleaner and cozier office caters to the various banking interests and needs of the clients, visitors and employees. With the pristine quality of the furniture and fixtures, the new edifice of the Alicia Branch can now be regarded as one of the eye-catching offices that FICOBank has today.

Giving life and purpose to the branch is the people of FICOBank Alicia, under the sterling leadership of Ms. Ma. Pilar C. Atienza. Through her masterful steerage, the branch has been awarded as the second Best Performing Branch in 2006 and 2009. And with the initial tally of the 2010 performance ratings of the branches, FICOBank Alicia has the edge and the plus factors.

—Ruby Mabbayad

Start of a New Journey

By Shyrill T. Bilog



New job, new responsibility, new office and new co-employees. It's like being trapped in the middle of nowhere, wondering what I had gotten myself into. These were the first things that came into my mind while I was fixing my things on my assigned workspace. I never thought that, one day, I would be writing this way. Being an Accountancy graduate, I was trained to deal with matters involving

numbers, computation procedures, never-ending journal entries, debits, credits and the like.

My previous jobs with Fortune Medicare, Inc. and Land Bank of the Philippines were all related to my degree. Incongruously, I'm doing my first assigned task to write an article about myself and my experiences, as well as my personal aspirations and expectations with my new employer—FICOBank. I am a bit inexperienced for this, as one might say.

I really don't have much experience in writing, more so in planning. In spite of that, the management has still selected me to fill up the vacant position of a Planning Assistant. Maybe, it might have spotted my potential to be developed for such post, as I signified my willingness to be trained and my intent to further hone my competence during the three-stage interview sessions that I went through. Of course, I know that Dr. Robert Palac, my head in the Business Development Department, will mold me to become a better technical assistant and a better person as well.

When I started my training last January 3, 2011, first working day of the year, I supposed to be like a child clinging to her parents on the first day of school. To my surprise, many friendly faces approached me, as if we are longtime classmates. I was touched by the way they welcomed me. I said to myself, with FICOBank, I found a new family.

To be able to get a good start and gain an understanding about the Bank and its operations, along with other important aspects, the Human Resource and Administration Department, headed by Ms. Carlyn Vitoria, required me to undergo a five-day orientation session. For this reason, I would like to express my sincerest thanks to her for the knowledge I have gained, particularly on the corporate culture and essential work attitudes that a FICOBank employee must possess. I was not alone in the said orientation. It was on that training activity where I met Mr. Norwind Bontigao, my colleague, who was assigned later as Clearing Assistant of the Area Office in Central Luzon. I was so thankful because, with him, I found a companion. We have had a wonderful and wisdom-filled time together by exchanging our ideas and perceptions.

I was turned over to the Business Development Department on 1/11/11. This is it! The moment of truth. I have to perform my job responsibly in a way that I should be an asset of the company and not a liability. I am hoping that I could surmount all the trials and challenges that lie ahead, as I track the path of becoming a better Planning Assistant. Equipped with a strong determination and a will to go on despite the obstacles, I'll give my best effort to come up with, not only a job well done, but, a better-than-expected performance. As a beginner, I am not yet a good writer and an adept planner. But, at least, I know I could make a step toward a journey of a thousand miles

with the help of my superior and co-staff in BDD, namely, Sir Jackie and Ma'am Kat.

In closing, I would like to thank my FICOBank family for choosing me among the hundreds of applicants to become part of its banking corps. Thank you for giving me a chance to share my knowledge and skills. I'm looking forward to an exciting journey with you, be it smooth or rough. I know that this maiden piece of writing would not be the last, but the start of something better!

Aiming at Better Things in Everything



Simple and nothing so special. This is how Maureen Lyn H. Sigua, Mau to friends, usually describes her self and her life. But to people who know her well, she is well-loved and someone special.

The eldest in a brood of three, she grew up in a simple and peaceful life in her home province of Bataan. After finishing a degree in BS Accountancy, she was previously employed in two other private companies before finally joining the FICOBank family in May 2008. Coincidentally, it was her 28th birthday when she started her first day with the Bank.

Starting off as Loan Bookkeeper, she was made a Management Trainee after only a few months. Her potentials did not go unnoticed by the Bank. Initially wanting only to be one of the staff, she was able to discover something she never thought she had—a leadership potential. This was largely due to her superior in the branch, whom she treated as a second father and a friend. Her views were also changed. She now wants to become an inspiration to those who treat everyday work as just simple task. She emphasizes the importance of having passion for work—loving it and showing concern for the whole organization. She shares that every obstacle should be considered as a learning tool for improvement.

As one of the pioneering team members of the Dinalupihan Branch, she relates their difficulties during the "introductory period" of the Bank. Many times, during their marketing activities, people would tease: "*Bakit pico, wala bang kinalabaw o indiyán?*" They were obviously referring to local mango varieties, when being told of the name of the Bank. They would then spell out repeatedly what FICO stands for. Patience and love for the Bank were what kept them to maintain their "cool," just so FICOBank will be known in the locality. A daunting and challenging task indeed!

Mau tied the knot at the apt age of 29 with her longtime boyfriend, Ryann, a supervisor of the giant Asia Brewery, Inc. She relished the pains and gains of motherhood after giving birth to a baby boy in September 2010.

She plans to embark on a continuing education through training, or if possible, through graduate school, if given the chance. For her, satisfaction is always governed by one's aim at better things in everything one does.

—MA Quidasol

A One-of-a-Kind Gem



Recognizing a gem when it sees one, Rosa R. Andres was picked as one of the staff of the budding bank. This was toward the end of 1997 when there were only three FICOBank branches, all located in the province of Isabela.

