



ASENSO KA!

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MARIA BELEND A Q. AMBI
DTI-XI Regional Director

PAYING IT FORWARD

In a world where gaining profit is more important than being socially responsible, kindness is often considered as a novelty. This is why we're proud of our MSMEs in Davao Region — each one of them is passionate about giving back to the community. Thus, relevant support from the government and other stakeholders is important to help them prosper.

To help aspiring entrepreneurs and startups scale up their enterprises, DTI has initiated the Kapatid Mentor ME (KMME) program. Various business concepts are discussed through different modules and topics. This program aims to spur economic activity, generate employment opportunities, and mainstream OTOPreneurs who are ready for business expansion.

Another project from DTI that has been helping MSMEs is the Shared Service Facility (SSF) project. This involves the provision of machinery, tools, and equipment to the MSMEs. Through this project, DTI aims to enhance productivity, increase production, and improve the product quality of the beneficiaries.

This issue of Asenso Ka! Magazine will showcase the success stories of our MSMEs who have graduated from the KMME program and the beneficiaries of the SSF project. We hope that their stories of struggle, success, and generosity will inspire you to start your own business and support local entrepreneurs.

Whether it is by supporting the indigenous community, empowering women, preserving the environment, or providing opportunities to the underprivileged, these MSMEs all have one thing in common - their commitment to help. We are looking forward to helping more MSMEs, with our President Rodrigo R. Duterte pledging his full support towards the continual progress of the Philippines.

Mabuhay and God bless us all!

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About the Magazine

Asenso Ka! Magazine is a publication of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) XI.

This seeks to recognize the success of the micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Davao region and inspire others to strive more. Through this magazine, MSMEs are also encouraged to innovate continuously. In the meantime, this showcases as well the importance of convergence in developing MSMEs.

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NEGOSYO CENTER

FASHION WITH A FUSION OF TWO COMMUNITIES



Cheri-Lou “Che” Rabanoz Aranjuez is a socially-responsible fashionista. Through her unique bags and corporate wear designs, she is inspiring many people to be stylish while paying it forward.

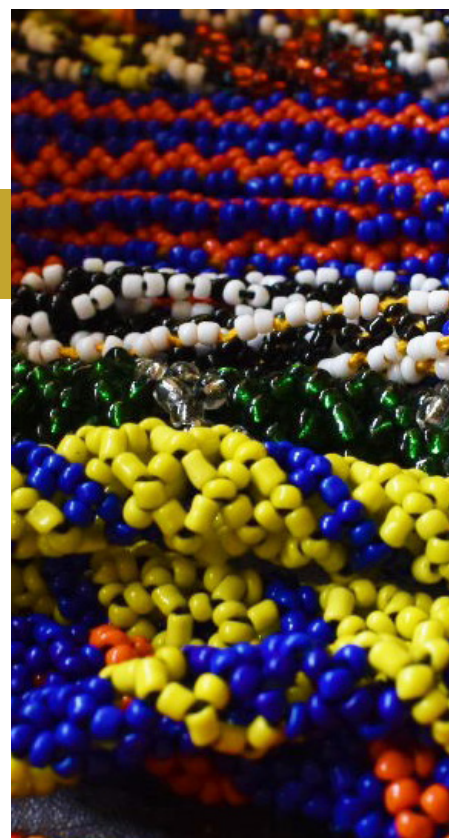
Pursuing her Passion for Fashion

Fashion design was not Che's first choice for a degree in college. She graduated with a degree in Accountancy, but later on realized that her passion was in fashion and enrolled herself at fashion school. At this point, she shares that she had opened a bridal shop before realizing that she was not equipped to manage such a type of business.

At the time, she was juggling her fashion design classes, running a bridal shop, and raising two kids. It was too much for her. She confided that there were moments

when she wanted to give up. Che saw the business potential for corporate attire designs in Compostela Valley, this pushed her to finish her course.

Eventually, she stopped renting out bridal gowns and focused on designing corporate uniforms for government agencies. Additionally, she started offering straw bags handmade by persons deprived of liberty (PDL) at the Montevista District Jail. These bags are then embellished with traditional ethnic designs from a Mandaya community in New Bataan.



Che says that she gives the Mandaya women the liberty to design the beadworks.



The Mandaya women from New Bataan who supply Che with intricately-designed beadworks.



These women also make traditional jewelry using their beads.



Aside from bags, the PDLs also create wallets, fans, bats, and purses.

Giving Back to the Community

“Fashion is all about creating designs that have a greater purpose.” This is Che’s mantra as she started her career in fashion design. She shares that she had a great desire to introduce products from her hometown to a bigger audience. The problem was that she did not know what to showcase.

Luckily, she discovered a potential addition to her fashion line as she was visiting the Montevista Municipal Hall. Displayed were coin purses made out of straw. This was her eureka moment. She will bring these local handicrafts with her to the London Fashion Week where she was invited. Che paid a visit to the district jail where

she met the talented and industrious women PDLs who handcrafted the coin purses. She formed a partnership with the jail’s livelihood program, the Business Resource Center, which signaled the start of her bag production.

With the help of the Provincial Women Development Council of Compostela Valley, she was also able to meet an IP community in New Bataan. These Mandaya women provided her with their intricate beadwork which she used to decorate her bags. Thus, she calls her products a “fusion of communities” between the PDL and the IP community.



After finishing fashion school, Che now focuses on designing and making corporate uniforms with tribal designs.

Comvaleña in the Fashion Industry

Che says that the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has been a huge help in increasing her linkages and networks as an entrepreneur. She was also able to develop her brand through the Brand Equity Development and the Kapatid Mentor ME programs. Most importantly, DTI provided her with their full-fledged support during her participation in the London Fashion Week.

