

# Hoteliers embrace wider life mission: To help more Pinoys prosper

They painstakingly built and grew their tourism business over the past two decades to include two hotels (Astoria Plaza in Ortigas CBD and Astoria Greenbelt in the Makati CBD) and four resorts (Astoria Boracay and Astoria Current in Boracay Island, Astoria Palawan and Astoria Bohol).

Then, over the past two years, these hoteliers started envisioning something grander as their life's work: to be able to help more Filipinos take the road towards financial prosperity and, thus, significantly aid in the development of the countryside. Their mission is just as grand: to spread financial literacy and life education to the countryside and spur real economic progress to the far-flung areas of the country.

Jeffrey T. Ng, president of Astoria Hotels & Resorts (AHR), and his wife, Vivian S. Ng, AHR chief operating officer, may have found the perfect formula to help Filipinos change their mindset, grow their income exponentially, and veer off from the financially debilitating debt cycle. With the aptly titled "#SikapPinoy" initiative, lives are changing — not one at a time but for several hundreds of Filipinos all at once.

Vivian explained, "With the advent of all the available financing being pushed to our countrymen and women, it just encourages them to obtain cash the easiest way when faced with adversity, not realizing the consequences of that decision. Then they have to spend a huge portion of their earnings to chase the obligation of paying for the heavy interest charges. This initiative is meant to educate them and teach them the value and benefit of saving and investing in their own entrepreneurial opportunities that will enable them to lift their lives faster."

The Ngs designed the #SikapPinoy program such that even fisher-folk and farmers will be able to understand the simple concepts. And they invited a set of speakers who faced various kinds of adversity and came out strong winners in the game of life.

## LIFE STORIES

Felisa Samonte was widowed at a young age. Once the grieving period was over, she bravely said goodbye to

her in-laws and took all her seven children to Manila in search of a better life. When her boss migrated and left her his camera, she took it upon herself to learn the tricks of the trade. Now in her 80s and, after taking the graduation and first communion photos of countless school children, she has no plans of retiring; she still wants to support her growing brood of grandchildren.

Alex Quizon recovered from 22 long years of drug dependence and three bouts at the rehab center, where, incidentally, he won in arts competitions. Once he got his life together, he took a fine arts course at the University of the Philippines. After striking it out on his own, he went back to his native Bataan and started teaching art classes for free. The demand for his artistry increased exponentially. His works now adorn landmarks all over the province.

Tut artist Seth Duplito demonstrated resilience. He uses dancing as a means to ward off the effects of focal epilepsy, a diagnosis which he received at a tender age of 14.

Other speakers over the past two years include Lorna Tambaaoan. Cubao's famous *turon* vendor was able to steer all her children through college through this single source of income. Marlon Fuentes, a car service driver, is able to support his family even while suffering from Tourette's Syndrome.

A notable #SikapPinoy crusader is personal finance coach Salve Duplito of ANC. Salve, who hails from a poor family from Albay, said that what she is now is due to sheer hard work and the determination to never give up.

She explained that when faced with adversity — be it the death of a spouse or during enrolment time and cash is urgently needed — people should be strong and refrain from taking a quick loan from a loan shark. The interest rates are quite high, she informed. And it's better that whatever profits they earn go to them and their families instead of as payment to loan sharks. It is important to have two things: an emergency fund and savings. But first, pay off all your debts, she stressed. And once you have built a sizeable emergency fund, then you can start saving and then, later on,

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

# Lifestyle

modern living

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Song & dance finale: Astoria Hotels & Resorts president Jeffrey Ng (fifth from left) and chief operating officer Vivian Ng (third from left) gamely dance to the #SikapPinoy theme onstage with the locals at the conclusion of the Boracay leg for #SikapPinoy. The event was hosted by Astoria Boracay and Astoria Current.

investing.

Duplito demonstrated how they can look forward to, say, a million pesos or more, just by saving as low as P20 a day. Mainly by taking on an extra job a few hours a day, Salve advised. By diversifying your income streams, you will surely earn more. In a decade or two, their daily savings can become millions, which they can use to fund their dreams: build a bigger house, travel locally or abroad. Whatever it is that they drew in their visualization board, it can be achievable by then, according to Salve.

Finally, Pastor Benny Santos guided the locals in affirming their faith and how God can help them in their livelihoods and doing more for their families.

## #SIKAPPINOY BEARS FRUITS

This early, the Ngs' #SikapPinoy initiative is starting to bear fruit. At the Astoria Palawan event, the Astoria team proudly showcased videos of how some attendees from the previous year have started to turn their lives around.

The wife of a local fisherman from Port Barton started farming *lato* or seaweed. She also sells seafood for a few hours daily, while serving as a tourist guide once the fishing hours are done. With more sources of income for the family, they now have a few appliances. A cemented, sturdier house has started to take shape from their humble shack.

With more earnings after being inspired by Sikap Pinoy, another local lady bought a motorcycle. Now mobile, she can sell more of her *merienda* and other

wares during the day.

A member of Astoria Palawan's housekeeping team diligently manages her *sari-sari* and *ukay-ukay* store after her duty ends at 2 p.m. She and her husband also run a small piggery. Since the wife's salary is intact, the couple can start building a bigger house as well.

"The stories of these two couples and what they're doing for their families are very heartwarming. I pray that we can deliver this life education to every corner of this country. Our countrymen can do it, they just need the right life education and perspective and strategy," said Vivian.

## LIFE LESSONS

So what learnings can we take from the Ngs' growing #SikapPinoy initiative?

If confronted by a life-changing event such as the death of a spouse, be brave. Have the initiative to learn something new or embrace a new trade, like Nanay Fely to support your family.

Despite adversities in life, be steadfast and share your talents like Alex. Eventually, work opportunities will find you as you get to know more people.

Pay off and then shun debts, work harder, work smarter, start saving and investing a little. In time, you will be money-savvy just like Salve.

And when the right time comes, you and your family will be able to reap the benefits of your hard work.

Ultimately, that is the true value of #SikapPinoy.

luxe accommodations  
in the best locations



Astoria Hotels and Resorts have grown to include six properties — two city hotels and four resorts, all situated in renowned locales around the country. The Astoria brand combines luxurious rooms with world-class amenities and unparalleled hospitality to make your stay truly exceptional.

Experience the best of the Philippines in lavish locations designed for perfect getaways.

ASTORIA



#1 Astoria Current  
TOP HOTELS  
Philippines

#1 Astoria Palawan  
HOTELS FOR FAMILIES  
Philippines

#6 Astoria Palawan  
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Philippines

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