A couple of years earlier, Rosa finished a degree in Accountancy from the Isabela State University. Shortly after joining the FICOBank family, she pursued a master's degree in Business Management from the University of La Salette.

She was one of the beneficiaries of a satellite graduate program of the said university, in coordination and with the support of the Bank, which offered its premises as off-site venue of the graduate school.

Starting as Bookkeeper, Rosa rose through the ranks. After a couple of brief reassignments to other branches, she was back at the Jones Branch and later became its Branch Accountant for seven years. "This was where I met my lifetime partner, Ruel, a self-employed entrepreneur," she recalls. "Ruel is into swine-raising, a livelihood project that he hopes will be instrumental in forming a brighter future for our family," she adds. Their union is blessed with two wonderful children. They now call San Agustin, Isabela their home.

Taking in more responsibilities, she was assigned to the office of EVP/COO Soledad S. Cabantac. For several months, she was a Roving Technical Assistant, making the rounds of the Bank's branches and assuming the roles of on-leave employees, such as tellering, jewelry appraisal, general clerkship and bookkeeping. "In every assignment, I always see to it that I'm friendly and respectful with a smiling face. If you love your work, you'll do it cooperatively and humbly with everybody. If you are happy and contented with it, it will show. And you will care for it," Rosa shares.

In mid-2008, she was selected as one of the trainees for the Branch Service Officer Training Program, and was posted in Cabanatuan (Nueva Ecija) Branch as Assistant Branch Manager for more than a year. "It was hard being away from my family. Yet I did my job diligently and honestly. FICOBank is also my family now. My superiors are good to me and they are supportive of my work. The least that I can do is to perform my duties and responsibilities efficiently," she declares. The said training program further honed Rosa to tackle managerial responsibilities, in addition to the numerous training and capability-building activities that she has completed.

-KA Alip & MA Quidasol

The Two Sides of My Life

By Amor A. Bartolome



The story of my life mirrors the light and dark sides. Coming in single and tying the knot several months later are considered as the highlights of my stay with FICOBank. Nine months after joining the Bank, I married the beautiful Lourdes Seredio, with whom I have two children. During the ceremony, all directors and managers of the Bank stood as our principal sponsors. This represents the light side of my life.

After finishing an accountancy degree from the Isabela State University in 1995, I joined the Mallig Plains Rural Bank, Inc. as Loan Officer. I only stayed

there for less than a year. I found a home in FICOBank immediately after. This was the time when the Bank only had three branches, all located in Isabela. I started as Loan Officer and occupied other positions such as Credit and Collection Head, Senior Loan Officer, and Asset Management Assistant until my appointment as Head of the Collection Unit of the Asset Management and Legal Department in 2006. I hold the position up to this day.

A tragic point in my life occurred when I suffered a stroke in July 2004 that left me paralyzed. With moral and financial support from my family, friends and co-employees, especially the officers and directors of the Bank, I was able to recover and go back to my job after two months. The stroke, however, made me dependent on drugs. Shortly, I was diagnosed as having renal failure. This was a serious illness, a condition that was hard to manage and harder to accept at such a young age.

In February 2005, my family and I decided to seek treatment through alternative medicine. The treatment worked and I was well for three straight years. However, in December 2008, the malfunctioning of my kidney recurred. I was again hospitalized, this time, for three straight weeks. Hemodialysis was also required, a very stressful and financially-taxing procedure that I have to undergo regularly since that time up to the present.

Aside from being a complicated and inconvenient therapy though, hemodialysis is not the cure as far as my case is concerned. I was told by doctors that the course of last resort is kidney transplant—a very prohibitive medical procedure both in cost and the search for a suitable and compatible organ donor. This represents the dark side of my life. I am very grateful though, that in all these events in my life, the whole FICOBank family, especially Chairman Almazan, Vice Chairman Somera, all the directors, President/CEO Ocampo, EVP/COO Cabantac, SVP Molina (my immediate boss), SVP Rico and DH Maninantan, is giving its undying support and understanding. With the blessings of the Almighty, I hope to win this battle of my life, be on the road to recovery and return to normal work in due time.

A Standout Employee Worthy of Emulation



As a child, she dreamt of becoming a banker. Today, she is living her dream and gaining recognitions because of her exemplary performance. Her love for her work makes her a standout employee that is worthy of emulation by others.

Analyn R. Calacien was an early achiever in her school days. She graduated as salutatorian in high school and a dean's lister in college. She lives a happy family life. She is married to Nathaniel, a management graduate carving a career in sales. The couple is blessed with two wonderful children—Krysha and Krhyss Henrich.

This year marks a decade of fruitful service to the Bank by Analyn. Joining FICOBANK at the turn of the century, she started as an Assistant at the Treasury Department. After a few years, she was selected to undergo the Branch Service Officer Training Program. After hurdling the rigorous training and completing the prescribed period, she became a full-fledged ABM.

Analyn is one of the "jewels" of the Bank. During FICOBANK's 28th Founding Anniversary in September 2004, she was awarded as an Outstanding Employee—an apt recognition for someone who gives her time and talent for the betterment of the organization. Such distinction is not surprising from someone who has been a consistent honor student.

Looking back, Analyn says that her stay with the Bank is like a capsule of experiences. There were times when clients showed rude attitudes in transacting business with her, but she remained calm, composed and professional. The feeling of neutralizing the situation is rewarding, as she keeps on building better relationship with the clients. "We know for a fact that they are the reason why the Bank is established and sustained, so we need to reciprocate their support. Although sometimes, they act irritably, we need to deal with them with utmost respect and cordiality," she says.