As a fashion designer who has proven herself in the industry, Che admits

that this career definitely comes with challenges and hardships. In her case, one of these difficulties was dealing with the two communities and their different cultures, protocols, and practices.

In terms of production, she says that their biggest hurdle is the fact that all of the products are handmade. As a result, she can not rush the women PDLs nor the Mandaya women with their work. She is still trying to come up with a solution on how to hasten production to meet the demands of her buyers.

Inspiring Words for Budding Designers

Despite being hailed as a successful designer and entrepreneur, Che believes that she still has a long way to go. She currently has several visions and goals for her brand, as well as the communities that she is helping. Bit by bit, she is working on trying to achieve all of it.

For aspiring fashion designers, Che wants to share some advice. “They have to put it in their minds that fashion design is not all about glam and glitz. Behind all the fancy stuff that you see on the stage are the hard work, love, and commitment that comes with each

creation. It will really show in your masterpiece if you truly love your craft or not. It would not be an expression of art without your love for it.”

CREATING LIVELIHOOD FOR DECADES



For the members of Kiblawan Multipurpose Cooperative (KMPC), the association is not simply an entity which lets them invest and borrow money from. The 48-year-old cooperative also provides livelihood, education, and opportunities through the members' shared passion for volunteerism.

Today, with its state-of-the-art office building and functional facilities, it is surprising to know that the cooperative started out extremely small. Established during 1971, it initially started out as a credit union with a meager capital of ₱1,007. Later on, they formed a separate consumers' cooperative and opened a small grocery store in the municipality. Eager to make the cooperative prosper, the members did their best to learn the ropes of managing it. Unfortunately, KMPC also had its

fair share of problems. Erlinda I. Sapin, the coop's retired bookkeeper, recalls how the grocery store burned down years ago. The first muscovado sugar production did not succeed as well, which led to its discontinuance.

"The funding we received from abroad was used up and the project didn't prosper. It was very difficult, but we did not give up."

It was then that KMPC received assistance from government agencies to revive their muscovado sugar production. Through the Shared Service Facility (SSF) project under the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the coop received equipment, tools, and a facility for muscovado sugar processing. Their former grocery store has also been converted into a bakery, which now has



Some of the workers in the muscovado processing facility.



The coop is proud of their muscovado sugar, a healthier substitute to refined sugars.



Sugarcane is one of Kiblawan's crops, providing livelihood for many sugarcane farmers.

three branches throughout Kiblawan. From its humble beginnings as a lending cooperative, KMPC aims to educate future generations about the importance of financial literacy. They established the School Savings Mobilization Program which encourages high school students to save a portion of their money in the cooperative. Additionally, the coop also provides scholarships to members' children.

Juana E. Alvarado, the current KMPC

manager, says that what keeps the coop thriving, even after decades of trials and setbacks, are the members' spirit for volunteerism. "The coop will not survive if the members are only looking out for themselves alone. We have to help everyone create a livelihood instead of focusing on money matters."

Jessa G. Lagroma, the group's accounting clerk, shares that the coop has created plenty of opportunities for its members. By providing them with a

capital, several members have already made their lands productive and have created a regular source of income.

Even after years of servitude, Alvarado is still willing to allocate her time to the cooperative. Along with others who have been members since its establishment, she aims to help the future generations of Kiblawan attain a better life through their humble multi-purpose cooperative.

Delicious Meals

IN EVERY DISH



Choose from a variety of healthy and yummy products: tocino, longganisa, embutido, and tapa.



With two locations in Davao City, people craving for breakfast food can easily curb their hunger in the restaurant.



KHP Dabaw Kitchen serves delicious breakfast food no matter what time of the day.



The processed food products are all produced in Khit's home-turned-processing facility.

Tocino, tapa, longganisa, corned beef: these are all well-loved breakfast food choices which people enjoy eating no matter the time of day. For Kristine Mae “Khit” Flores, these processed food products are more than just good food, these launched her career as a young entrepreneur.

A graduate of Hospitality and Restaurant Management, Khit worked at a hotel’s kitchen where she learned first-hand how food was cooked and prepared to meet hotel standards. While she was there, she always dreamt of building her own business. This motivated her to quit her job and instead,

make processed food products. Her dream was ambitious, she was prepared to go big; little did she know, the challenges of making the dream come true were bigger.

“Working at a hotel was difficult, it was like doing charity work. I had to work for nine hours straight.



KHP Dabaw Kitchen's young owner, Khit Flores.

That was when I came up with the idea of building a business.”

Fortunately, her on-the-job training as a student provided her with the know-how on longganisa production. She made homemade longganisa in her own kitchen during the day, and went to her job at the hotel in the afternoon. Eventually, she decided to leave her job to focus on developing her meat processing business.

Naturally a shy person, Khit was not so keen on selling and marketing her products - this became a big challenge for her. She says that it was also difficult to compete with big, well-known brands in the market. Consumers were used to buying those that are commonly found in supermarkets, hence, gaining consumer trust was another hurdle for her.

Her big break came when she was able to present her food products to a famous hotel in Davao City. Khit shares that the head chef of the hotel's restaurant cooked her food

in front of her and tasted these himself. The chef was impressed. Up to this day, Khit has been supplying them with her delicious products.

As time went by, Khit attracted a business investor and was able to open a restaurant. KHP Dabaw Kitchen specializes in all-day breakfast meals that are both affordable and sumptuous. It currently has two branches: located at Guzman Street and Malvar Street, Davao City.

