



CHEER
For Viet Nam

December 2003

Dear friends,

On behalf of the CHEER Board I would like to send you our gratitude for your continued support of and valuable contribution to Cheer's many projects in Viet Nam. In this wonderful holidays season many of us will find comfort in the arms of families and friends, neighbors and communities. The sense of sharing in this time has made us stronger and at the same time compels us to reflect on our collective responsibility as well as our vulnerability and fragility in this vast universe. For CHEER it has been a year filled with amazing projects and challenges.

After last year's visit to Hue, central Viet Nam, we were "overwhelmed with the experience, humble at the stoicism of the people, burdened with the sense of responsibility, at the same time, excited by the possibilities. After many years of working in Viet Nam, we came to a strategically important decision: We will concentrate our efforts in a few development and asset and capacity building because of our limited resources. We will focus on one village in A Luoi, continue with our teacher training program, and expand cultural exchanges."

Reflections of Viet Nam: After the success of last year's event, the second attempt to raise funds through introducing beautiful Vietnamese traditional and modern crafts to our friends and supporters ... We carefully hand-picked the crafts made by artisans, ethnic groups and handicapped people throughout many provinces. Thank you Renee Montaigne and Nicola Scott for graciously opened their beautiful homes for the occasion and to all of you for participating in this lovely and unique event.

The A Luoi Valley Project : In the middle of July, CHEER Board member Sally Benson and I went to A Luoi Province to visit the 2002 loan recipients and started our three-year project. On this two-hour trip to A Luoi from Hue, a swath of land in central Viet Nam, neighboring the Laos border on the west and Quang Tri Province on the southwest, instead of crossing the nonchalantly beautiful Huong -Perfume-- River almost at its source on a rustic ferry as we did the previous year, we drove on the "modern" bridge spanning amid the gentle landscape of bamboo clusters, thatched roof houses and dirt roads. The change has not only taken place in the many cities and towns but appeared also at this remote area. Life has sprung up and slowly taken shape with cafes, a school, a guesthouse, a two-story post office, a bustling market, a pagoda, and a photocopy place along this main artery. Most of 36,000 people in A Luoi's 21 villages are ethnic. They are the Pa Co, Ta Oi, Pa Hy, Van Kieu. Except for three new economic

villages, Son Thuy, Phu Vinh and part of the provincial town, the rest of A Luoi's 18 villages are still impoverished. Over 60% of the people live below the poverty line or under the government poverty standard of a monthly income of 80,000 dong, approximately \$5.2/month and the daily struggle from unexploded mines, residue of dioxin on the soil and in well water has made life even harder for these people.

The small revolving loan with non-interest initiated by CHEER has made life less harder for a number of people in the program.

- The ten-women bead weaving coop among last year's 50 loan recipients, not only improved their crafts, founded a buyer in Ha Noi but also added two new young members to the coop. At the beginning of 2004 they will return the loans to the next 10 families on the list.
- Mr. Quynh Luong, the only Ta Oi basket weaving artisan in A Ngo village, was among the new people to receive the new loan. With the loan he will set up a class to teach the basket weaving crafts to youngsters in the village.

We also support the building of kindergartens, room to read, study-corner and scholarship for the children.

- The Son Thuy Kindergarten, built with a generous donation from Dr. Ton That Chieu and his family, afforded 124 preschoolers a place to sing and dance, and got a head start in early childhood education.
- We delivered scholarships to 50 students, 24 study-corners and start-up money for a Room to Read at Hong Kim Elementary School. 285 students at this school 285 in all are from poor family. With your generous donations we can support all of them financially next year. This was the first year we sponsored and mentored 15 seniors from A Luoi High School. Retired principal Le Van Cau, will monitor their progress so that they can pass the Hue University entrance examination in 2004. Six university students from A Luoi Province, the only students admitted to the University of Hue in 2002, also received full scholarships.
- Phu Mau 1 Elementary School: The Phu Mau 1 Elementary School, the first joint effort between CHEER and local villagers, was dedicated in July. Now the 605 students from the school will no longer have to walk 10km to attend classes. We presented 40 scholarships to the best students and 30 study corners. The school still needs trees, a Room to Read, desks and benches for the third classroom and water and electricity outlets.
- Vocational Schools: The Tay Linh Vocational School housed 100 young girls from poor families and/or orphans. They learned sewing and embroidery. A new computer class is set up for those who wanted to learn the skills. At the Thanh Giong Vocational School, in addition to 4 sewing classes, a wood carving class was recently added to revitalize the art of making traditional wood carving for which Hue is famous.
- *Traversing Borders: Viet Nam Teacher Training Program:* In July a team of 4 professionals from the United States and I conducted our third summer teacher training,

a ten-day intensive training for 32 Vietnamese language teachers at Hue University, located in the beautiful ancient World Heritage City of Hue, Central Viet Nam. In addition to Randy Grant, Giang Hoang, our U.S. team enjoyed the expertise of Dr. Brock Klein, a professor at Pasadena Community College. Dr. Lillian Utsumi could not participate in the training at the last minutes due to her unexpected accident. The teachers from Viet Nam, all graduates from Vietnamese Universities and currently teach English, were full-time teachers at public [29] and semi-private [3] schools. Sharing "The American Experience" with the teachers from Viet Nam had demonstrated how we could deepen our mutual appreciation and understanding of both cultures.

We felt humble before the eagerness, dedication, generosity and passion for teaching from this mixed group of veterans and young teachers. We culminated the training with the making of the Dream Catcher and the teachers embraced it with open hearts. "I did attend many workshops before but they were only professional. This workshop is not only professional but also human. We love pronunciation, field trip, reading comprehension and we also love peace and justice, so we feel very happy when you bring us the precious experiences of your country's history through the language of English. I think that all the contents of the workshop are very selective and necessary for us. There are many things new to us. The most important thing is that you bring us a dream." We are planning for the 2004 training and hope that the message of PEACE will echo beyond national boundaries and this kind of training will transform the teachers' lives as much as ours.

As we walked through the hot spot of A Chau Valley where many families were relocated due to the high level of dioxin in the soil, one villager told us: "Had it not been for the contaminated land, this place could have been a prosperous and beautiful provincial town." For almost a decade we have worked to build trust, tolerance and peace among peoples. We have shared our collective responsibility and our belief in the immense capacity of our heart and humanity to create a caring environment for our children, a place in which to live with no fear and to dream of a bright future. You have brought dignity to the life of many children and families in Viet Nam. We need to continue our endeavor, however small to sow the seed of peace.

Peace and Love,

Nam-Hau