The Bank's expansion in recent years also made an impression in her career when the new General Ledger System was in its pilot-testing stage at the Head Office. "I remember I was pregnant with my second child. We would extend until 9 to 10 p.m. so that we could understand and study well how to use the new system," she relates. "Whenever a new system or a product is in its initial stage, we were always involved in the process," she adds.

Analyn would like to be known as a simple, but hardworking, employee who values honesty. "I would like every FICOBANKer to uphold the virtue of honesty in their work because if everyone does, I know everybody benefits," she says. "Resist temptations. Never sacrifice your career over money. I believe that we, as employees, were factors in the transformation of the Bank into a bigger and stronger one. If it is secure, then we must also be secure," she adds.

Just like every good mother, Analyn hopes to provide her children with the best that life can offer. "With hard work, I was able to help all my siblings go to school. I hope to do the same with my own kids," she says.

—MA Quidasol

Trying to Stay Humble Despite Her Achievements



There are many reasons why a person sticks to a job or a company. It may be the pay, position, perks or the place. Whatever the reason, it is not often that one encounters someone who has remained in the same company for a relatively lengthy period.

Rolangelin "Gigi" G. Nueve has been with FICOBANK for over 13 years now. After obtaining a degree in BS Accountancy from the Isabela State University in 1996, she joined the organization less than a year

later. "It was my first job. I started as General Clerk in the Accounting Department. I became the Loan Bookkeeper afterward. The Bank was then operating at the CAVADECO building. There were only three branches then," she recalls. After the Bank opened its branch in Maddela, Quirino, she was assigned there. She became the Cashier and later the Branch Accountant for seven straight years.

"I met my husband, Edwin, in Maddela. He's an employee of the local government unit of my adopted hometown. We seldom go on vacation to my native Echague, Isabela except on long weekends. During his free time, he tends to our farm. We are blessed with two young sons. We're a happy family," she reveals.

Gigi shares her experiences during her early years with the Bank. "We used the radio in transmitting our reports, especially the inward checks and proof sheets. Things became better when telephone lines were installed," she says. "Now, we are very fortunate that with the advances in technology, information is within our fingertips using the internet. Reports are transmitted in seconds through skype," she adds.

In 2006, after more than nine years with the Bank, Gigi was chosen to undergo the Branch Service Officer Training course. She was posted at the Alicia Branch for her on-the-job training. Successfully completing it, she was again reunited with the Maddela Branch where she was designated as full-fledged Assistant Branch Manager up to August 9, 2010. The following day, she started to take charge of the operations of FICOBANK Diffun, as Extension Office Manager.

"Whatever achievements that I've accomplished, I try to stay humble and simple. I'd like to think of myself as a good employee who practices good customer service, and with good values. I know that the management is aware of my performance. It values good work and honesty. That is why it cares for its employees a lot. Proof of this is a very competitive compensation and more bonuses," she exclaims.

—MA Quidasol

Aspiring for a Better Station in Life

By Dionico A. Marquez, Jr.



Always think positive. Adopting such attitude greatly helps in every endeavor. Being born poor is not a reason to remain so. Rather, it serves to inspire one to aspire for a better station in life.

My parents are farmers. They rely on farming for our main source of income. Being the fourth of five siblings, I had experienced a childhood characterized by economic deprivation. Although my parents tried their best to provide us with the basic necessities in life, we were happy

just to go by three square meals a day. I cannot say I was satisfied since most of the time I went to grade school with only my pencil and notebook. But such did not hinder me to excel, as I maintained top honors until graduation. I also placed in the top 10 during my secondary years.

Fascinated with the design of structures and their construction, I dreamt of becoming a civil engineer. Due to financial constraints, my father advised me to take up a course in Accountancy instead. This course was shorter and relatively cheaper. At the Isabela State University, Echague Campus, I was able to enjoy tuition fee discounts granted to children of barangay officials. I also became an academic scholar for a year. Since my parents could only provide for my daily school allowance, I worked in the farm during my free time to earn extra income for my other needs.

The same financial problems hounded me even after completing my course in college. My original plan of working at once and then saving the needed amount for the review and the licensure exams for accountants did not fully materialize up to this day. I first joined the local government unit of San Isidro (Isabela), but did not stay long due to a minimal salary. Transferring to PR Bank was not much different either, in terms of remuneration. However, as Internal Auditor, I learned a lot, especially from our head who is a retired examiner of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas. With the knowledge gained, I developed further my self-confidence. Going to other places was a bonus. My only problem with the management was the way it treated its employees.

Joining FICOBANK in 2002, I was hired as Credit Analyst, a position very distinct from my previous work. It was a challenge and motivation for me to perform the job well, especially since there were only two Credit Department staff then. Aside from conducting the final evaluation on loan applications forwarded for approval, our department was also tasked to develop new loan products and improve existing ones to fit with the changing market conditions. As the Bank expanded, promotions and lateral transfers left me as the sole Senior Credit Analyst in the department. New personnel were likewise hired as replacements. It was during this time that I experienced going to far-flung places, which I could never imagine would exist. The difficulty of reaching those places almost made me quit and feel pity for myself.

Through the initiatives of the Bank, a six-month Management Training Program was conducted to identify and train employees with potentials for higher positions. I emerged at the top with only two of us passing the program. This paved the way for my recognition and designation as Product Manager. This was later changed into Unit Head when the Credit Department underwent reorganization. In 2007, I was able to pass the licensure exams for Real Estate Appraisers, administered by the Professional Regulation Commission.