It's difficult for Khit to pinpoint which dishes are her best-sellers since most of her products are consumer favorites. She says that the best-sellers vary from one branch to another. Khit prides herself in manufacturing homemade processed meats without artificial flavors, MSG, and extenders.

Like her business, Khit has also grown as a person and entrepreneur. With the help of the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI)

Kapatid Mentor ME program, she has learned to manage her business more efficiently. Most importantly, she gained more confidence and was able to help other aspiring entrepreneurs struggling to start their own business ventures.

“After I joined the first batch of Kapatid Mentor ME program, I was able to learn a lot. My business became more organized; I had a better target market; I learned how to record my sales, and more. The best thing about DTI is that they follow up with you even after graduating from the program to monitor progress and to help us out.”

Today, Khit is a speaker for some of DTI's seminars. After joining The Final Pitch, a business reality TV show and graduating from KMME, she has been tapped by DTI as a mentor and speaker. Despite her shyness, she can now speak in front of other entrepreneurs and inspire others to work hard like her.

She would not say that her business has reached a level of success she is content with since she still has plans and goals for it. Nonetheless, she is thankful for all the opportunities that she has received amid her little entrepreneurship background.

“For those who want to start a business, you really need perseverance and passion. There will always be challenges along the way, so they have to be more patient. Success will not happen overnight, nor in five years. It will be a long journey, so you have to really work hard for it.”

From **IN**vasive to **IN**novative

Water hyacinth, more commonly known as water lily, looks attractive and beautiful. However, the ugly truth behind this fast-growing aquatic plant is that it is highly invasive in fish ponds and lakes. Wow Carmen Handicrafts created a solution to this problem by turning these invasive plants into an innovative business venture.



The beautiful but harmful water hyacinth, damaging most of Carmen's fish cages and ponds.

In 2015, Wow Carmen Handicrafts (Weavers of Water Hyacinth in Carmen, Davao del Norte) was founded as a solution to the growing farm disturbance in Carmen's tilapia fish cages. Pastor Albert Dillo shares that when they got invited to a training on how to maximize the water hyacinth, they did not hesitate to join.

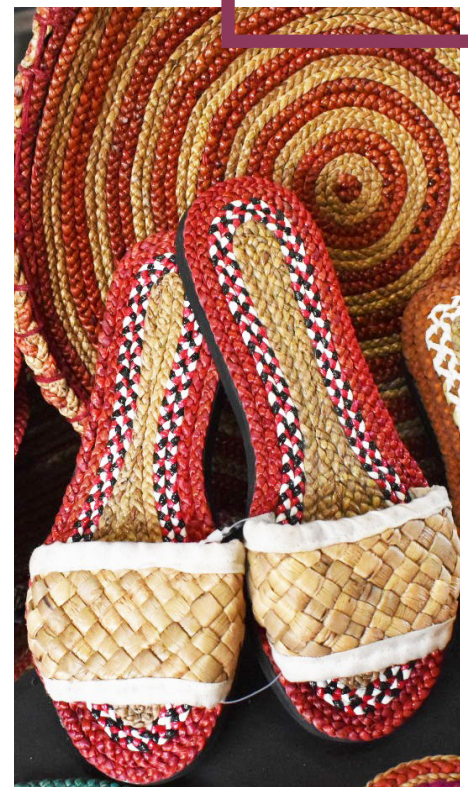
This faith-based association makes woven products out of dried water hyacinth leaves. The talented weavers from their community can make slippers, door mats, rugs, coasters, bags, tumbler holders, and centerpieces. Adorned with vibrant colors, stylish designs, and made from sturdy material, these woven handicrafts are making waves in the local and international markets.

Each of their handcrafted masterpieces can take several days to produce, depending on the design. The water hyacinth leaves need to

be dried first, then dyed, before they can be woven and created into products. It is a strenuous job that requires more than one person to finish. The final product is attractive, durable, and of export-quality.

Thankfully, their weavers will not have to work as hard as before. Wow Carmen Handicrafts is a beneficiary of the Department of Trade and Industry's Shared Service Facility project. They now have weaving equipment such as flatters, rubber slicers, and a looming machine, thanks to DTI.

Ptr. Albert is also grateful for the Kapatid Mentor ME (KMME) program, where he learned about the different aspects of business operations.



Sturdy and stylish sandals made from dried water hyacinth leaves.

“Through the KMME, I was able to picture out the entire plan for the business, from the supply to the production. All aspects are important and should be given equal attention so that the business will prosper.”

Scouting for their products is easy, since they have displays at the Go Lokal Store in Abreeza Mall, Davao City. They also join trade expos, design events, and bazaars. In fact, they recently showcased their products at the Manila FAME trade fair.

In addition to helping the environment by eliminating the problem in the municipality, Wow Carmen Handicrafts is also a socially responsible association. Most of their weavers are women in the community who have no source of income. Through this association, they now earn at the comfort of their own homes.



Wow Carmen also offers placemats, coasters, rugs, bags, tumbler holders, etc.



A weaver works on a rug from a regular buyer. One rug can take about a few days to finish.



Pastor Albert Dillo proudly poses with some of his talented weavers.

Goodness In Every Pack



The power couple behind Mira's Food Trading, Mira and Ramel Gelbire.

It started out as a business idea which turned into an experimental venture for couple Ramel and Miraflor “Mira” Gelbire. Little did they know that their idea would boom and change their lives - along with those in their community.



Each pack of Mira's food products is guaranteed delicious and affordable.



Workers must double-time with production to cater the heavy volume of orders.