The Bank's expansion initiative created a deficiency in manpower

in our department. Most of our trained staff were pulled out and assigned to newly-opened branches. Being undermanned led to a more challenging work setting. Working into the night and even on weekends and holidays was no longer unusual, but a normal one. This went on over several years. Nonetheless, I can proudly say we've done well despite the numerous challenges encountered, even leading to nightmarish arguments with the heads of some operating units.

The quest to professionalize further the personnel of the Credit Department is a continuing process. Training courses are conducted on property appraisal, credit analysis and loan structuring. Development and modification of loan products, in coordination with the Business Development Department of the Bank, are also nonstop.

When I planned to have my own family, I have committed myself to pursue a couple of things. Firstly, that my future kids will not experience the same hardships I had endured. Lastly, without exerting undue pressure on them, that they will fulfill my dreams of becoming a civil engineer and a certified public accountant. With my wife, Charity, by my side, and the support of the Bank, I hope that my dreams are within arm's reach.

Being an Employer of Choice

Most companies covet the title EMPLOYER OF CHOICE. Aptly defined, they are "...great employers, employers who people clearly value working for." After much "Googling," I have found a UK-based organization, bearing the same name (www.employers-of-choice.org), dedicated in assisting companies to become such. It has these six wonderful principles that make up an Employer of Choice...

The Six Principles of CHOICE:

CARING ABOUT PEOPLE ensures they feel valued, respected and appreciated;

HONESTY AND FAIRNESS build mutual trust and respect;

OPEN COMMUNICATION enables a positive and productive environment;

INVOLVING PEOPLE strengthens their commitment to successful outcomes;

COACHING AND ASSISTING people to achieve their potential is a win-win approach; and

ETHICAL PRACTICE reinforces belief in the organization.

At this time when FICOBANK is leveling up its whole operation, it is now focused on getting, keeping and growing great people. The abovementioned principles are very good scorecards to follow to become an employer of choice. Along this, the Bank is in search of the best-qualified applicants to be nurtured to grow their respective potentials, along with the growth of the whole organization. This is not an easy job, but this is what the Bank, as a whole, has committed to do. And it has no other way but to continue and still become better in being an employer of choice. Hereon, it will pursue to perfect the practice of getting and developing people who will have **great performance** and who **will be greatly rewarded**.

-HRAD

Marketing Sorties: Part II

By Katrina Ann V. Alip



In my previous article, I have written down the importance of leafleting in introducing our Bank's products and services. I have also shared our stories when we "intrude" strangers just to deliver the good news from our Bank. For sometimes, we continue doing this routine every Wednesday, so that those interested individuals whom we have handed our precious flyers could visit our branch/extension office on the following day.

The year 2010 has passed and we have visited various places in Isabela and some part of Cagayan. I am proud to say that for a few months, I have reached some of the remotest places in the province to carry out the assigned tasks in our department. Together with my colleagues and our superior, we headed the roughest road, dirtiest paddies and even the no-signal barrios. We met different kinds of people and even befriended with some of them. We had a savor of their cultures and even tasted their delicacies. These are sometimes the bonuses that we get from our marketing activities and it's really invaluable. I suppose, some of them may have availed themselves of our products and services after reading our flyers.

Spending our five-Wednesday marketing sorties in Echague is very memorable, as the place is one of my favorite destinations. In one of our marketing days in that municipality, we happened to visit a middle-east barangay, but not that it has a resemblance with the real geographical region in Asia and Africa. The name of the place sounds like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as the barangay is called Arabiat. To take a souvenir of our visit, we seized the opportunity of taking photographs of ourselves, with the place's sign board (?) serving as our backdrop. We also visited Barangay Pagasa, also in Echague. It is a remote place, but with electricity of course. In those barangays, we met hundreds of people who could be possible clients of our Bank. Some are sincere while others are not. Some looks interested while others show no interest at all. It is also funny to share that there are also those people who reject accepting our flyers while others are eager to have a copy of such marketing collateral.

More than the happy experiences we had, we also suffered some setbacks. In one of our assignments in Tuguegarao City, I happened to give a couple with complete set of our marketing collaterals. When the man asked what it is all about, I answered him, but with my voice so soft he didn't hear me and assumed that I did not respond. He uttered words so rude and threw the leaflets that I gave his wife. If these were the kind of people we sometimes meet, we just shrugged our shoulders, as if nothing happens. Then, we continue our works.

As of this writing, the latest places we've visited were the barrios of Tuguegarao City. We postponed providing marketing support to our operating units in Isabela, as during that time we are about to open FICOBank Tuguegarao. For a month, since November 2010, we have distributed flyers to the barangays of Tuguegarao like Tagga, Gosi Norte and Sur, Libag Norte and Sur, Balzain East and West, and Centro 1 to 6, as well as in the poblacion area of Peñaflanca, to introduce our Bank among the people. We did this with the intention that our presence in the market will be felt even before our extension

office officially opened.

This year, we are again scheduled for a series of marketing activities, but, this time, we are back in Isabela to complete our unfinished business with our field and extension offices, as well as their respective servicing branches. With a new companion joining us in our department, I'm sure our marketing sorties will be better!

Before I finally end my article, let me extend my gratitude to the staff of our operating units in Alicia, San Mateo, Santiago, Tumauni, Ilagan, Echague and Tuguegarao for their full support during our visit in their place. We appreciate your hospitality and kindness. Thank you very much! Muwaaaahhhh!

The FICOBank Multivitamin

By Jackie M. Juan

In any endeavor, a person with a healthy mind and body has always the greatest chance to succeed. However, it does not end there. Our body comprises not only the physical, but also the spiritual and emotional aspects, among others. Hence, nurturing the "other" aspects is of great importance in creating a balanced and healthier life.