Delectable Food Made from Scratch

Her work in a meat importation company in Cebu before provided them some experience in processing high-quality meat. This marked the beginning of Mira's Food Trading. Along with her husband's superb culinary skills, they developed a chorizo recipe and tried selling it in Cebu. It proved to have a high demand in the market. The couple decided to move their small business to Mindanao.

Aside from chorizo, they were also reselling lumpia shanghai from a company in Cebu. Due to the high volume of orders for their chorizo, they decided to stop reselling and develop their own lumpia recipe instead. Building their business from the ground up, the couple was producing and packing chorizo and lumpia on their own, in their home's humble kitchen.

"We did everything on our own. My husband built this processing center himself because we did not want to spend a lot on labor," Mira proudly shares.

The couple spent their days and nights producing, packing, and delivering their products. Sometimes, their children would also help them whenever their time permitted. Eventually, they started hiring a few workers from the community to help them with the huge amount of orders.

Conquering Challenges and Competitors

Like all businesses, Mira's Food Trading also went through several rough patches along the way. One of their biggest problems are the competitors. When they first started marketing their lumpia products, one

of their resellers tried to imitate their recipe and sold it to their customers. They even convinced people that it was a sister company of Mira's.

Another challenge is staying on top of the market despite the stiff competition. Mira narrates how there were several instances where new lumpia products went out to the market with lower prices, with up to a four-peso difference.

"My agent insisted that we should lower our price to match the pricing of our competitors. I always stood firm and said 'no'. I want the customers to see the difference when it comes to the taste."

Amid the presence of competitors, including a food manufacturer giant, Mira remained unfazed. She stood by her products and believed that even if customers are looking for cheaper prices, they will always go back to the better-tasting lumpia. Sure enough, they did. Mira's Food Trading remained well-known in Davao del Sur, Davao Occidental and Davao del Norte as a maker of delectable lumpia, chorizo, embutido, and chicharon.

Learning from the Best

When asked how the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has helped their business, Mira emphasizes that it has helped them greatly. "DTI helped us learn how to run

a business, such as delegating tasks to managing different departments like marketing, production, and Human Resource."

Through the Kapatid Mentor Me (KMME) project, small business owners like Mira and Ramel are taught and mentored by successful businessmen and business experts. They were lectured and coached about various business topics which helped them improve their management and production. DTI also helped Mira's Food Trading with the branding and packaging of their products.

Giving Back to the Community

Gaining sky-high profits is the least of Mira's concerns. Although she is keen on gaining more orders every day, she says that the most important thing to her is giving back. She says that their business is not for them to become rich, but for them to help other people.

She confides at how difficult it is to run a business, and that sometimes she wants to give up. However, what keeps her moving forward is the fact that they are able to help people in her community by providing jobs.

"We also have a vision for this business to become successful, not just for ourselves, but for the people who are working for us."





Ric's Vinegar is available in several sizes: pouch, lapad, long neck, large, and small bottles.

HEALTHY AND FLAVORFUL SAWSAWAN

Meal times are never complete without the *sawsawan* made from vinegar. Whether for snacks like *chicharon*, or for cooking dishes like *paksiw*, vinegar is a ubiquitous condiment in any home, eatery, or restaurant. Ric's Vinegar, dubbed as 'the healthy *sawsawan*' from Mati, Davao Oriental, is slowly becoming a favorite and it is not surprising why.

Ric and Jocelyn Quimpan, the owners of this homegrown brand, got the idea of producing vinegar from a family member. Jocelyn shares that her uncle was a "manananggot", or a coconut sap gatherer. He always had plenty of unused vinegar stocked in his home.

"Whenever we visit his home, the vinegar would still be there. I thought, what can I do with all these? That is when I got the idea to make a *sawsawan*."

All the coconut sap they use for their products are grown in the wide expanse of their own backyard. From the coconut to the bottle, it is all a result of their family's teamwork. Since Jocelyn is a teacher, her husband is in-charge of the production but she pitches in with the work as well. Their nephews help them during weekends, too.

The first variant which Jocelyn developed was the sweet chili, a sugar-based *sawsawan*. Later

on, she added more products to the line, such as special hot, spicy white, and white vinegar.

To cater to their customer's requests, their *sawsawan* also comes in various sizes. Customers can choose between 750 ml and 375 ml bottles, as well as smaller bottles, and a tetra pouch.

Running a business also came with many obstacles. Among them was to go through were the varying prices of the spices. Since they use several spices, such as garlic, chili, ginger, *langkawas*, and onion, sourcing these ingredients can be financially constraining for them.



Jocelyn Quimpan, the woman behind the idea of Ric's.



Ric's Vinegar is currently available in pasalubong centers and select supermarkets.



From sourcing to packaging, the family does it all themselves.



Production takes place in a small facility beside the Quimpan's humble home in Mati.

Another challenge was the production. Jocelyn says that they wanted to supply for more supermarkets, but they are still working on maximizing their time for production.

Fortunately, Ric and Jocelyn are not alone in their business venture. Jocelyn expressed her gratefulness for the Kapatid Mentor ME program of the Department of Trade and Industry, saying that it has been a tremendous help from the very beginning.

“At first, we really had no idea what to name our product. It was very timely that at the time of our registration, there was a branding seminar as well. Sir Peter from

DTI helped us design the branding to come up with the name Ric's. Joining the KMME program also made a huge difference on how we viewed the business. We can really see the difference between what we are currently practicing and what we should be doing.”

For now, their healthy sawsawan business is still in the process of growth. They are looking into adding more products, such as honey vinegar. They are aiming to expand their market and double their production, too. Despite the hardships of running a family business, customers are starting to recognize this brand for its delicious flavor. Ric's Vinegar is sure to become a home staple in the coming years.