As shared by Pastor Jojo Julian of the Church of God in his message during the FICOBank's 34th Founding Anniversary Celebration and Special General Assembly last September 10, 2010, the complete multivitamin needed by our spiritual being in pursuit of a sounder and happier life is actually the cheapest medicine, as it costs us no money at all (only the determination and faith in God). And this has been tested and attested by the people who actually brought FICOBank to success, as they have all together taken the essential spiritual vitamins—the FICOBank Multivitamin.

The FICOBank Multivitamin is made up of complete vitamins, from A to Z, as follows:

- A - We are **accepted** by God;
- B - We are **beloved** by God;
- C - We are **chosen** by God;
- D - We are **delivered** by the Lord;
- E - We are **enlightened** from all the worries that we face around us;
- F - We are **forgiven** from our sins;
- G - We have the **grace** of God;
- H - We have the **heritage** coming from the Lord;
- I - There is always the **inheritance** that the Lord has placed upon us;
- J - We are **justified** because of the blood of Jesus that washed all of our sins;
- K - We have the **knowledge** that comes from the Lord;
- L - We have the **land** of God;
- M - We have the **mercy** of God;
- N - There is the **nearness** of God;
- O - We have **oneness** with the Lord;
- P - We have **peace** of mind;
- Q - We have the **quickening** of the spirit;
- R - We are **redeemed** by the Lord;
- S - We are **sealed** with the Holy Spirit;
- T - We are **treasured** by God;
- U - We are **united** with the believers and other people;
- V - We are **validated** as true children of the Lord;
- W - We have the **wisdom** coming from the Lord;
- X - We are **exalted** by other believers;
- Y - We keep on **yearning** for Him;
- Z - Because the **zeal** of God is keeping us vigorous all the time.

For us to be healthier without respite, let us always take the FICOBank Multivitamin. It's absolutely free!

Sa Kuko ng Kahirapan

Ni Johnson B. Pascual



Dito ang mundo ni Alona, kasama ang magulang.

Sari-saring amoy, maanta, malansa, amoy burak at amoy ng pawis ng mga taong di alintana ang pagod at sikip ng kapaligiran para kumita ng kaunting halaga—halagang pamatid uhaw at gutom maitawid lang ang pang-araw-araw na pangangailangan. Ganyan ang mundong ginagalawan ng mga taong-palengke na may iba't-ibang pinagkakakitaan, mula sa gamit at kailangang pangkusina, mga tsit-tsirya, mga pagkaing-kalyeng di mo mawari kung malinis ang pagkagawa o ito'y maiging kainin dahil mura at mabili, at madaling pagkaperahan. Ilan ba sa atin ang nakaranas na ng ganitong sitwasyon? Marami sa ating mga kapatid ang kapus-palad at kung minsan kahit kumapit na sa patalim para mabuhay ay ginagawa na.

Nakaranas ka na ba ng hirap, yung halos di mabuo ang tatlong kainan sa isang araw? Yung may gusto kang kainin o maranasan pero wala kang pambili, masakit di ba? Pero sa isang taong positibo ang pananaw sa buhay, ang mga simpleng bagay na kayang abutin ay isa nang tagumpay. Balikan natin ang ilang kaganapan nang ako'y ginawang taong-bahay sa isang sangay namin sa Cabanatuan City. Dito ay napag-iba natin ang buhay ng isang batang magdi-dyaryo at nalathala at naipalabas pa sa isang TV network ang kanyang payak at mahirap na kalagayan sa buhay. Mula noon ay nagbago na ang buhay ni June Lugod.

Dito sa Maddela, Quirino ay marami ring pwedeng maging June Lugod, mga batang may malalaking pangarap sa kabila ng kahirapan sa buhay. Isa na ryan si Alona, isang batang nasa unang taon sa Maddela Comprehensive High School na madalas kong nakikita dito sa tabi ng bangko. Ako'y natutuwa pero naaawa dahil sa kanyang murang katawan ay kasali na siya sa pagtataguyod ng ikabubuhay ng pamilya sa pamamagitan nang pagtitinda ng gulay pagkagaling sa paaralan—na sana ay nasa bahay na upang mag-aral ng leksyon sa eskwela. Siya ay isa lamang sa mga maraming musmos na maagang nasasabak sa hirap ng buhay.

Sa dami ng perang nasasayang dahil sa katiwalian, paggasta nang walang katuturan maging sa lokal o national, kung 'yang mga perang nawawaldas ay maipamahagi kaya sa mga ganitong kapus-palad? Marami na sanang batang gaya ni Alona ang hindi nahaharap sa mga maaring sapitin ng kanilang murang katawan. Ilan pa kaya ang mga batang maagang nakikibaka sa kahirapan? Dahil sa ipinakitang sigla at positibong pananaw, binigyan ko siya ng halagang panimula para makapag-impok. At ang bawat ikidat na ibibigay sa pamilya niya ay tatapatan ko ng halagang idadagdag niya sa P100.00 niyang Batang Masinop Savings Account.