The coconut sap used to make the vinegar are all harvested from the trees in their property.

ICE CREAM AND ICE CANDY ROLLED INTO ONE

If your lips have never gotten numb from eating ice candy as a kid, then your childhood was not complete. For kids, ice candy is a cheaper alternative to ice cream during summertime. It is sold in neighborhood sari-sari stores and are usually made out of refrigerated powdered juice drinks. Lamee Ann Ice Cream Candy stands out from the ordinary ice candies by bringing you two beloved desserts in one stick.

This tasty product is like an ice cream and ice candy rolled into one. From the very first bite, customers will definitely say that it lives up to its name. In fact, owners Robinson and Sarita Uyamot share that it is actually a wordplay for the word “lami” (delicious). This came from a customer’s feedback who would always say that their ice candies are “lami” every time he bought one.

“We really did not know what to name our product when we registered it. Initially, we called it ‘Lami’, but DTI suggested that we use ‘Lamee Ann’ to make it more memorable and unique,” Sarita says.

Their ice candies are all made from fresh fruits and natural ingredients. They use boiled water, starch, milk, and fresh fruits to give it that creamy, delicious flavor. Lamee Ann currently offers five different flavors: durian, buko, mango float, cookies and cream, and avocado.



Owner Robinson Uyamot is all smiles while he attends a food festival held in one of Davao City’s malls.

Perhaps the best thing about Lamee Ann, aside from its milky and creamy taste, is its affordable price. For an ice cream candy that tastes exceptionally good, it comes at such a low price that anyone will be tempted to buy more than one.

Lamee Ann’s target market is primarily schools since students are more inclined to buy their products. However, it has become quite challenging for them since the Department of Education (DepEd) has become stricter



The woman behind the irresistible ice cream candies, owner Sarita Uyamot.



Ice cream or ice candy? It's hard to tell! But one thing's for sure, Lamee Ann definitely lives up to its name.



One of the very few workers labeling the ice cream candy packaging (left) and packaging the ice cream candies.

with the food sold in school canteens. Apparently, ice candy is considered a junk food even if it is made of all-natural ingredients.

For now, they are focused in joining trade fairs and exhibits to gain more market exposure. Apart from supplying ice candies in school canteens, they are also receiving bulk orders from other customers and resellers.

It is a good thing that the Department

of Trade and Industry (DTI) holds several trade fairs every year where Lamee Ann can participate at. The Kapatid Mentor ME and Brand Equity Development programs have also helped them in their business operations and brand establishment.

“My husband and I are both inexperienced in running a business. I was a social worker and he was a government employee before. The KMME gave us the knowledge we needed in running a business.”

It might not look like a grand business venture, but this humble ice cream candy has changed the lives of the Uyamot family. Sarita says that she is able to spend more time with her family while making ice cream candies at home. It also provided them with a regular source of income to provide for their daily needs. Most importantly, the couple is proud that Lamee Ann puts a smile on their customers' faces with every bite.

Juicing a Healthy Lifestyle



Healthy and flavorful juice variants from Belle's Refreshing Juices.



Gilda Flores, a proud health advocate, poses with one of their delicious concoctions.

Powdered juices and instant drinks are the Filipinos' go-to refreshments during the sweltering summer months. Despite being loaded with sugar and sweeteners, these beverages are still as popular as ever. One entrepreneur decided to choose a healthy lifestyle by producing all-natural juice drinks, making it accessible to the market and encouraging people to be more health-conscious.

Gilda C. Flores, the owner of Shechem Marketing, was already a health advocate even before becoming an entrepreneur. The juice business was initially owned by her former colleague. She was in charge of the marketing aspect of the business and owned 35% of the shares. However, after a botched partnership that left her with no shares and all the

juicing equipment, her colleague handed down the business to her. Gilda shares that she had no idea how juicing worked at first. "I didn't know how to use the equipment to make fruit juices, since I was only in charge of the business side of things."

Gilda is a vegetarian who made her own fruit smoothies at home for their own consumption. These smoothies were purely made of fruit, sans the sugar and water. Her late husband suggested that perhaps they should pursue making juices since they already have the equipment.

After joining workshops and seminars, she learned how to extract juices and make purees. She gradually experimented with different fruits to create unique and enticing flavors. That was when she started Belle's Refreshing Juice, an all-natural juice



The people behind Belle's: Gilda, her daughter, sons, and workers from around their neighborhood.



Fruits are sourced fresh and peeled everyday.



A worker mixes the ingredients that are produced fresh on a daily basis.

brand named after her daughter. All 10 flavors of her juices are made from freshly-squeezed fruits and even flowers. Customers can choose from delicious options which include mango, pineapple, four seasons, cucumber, lemonade, blue bell (blue ternate flower with buko juice) and butterfly pea lemonade (blue ternate with calamansi juice).

The fruits are all freshly sourced from local markets. In the meantime, some of the ingredients are picked from her own garden which she happily tends to. Her fruit juices have no artificial sweeteners and are not loaded with sugar. To substitute sugar in the

future, she is currently growing stevia, a plant-based sweetener. "The reason why I started Belle's is to deliver healthy fruit juices to everyone. Whether I produce these or not, people will always drink juice. So why not make something that is healthy?" she says.

Joining the Kapatid Mentor ME and Brand Equity programs by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) have greatly changed Gilda's perspective. According to her, she was only focused on gaining profits to sustain their daily needs when she first started. After graduating from the KMME program, she began to dream big

after being inspired by the mentors. Aside from being a health advocate, Gilda is also helping her community by providing a few people with livelihood. The employees are neighbors who are responsible for the juicing, packaging, and delivery. Her children are also working with her to keep the business up and running.