"Ang mahal naman ng gulay mo! Lanta na nga ang gulay mo ang

mahal pa!" Yan ang mga katagang madalas marinig mula sa mga barat na mamimili. Di lang nila maisip ang hirap at sakripisyo ng batang gustong umunlad o maibsan ang nararanasang kahirapan. Batid sa mga mata ng batang ito ang lihim na panibugho pero wala siyang magawa, maliban sa matamis na ngiti na pwedeng isukli sabay sabi ng: *"Tulong na lang po niyo sa akin mam, dagdag pangkain at pambili ng gamit eskwela at para rin po sa mga kapatid ko."* Di ka ba naantig sa mga tapat na sagot na yan? Kung hindi, marahil ay may puso kang bakal. Ang gulay naman ay inaangkat pa ng mga magulang kaya magkano lang ang kita? Katulong ang tatay na naglalagag ng gulay sa isang "traysikad" na lumang-luma na, kalawagin at may gomang nakakalbo pa. Kung ikaw ang namimili ng gulay ni Alona, babaratin mo pa ba? Baka sa awa mo sa pamilya ay dadagdagan mo pa siguro, pero likas sa ating mga Pinoy ang barat na may kasamang pang-uuyam. Alona, 'wag kang mag-alala. Sa mga kagaya mong pinahihirapan ng tadhana ay may naghihintay na gantimpala. Ako man ay galing din sa pamilyang mahirap pero ako'y nagsikap para di maranasang muli ang nakaraan. Pero sadyang may mga kapatid tayong mainggitin at utak-talangka. Kaya marami pa rin ang mga naghihirap sa kabila ng ibayong pagsisikap.

Sa iyong araw-araw na pakikibaka, napansin ka na ba ni Punong Barangay, mga Kagawad ng Sangguniang Barangay o Bayan para sana ang kanilang programang pang-ahon sa kahirapan ay kanilang pag-ibayuhin sa tulong ng kaban ng bayan.



'Yan si Alona kasama ang maliit na kapatid.

Ako'y naniniwala na sa halagang isang daan piso ay ating nasimulan ang bagong daan para sa bagong umaga, at sana'y may makabasa sa kwentong ito para maantig ang kanilang puso. Nalaman ko pa, Ne', na sa lumang barung-barong kayo nakatira, na inyong pinagtitiyagaan ang tulo ng ulan pag ito'y bumubuhos at ang di-gaanong magandang kapaligiran. Ako'y hanga sa iyong sipag at tiyaga. Manalig ka sa Panginoon na ika'y bibiyayan ng malakas na katawan at malinis na kaisipan upang matulungan ang iyong magulang at mga kapatid. Ako'y kasama sa mga maraming nananalangin sa iyong tagumpay.

Ang iyong kwento ay aking inilathala sa FICOnnect at ilalathala pa sa Quirino Today at iba pang pahayagan upang magsilbing inspirasyon sa mga batang tulad mo—mahirap man o mayaman. Pinagpala ka dahil marunong kang makibaka. Pagdating ng araw, ang tagumpay ay napakatamis dahil ito'y iyong pinaghirapan. Lagi mong isipin at tanawin ang iyong nakaraan at pinanggalingan kapag ika'y nasa rurok na ng

tagumpay, at pagyamin mo 'yan dahil 'yan ay regalo ng Maykapal. Hindi rin masama kung ang iyong kwento sa buhay ay manumbalik sa iba pang batang di nabigyan nang sapat na pagkakataong mabuhay nang mariwasa. Sana'y di mo rin ipagkait ang natatangi mong karanasan at malagintong kwento ng iyong buhay.



Ito ang lumang "traysikad" ng pamilya.

Oasis of a Far-Place Success

The Story of Agustina Ruiz



Agustina Ruiz shows her oasis of success.

Reaching her business place is not easy. During the summer months, the dusty and unpaved road annoys every traveler traversing the several kilometer stretch of a semi-forested region. The worst scenario that would surely upset strangers would be during rainy days, especially if the waters from the nearby river rise and *bancas* begin to appear in the place. And with the absence of safe and secure conveyance, one would surely refuse paying the place a visit. For an area where business is likely to fail, the likes of Agustina Ruiz coming to fore breaks the barrier and creates an opportunity for unprecedented business success while helping her townsfolk. And just like an oasis in the middle of the desert, her humble grocery serves as the melting point of a large population, which needs her goods for their living.

Personal Background

Agustina Apigo Ruiz, 35 years old, is a native of Narra (National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Area), Echague, Isabela, one of the places founded under Republic Act 1160 of 1954, enacted by the then President of the Philippines, Ramon Magsaysay. The place was given to poor families, from across the country, which are willing to inhabit the area. As a child, she spent her days living in a community with people of diverse ethnicities. Initial life for her is difficult, as the place is totally underdeveloped, with scarce water supply, where electricity is a myth, and going to the market in town would took them four hours of walking, and another four hours in going back.

When she was in the grade school, her parents separated. Though life wasn't easy at first, she was able to accept her family's fate and maintained a good relationship with her father. To help her mother, of whom she lived with, she worked in the farm and sold goods like vegetables in the neighborhood. When she was to enter college, she went to Manila and attended the Adamson University, taking up a degree in computer engineering. When she was in her second year, she met Romulo Castro Ruiz, who was a student from a nearby university, of whom she fell in love with and eventually became her husband. Things happen unexpectedly and the two were unable to finish their studies. Later, they ended up

living together in a small house in the metropolitan. To cope with their financial needs, she sold barbecues and vegetables while Romulo worked as a welder, cart puller (*kargador*) and, later, production crewman of Dunkin Donuts. Since the income they were earning still can't satisfy their needs, they decided to go back to Narra and started their luck.

Although life in Narra wasn't easy at first, the couple held on each other and found ways to reverse the futile scenario that they were into. For some time, Agustina sold good items like *tuyo* (dried fish) and bananas. She also became an AVON agent. Little did they know that these would be her stepping stone for venturing into a successful business undertaking, together with her husband.

Business Milieu

Just when the couple grew their earnings, Agustina decided to start a small business that is engaged in selling feeds and *darak*. Since her earning was not sufficient for their initial capital, she agreed to sell the same items owned by his brother-in-law. She received commission in return and saved a portion of it.

Aware of the situation in their place, she borrowed P15,000.00 from her cousin to start up a *sarisari* store, as, during that time, stores were very rare in their place. At first, Agustina experienced difficulty in managing her store because she doesn't have enough patrons and capital, but because of her good customer dealings, she was able to have a lot of loyal customers. Initially, she became a retailer of grocery items. Through the course of time, the business was able to serve one barangay, which became two and then four.

When some of her dealers asked for cheques, as mode of payments, Agustina sought help from FICOBank, which she heard from some acquaintances, by opening a checking account. At times, she was just a depositor, but when her business needed additional capital and customers came in hefty with bulking purchases from her grocery, Agustina decided to avail herself of FICOBank's Microfinance Loan and had luckily been granted by the bank. These made her business bigger, as merchandise inventories in her store were more than before.

In 2007, Agustina and her husband decided to become a wholesaler and dealer of bananas and pineapples, which they outsourced from the neighborhood. With another microfinance loan from FICOBank, plus their personal savings, they were able to purchase a secondhand elf that is used for transporting bananas and pineapples in the nearby towns and outside the province.

But because of poor infrastructure, some of their deliveries would sometimes perish before being sold. This worsens when typhoons ravaged the area, as some of the bridges were covered with water and the only resort to transport the deliveries is through alternative routes that are even farther. Problems also arose in their business, as some of their customers can't afford to pay the goods that they owed from her grocery store. But instead of treating this as a problem, Agustina finds it as an opportunity to grow her business and help her townsfolk. Instead of accepting cash, as



From Ahem's Collections

Let's Make Life Light

Curse

A man is driving up a steep, narrow mountain road. A woman is driving down the same road. As they pass each other, the woman leans out of the window and yells "PIG!"

The man immediately leans out of his window and replies, "BITCH!"

They each continue on their way, and... as the man rounds the next corner, he crashes into a pig in the middle of the road... and dies immediately.

If only men would listen.

Ten Husband

A lawyer married a woman who had previously divorced 10 husbands. On their wedding night, she told her new husband, "Please be gentle; I'm still a virgin."

"What?" said the puzzled groom. "How can that be if you've been married 10 times?"

"Well, husband #1 was a sales representative; he kept telling me how great it was going to be."

"Husband #2 was in software services; he was never really sure how it was supposed to function, but he said he'd look into it and get back to me."

"Husband #3 was from field services; he said everything had been checked out diagnostically, but he just couldn't get the system up."

"Husband #4 was in telemarketing; even though he knew he had the order, didn't know when he would be able to deliver."

"Husband #5 was an engineer; he understood the basic process, but wanted three years to research, implement and design a new state-of-the-art method."

"Husband #6 was from finance and administration; he thought he knew how, but he wasn't sure whether it was his job or not."

"Husband #7 was in marketing; although he had a product, he was never sure how to position it."

"Husband #8 was a psychiatrist; all he ever did was talk about it."

"Husband #9 was a gynecologist; all he did was look at it."

"Husband #10 was a stamp collector; all he ever did was... God, I miss him!"

"But now that I've married you, I'm really excited!" "Good," said the husband, "but, why?"

"Duh; you're a LAWYER. This time I KNOW I'm gonna get screwed!"

Better Relationship

A man walked into a therapist's office looking very depressed. "Doc, you've got to help me. I can't go on like this."

"What's the problem?" the doctor inquired.

"Well, I'm 35 years old and I still have no luck with the ladies. No matter how hard I try, I just seem to scare them away."

"My friend, this is not a serious problem. You just need to work on your self-esteem. Each morning, I want you to get up and run to the bathroom mirror. Tell yourself that you are a good person, a fun person, and an attractive person. But say it with real conviction. Within a week, you'll have women buzzing all around you."

The man seemed content with this advice and walked out of the office a bit excited. Three weeks later he returned with the same downtrodden expression on his face.

"Did my advice not work?" asked the doctor.

"It worked alright. For the past several weeks, I've enjoyed some of the best moments in my life with the most fabulous looking women."

"So, what's your problem?"

"I don't have a problem," the man replied. "My wife does."

An Evening Drive

A man bought a new Mercedes to celebrate his wife leaving him and was out on the interstate for a nice evening drive.

The top was down, the breeze was blowing through what was left of his hair and he decided to open it up. As the needle jumped up to 80 mph, he suddenly saw flashing red and blue lights behind him.

"There's no way they can catch a Mercedes," he thought to himself and opened it up further. The needle hit 90, 100... Then the reality of the situation hit him. "What am I doing?" he thought and pulled over.

The cop came up to him, took his license without a word and examined it and the car.

"It's been a long hard day. This is the end of my shift and it's Friday the 13th. I don't like more paperwork. I don't need the frustration or the overtime. So if you can give me a really good excuse for your driving that I haven't heard before, you can go."

The guy thinks about it for a second and says, "Last week my nagging wife ran off with a cop. I was afraid you were trying to give her back!"

"Have a nice weekend," said the officer.

The Gifts

It was at the end of the school year, and a kindergarten teacher was receiving gifts from her pupils.

The florist's son handed her a gift. She shook it, held it overhead, and said, "I bet I know what it is. Some flowers." "That's right" the boy said, "but how did you know?" "Oh, just a wild guess," she said.

The next pupil was the candy shop owner's daughter. The teacher held her gift overhead, shook it, and said, "I bet I can guess what it is. A box of sweets." "That's right, but how did you know?" asked the girl. "Oh, just a wild guess," said the teacher.