Belle's Refreshing Juice is currently sold in schools, office canteens, catering services, restaurants, and at a hotel. Her vision for Belle's is to give more people a healthier option, not just in Davao, but in other places as well.

Natural and Accessible Healthcare for Everyone

It is a sad fact that majority of Filipinos have limited to no access to basic healthcare programs. This is especially true for marginalized groups and those living in remote areas. Fortunately, there are kind-hearted people, like Rev. Fr. Rolando J. Fernandez, MI of St. Camillus Hospital of Mati, who are passionate about providing accessible healthcare for everyone.

Before the hospital was founded, the ministers conducted community outreach programs in the neighboring areas of Mati. They discovered that a drastic number of residents are ill and unable to receive medical care due to poverty. As a solution, they provided basic healthcare seminars where they taught people how to use medicinal plants within their environment.

Although the seminars proved to be helpful, they realized that there was still a lot more to be done. With the help of several volunteers, the hospital founded the community-based healthcare center. Their goal is to train people on how to create herbal medicine and provide traditional healthcare for the underprivileged.

Aside from Fr. Rolando, Sr. Bernardita A. Otibak, MI was one of the key persons who made the healthcare center possible. Despite the tedious paperwork and requirements needed to



One root, three variants: turmeric granules, powder, and capsules from St. Camillus.

register the center at the FDA, she truly pushed through with it.

“They really wanted to pursue the processing, so I said that we will try and I will find the means to register it.”

Little by little, the healthcare center erected a few buildings for training and for processing the medicine. They were also able to purchase the machinery necessary for the entire production process. What was a laborious job for the volunteers is now physically easier and time-saving for them.

The healthcare center now sells a wide variety of Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) - approved herbal medicines. Some of these include the following: granules (tawa-tawa, turmeric, ginger), powders (ampalaya, gabon, turmeric), capsules, and dried herbs (blue ternate, alangitngit). Additionally, they provide acupuncture,



The jolly, kind, and hardworking Sister Bernardita A. Otibak, MI.

acupressure, Ventosa, and traditional massage. They also sell organic vegetables, native chickens and pigs, and fruits that are grown organically within the center's grounds.



Sr. Bernardita poses with some of the volunteers in front of the Herb Processing facility.



Some of the food supplements and herbal products made by St. Camillus.

Sr. Bernardita says she is extremely happy that the center is able to help numerous people. She shares that it warms her heart knowing that terminally-ill patients have felt better because of the herbal medicines.

“More and more people are coming here and buying the herbal medicines because they can really see the difference. At

the same time, it also helps with the livelihood of the volunteers.” To handle the business aspect of the healthcare center, they sought help from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). Through the Kapatid Mentor ME program, they were able to scale up their business through several modules.

Sr. Bernardita says they want to develop more FDA-approved herbal medicines that are approved by the FDA. Together with Fr. Rolando, as well as the industrious volunteers, they are hoping to develop the healthcare center further to provide natural and accessible healthcare to the residents of Davao Oriental consistently.



These capsules are purely made from turmeric that are grown in St. Camillus.



Various medicinal plants are processed in the facility every day.



Full-time entrepreneur, wife, and mom Rovehyn Aguilar beside her pastil products.

Savory shredded chicken sitting on a bed of steamed rice and wrapped in a banana leaf - sounds sumptuous? Pastil is a traditional Maguindanaon delicacy that is enjoyed by people from all walks of life.

Banana Leaves and Bottles

Gracing her throne since 2017, Pastil Queen's founder Rovehyn T. Aguilar got the idea for producing pastil from her parents. Her mother used to sell pastil in their carinderia in Cotabato City, a staple food for the majority of their Muslim customers. At first, Rovehyn started selling traditional pastil until she received several requests to have her products shipped.

This was impossible, of course, since the pastil rice cannot be shipped or it will spoil. That was when she thought of bottling the kagikit (the shredded chicken toppings) so more customers can enjoy it for its longer shelf life.

PASTIL KAGIKIT ON THE GO



Perfect for quick and meals on-the-go, the chicken pastil is definitely worth every peso.



The hardworking people behind every bottle and pack of Pastil Queen.



For those who want to enjoy pastil any time, Pastil Queen's kagikit is available in bottles as well.

As a graduate of Food Technology, she has knowledge on how to maintain the quality of her product. Along with her husband who is a mechanical engineer, and her parents who are adept at making pastil, she launched her pastil kagikit-in-a-bottle. The easy-to-eat pastil just got more convenient.

“My target market are those ordinary employees who are looking for a quick and easy meal. The pastil kagikit is really a best-seller among workers and college students living in boarding houses.”

Thus, even if consumers eat Pastil Queen's kagikit on a regular basis, they do not have to worry because it is healthy. Rovelyn proudly shares that it has no preservatives or MSG.

Overcoming their Biggest Obstacles

Although Pastil Queen has gained a huge customer base already, they are still struggling to meet the rising demand. Everything is manufactured and packaged in their home by her parents and a few assistants. Cooking and shredding the chicken are all

done manually, so it is definitely a physically exhausting task.

Rovelyn says that she considers her biggest obstacle as a “good problem.” Whenever they receive a huge volume of orders, they have to work double-time since they lack manpower. She has no problem with marketing her products, however, supplying the influx of orders can be quite challenging for them.

Still, she is thankful for all the opportunities that came their way. For her, everything has been too swift for them to handle, but it is a challenge that she will gladly take on.

Expanding the Business Through DTI

When asked how the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has helped her business, Rovelyn expresses her utmost gratitude. She notes that if not for DTI, the brand would never have been launched.