The next gift was from the son of the liquor store owner. The teacher held the package overhead, but it was leaking. She touched a drop of the leakage with her finger and touched it to her tongue. "Is it wine?" she asked. "No," the boy replied, with some excitement. The teacher repeated the process, taking a larger drop of the leakage to her tongue. "Is it champagne?" she asked. "No," the boy replied, with more excitement. The teacher took one more taste before declaring, "I give up, what is it?" With great glee, the boy replied, "It's a puppy!"



Source: www.101funjokes.com

Oasis of...

from page 20

payment from her very poor customers, she welcomes accepting goods like bananas, pineapples and pigs whose prices are equivalent to the amount they owed. This made her even more endearing to the eyes of her customers.

Today, Agustina and her husband are busy managing their business. Since their income now comes bigger, they also started growing pigs for slaughter, which give them another good business opportunity. They also employ 10 people today in their businesses, all of whom are being paid well and treated like family members. Though their business has long way to travel, the two believe that through their good sense of business undertaking, they can soon reach every success that they dreamt of.

Business Plans

Agustina plans to expand her business by putting an extension to her grocery store, which now serves more than five barangays. She also plans to run a bakery store in their place. The promising opportunity in her piggery also made her plan to study and try the meat-processing business someday.

Success Factors

According to Agustina, what made her business successful is her compassionate treatment to her customers. She also added that being optimistic, honest and helpful—and a risk-taker in a positive way—enables her to grow her business bigger. Also, she admits that without the support of her family, especially her husband and children, her business would have not been for what it is today and in the future.

Social Responsibility

In a place where majority of the people belongs to the marginalized sector of the society, it is worthy to say that Agustina Ruiz is an asset to the community where she belongs because she chose to serve these people with her humble grocery store even this would mean a higher probability of loss. It is noteworthy to mention that with the business era that the country has today, it is very rare to find the like of Agustina, who accepts goods, just like the barter trade, as means of payment from her customer. Truly a good woman, she helped in the purge of unemployment in her community by employing 10 people with just compensation and treating them as family members.

Aside from being a busy woman, Agustina also finds ways to impart her knowledge to her compatriots. Being the Vice President of the Green Ladies Organization in their place, she actively helps in the conduct of livelihood training among its members. As a wife of a barangay kagawad, she is involved in community-development activities that her husband is being part of.

Truly, she is a woman of high moral standards. Being a client of FICOBANK, she maintains an excellent credit reputation by paying her loan amortizations on time.

If one day Agustina would rise to success, just like the bigger businesspersons in the region, it is because of her being a good person to all of the people around her. And just like a thirsty traveler in the desert, she has already found her oasis of success in a far away place.

—Jackie Molina Juan

Annual Christmas...

from page 4

Bank was then tested when the employees in attendance unanimously asked for an additional bonus, which in the end was granted.

After a sumptuous lunch, the party proceeded with lots of funs and surprises prepared by the HRA Department. Instead of the usual dance competition that the FICOBANK family has been accustomed to do and see for years, frustrated belters competed this time in the Videoke Singing Challenge. For each set of contenders, the one who received the loudest applause and cheers from the audience was declared as the winner and took home the prize at stake. For this singing-contest series, the winners were: Mr. Nido Raza, Mr. Pee Jay Paguyo, Mr. Dennis Caday, Mr. Ramon Macapugay and BM Emerson Umayam.

With some showcasing their “hidden talents” in doing dance routines, raffle draws were done in between. The winners of the three major prizes were Ms. Mabell Pataueg (1st prize – 32-inch LCD-type Samsung TV), Ms. Katrina Ann Alip (2nd prize – 7.4-cubic-foot Panasonic Refrigerator) and Ms. Marites Monteguado (3rd prize – 6.5-kg. Twin-Tub Panasonic Washing Machine). Aside from the major prizes, 66 consolation prizes were also given away.

Meanwhile, the second version of the Christmas Party was held for the employees of FICOBANK in Central and Northwest Luzon on December 23, 2010 at La Maja Rica Hotel and Restaurant in Tarlac City.

—Jackie Juan

Central and...

from page 4

pleasure were obviously shown on the images of every branch taken with the officers of the Bank. Creativity and enjoyment of the participating groups gave justice to their chosen concept for their costumes.

Altogether, the branches showcased their respective talents, as they surprised everyone with their distinct presentations. The crowd's excitement only broke off when the announcement of winners was finally done. For the costume competition, Concepcion Branch got the third prize. The second prize was bagged by the Area Office. And the Dinalupihan Branch, which was so prepared—from make-up to props and costume, as well as on how it put on view the totality of the concept—took the first prize. All group performers were indeed winners in their own rights. But the board of judges had to choose the three best performers of the event. Lingayen and Malasiqui branches settled for the third and second places, respectively. It was the Cabanatuan Branch which clinched the first place because of its undisputed and award-winning performance.

An entertainment number, which was intended to bring about extra spice to the celebration for the delight of everyone, was skillfully performed by the head and staff of the Area Office. Of course, the spectators were not only entertained, but were surprised and thrilled as well.

The tandem of Ms. Donna Jane F. Empania and Mr. Carlo Joy M. Espinosa did not only get something done, but did its assigned task exceptionally well, as masters of the ceremonies. Without a speck of doubt, this once-a-year merry-making and get-together activity entailed an overflowing joy in the hearts of the FICOBANKERS.

Truly, everything that is done, with a passionate heart, to share joyfully the true spirit of Christmas always ended up amazingly great. With this, no words can ever be reasonably enough to express the FICOBANKERS' sincerest appreciation and adoration to the One who is the very reason for this celebration—Jesus Christ.

—Donna Jane Empania & Roella May Villafior



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