At first, she simply wanted to start a business but she had no idea what it should be. The idea of selling pastil

was a just spur-of-the-moment idea when she sought help from DTI. After that, she was able to join the Kapatid Mentor ME and Brand Equity Development programs.

“I knew that those programs were the push that I needed to start a business. Joining our first exhibit was exactly what we needed to know how acceptable our product is in the market.”

Sure enough, their customers love the flavorful pastil kagikit. Some of them would even buy in bulk or visit them everyday to buy more. Rovelyn never expected that people would patronize their product, and it was all thanks to the opportunities and support given by DTI.

For those who want to try their best-selling pastil rice and pastil kagikit, customers can place their orders in advance. You have been warned, though; once you start eating Pastil Queen's products, you will have a hard time stopping.

Simple Ingredients, Extraordinary Flavor



Through Cacao & Beyond, owner Resie Faith Dicon combines her love for chocolates and the local farmers in Compostela Valley.

Once you taste bean-to-bar chocolates, there is no turning back. You will always remember the rich taste of real chocolate sourced from pure cacao beans. This is what COMVAL Tropical Harvest aims to promote – recognition for the cacao industry in Compostela Valley (now Davao de Oro).

Resie Faith Dicon, the CEO of the company, believes in giving back to the community. The company started as a livelihood project for the residents of Barangay Antiquera, Nabunturan. The cacao plantation is located at Maragusan, which provided jobs for farmers in the area. What started as a farm for cacao growing and beans trading slowly expanded to produce more cacao-based products that they have included in their production line.



Different variants of the bean-to-bar chocolates offered by Cacao & Beyond.

Resie's sweet tooth led her to create Cacao & Beyond, the brand name for her line of tablea, chocolate drink, and artisan chocolates. She never expected that her chocolate business would become successful. As sweet as it is, making chocolates comes with several bitter challenges. Yet her business prospered and she was able to provide a livelihood to several housewives in her community.



Aside from chocolates, they also offer tablea and cocoa powder.



A unique take on chocolate, the Chocolate Bites are truly a delight (and a best-seller).

“We started the tablea production to add value to our cacao products. Eventually, we moved on to chocolate-making. I was invited to several chocolate-making workshops which gave me the knowledge that I needed to start it.”

Unlike commercialized chocolates that are loaded with artificial sweeteners, Cacao & Beyond chocolates are healthy and contain less artificial sweeteners. All of the ingredients, except for the cranberries, are sourced locally in Compostela Valley.

Chocolate lovers can choose from the following variants: 90% dark chocolate, 70% dark chocolate, and 50% dark chocolate. The

50% variant also comes in plain, Arabica coffee, almond, cashew, and cranberries. Marketing her products is one of Resie’s goals, something that she is currently working on. Because her production area needs to be expanded, she cannot cater to a large volume of orders yet. Still, she is glad that the Kapatid Mentor ME program by the Department of Trade and Industry has helped her achieve a few other goals.

“Through our products, we are able to promote the cacao industry in our region. Some Filipinos are also promoting our products by bringing it abroad with them. It makes me happy to know that they are proud of what we have to offer.”



One of the workers packaging their products.



Cacao Culture Farm also produces soap from cocoa butter.

SPREADING CACAO CULTURE IN THE PHILIPPINES

Longing to get away from the hustle of Metro Manila, Kenneth and Shiela Reyes-Lao were only looking for a lifestyle change when they first came to Davao City. Nevertheless, when they saw a cacao fruit for the first time, they realized that it had the potential to become a thriving business.

From Tech to Agriculture

For Kenneth and Shiela of Cacao Culture Farms, producing cacao-based products was an unexpected path for both of them. Both of them were tech entrepreneurs based in Manila when they realized that they wanted a change of scenery. After moving to Davao, they searched for a business venture that they wanted to get into and one of those was agriculture.

Despite having no prior experience in the agriculture industry, their interest and eagerness to start were there. It was the Department of Trade and



Cocoa tea minus the guilt. Their cacao tea is made from the husks of the cacao beans.

Industry (DTI) that pointed them in the direction of cacao farming.

“DTI told us that cacao was among the priority crops of Davao. There were also trainings that were scheduled, so I attended some of those. It was when we saw a cacao for the first time when I told my wife that we needed to plant this,” Kenneth shares.

He says the idea came from their interest to grow their own chocolate. Their previous office-based jobs also urged them to “get their hands dirty” and be more in touch with nature. Agriculture proved to be a completely different yet a fulfilling change of pace in their careers.

Growing and Producing Cacao

The three-hectare farm that they are currently leasing in Gumalang, Calinan started as a cacao seedling nursery for farmers and farm owners. Over time, the neighboring farms started selling their cacao seedlings to them and they began producing cacao products from it.

At present, Cacao Culture Farms is partnering with a family-owned company called AEMPLOM to produce tablea. Cacao Culture provides the cacao beans while AEMPLOM



Kenneth Lao proves that switching to an entirely different career and succeeding in it are possible.

is responsible for the machinery, labor, production, and packaging. Aside from the traditional tablea, they also offer various cacao-based products for sale. These include cocoa powder, cacao nibs, cacao and chocolate body soaps, cocoa butter, and cacao tea. Kenneth says tea drinkers will definitely appreciate the cacao tea which is made from the shell of the beans.

“It has a tea taste but with the aroma of hot chocolate. So, it’s like drinking hot chocolate without the guilt of consuming sugar.”

Challenges in the Cacao Industry

A worker prepares the tablea in the molds.



Like any other business, Cacao Culture Farms encountered obstacles while still starting. According to Kenneth, one of the major challenges they had was dealing with old farming practices and introducing new, efficient ones.

He also adds that global warming is truly making an impact in agriculture. The drastically changing climate is already affecting the harvest schedule, cacao yield, and water supply.

In terms of production, they are also struggling with product distribution. They are still figuring out how to get the products closer to the customers

since not everyone has easy access to it. And because Davao is the chocolate capital of the country, they have several competitors as well. Fortunately, they are able to use their experience on information technology through social media marketing strategies. Their participation in the Kapatid Mentor ME program provided them with business trainings and market exposure.

Two Steps to Success

Diving into an entirely new career is indeed possible, as seen in Cacao Culture Farms. For those who want to start a business that is different from the career path they are on, Kenneth says there are only two steps.

The first one is to do research. In this digital age, all the needed information is at the tips of our fingertips. The second one is to just do it. He says people are always waiting for the right time to do something, when all they have to do is simply start.

“I think we made the right choice when we chose the cacao industry because we love it. We did not realize that we loved it until we started doing it. Is it right for everybody? Maybe not, because you really need to find something that you love to do.”

Cacao Culture supplies the beans while AEMPLOM is in charge of producing tablea.





All-natural and affordable – Magvilla is known in Tagum for their creamy and delectable ice creams.

The Taste of Sweet Success



From teenage sweethearts to a married couple, Victoriano and Villa Vicada built their business from scratch.

Kids and kids-at-heart will always light up at the sight of a delicious tub of ice cream. It is a dessert that is always present during birthdays and other celebrations. For couple Victoriano and Villa Vicada, making ice cream has always been a part of their love story, which then turned into a full-fledged business when they got married.

Back when they were still teenage sweethearts, Villa would always make her delicious homemade ice cream from scratch. Her then-boyfriend Victoriano suggested that they sell her ice cream since he has a stall

in Tagum's Trade Center. In 2003, they decided to name their brand Magvilla, adding 'Mag' to Villa's.

Although ice cream making was Villa's forte, it was her husband who developed the ingredients and flavors. Both of them worked together, from hand-mixing the ice cream to selling it. Soon, people started to recognize their product.

From producing, and then selling at their stall, Magvilla Ice Cream has definitely gone a long way. They currently have 40 consignment stores selling their ice cream tubs. Their production area has also expanded to cater to their growing market, since they now supply to areas in Davao del Norte and Davao de Oro.

All of their ice cream flavors are made from real fresh fruit, giving it that genuine and creamy taste. At present, they are offering eight flavors: chocolate, ube, cookies and cream, carrot and lemon, avocado, mango, strawberry, and durian. During exhibits, they also produce limited edition flavors, such as squash, malunggay, lemongrass, and guyabano.

Aside from its delectable flavor, Magvilla Ice Cream is much more affordable than most popular ice cream brands as well. Anyone can enjoy their ice cream especially that it comes in a variety of sizes and price ranges. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has also been

helpful in their business journey. Aside from joining the Kapatid Mentor ME program, they also participated in the Brand Equity and Development program. These helped them establish their brand and improve their business model.

It has been 16 years since Magvilla started, and they are not slowing down anytime soon. Villa says it was a long but worthwhile journey

"We realized that anything is possible. There are times when we thought of giving up, but if you enjoy what you do, you will be successful."



Magvilla is looking to expand their production to cater the growing demand for their ice cream.



Where it all started – the stall in Trade Center where they first sold their ice cream.



These workers are busy with the ice cream production just in time for durian season.



One of Magvilla's best-selling mango ice cream.

TICKLING TUMMIES AND TASTE BUDS

No meal is complete without a dash of spice and chili which tickle the palate. In almost every Filipino home, you are bound to find a bottle of hot sauce or chili. For Joshua and Sarah Uy, owners of Happi Tummy Foodstuff, Inc., the high demand for this flavor urged them to create their flagship chili garlic sauce.

CHIGAS, derived from the words 'chili garlic sauce', is a premium product made of chili oil, dried pepper, and garlic. Its distinctive taste and texture make it a quick favorite among consumers who get to taste it for the first time. With CHIGAS, anyone can enjoy siomai, fried tofu, or dumplings at home just like they would at their favorite restaurant.

Joshua shares he was not really into business as an undergraduate. His degree was under the medical field, which is totally different from what CHIGAS is all about. However, he tried his hand at selling processed food products at the young age of 23. Little did he know, his humble tocino, longganisa, ham, and embutido would take him far in the business world. As of today, some of these food products are specially manufactured for other companies.

Through the Kapatid Mentor



Owners Joshua and Sarah Uy pose with their flagship product, CHIGAS.



Happi Tummy has been to numerous trade fairs showcasing their infamous chili garlic sauce.



With a variety of flavors, CHIGAS adds a kick of flavor and spice to any dish.

ME (KMME) program of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), he was able to learn the ins and outs of the business. They were able to improve their business model and correct some practices that they have been doing wrong. DTI has also opened new doors for them by letting them join trade fairs and introducing their products to the international market.

“KMME encouraged us to really push harder into the market,” he says.

Joshua is now Happi Tummy’s General Manager and is in charge of overseeing operations. On the other hand, her wife Sarah, is the company’s Sales and Marketing Director. Together, they are aiming

to widen their market and introduce their products to more consumers.

Although they have come a long way since they started, there were challenges that they had to overcome. One of which is introducing a new product to Filipino consumers. He says educating consumers on how to incorporate their chili garlic sauce into several dishes is important. Once consumers learned that CHIGAS is more than just a dip sauce for siomai, it was well-received in the market.

Aside from dipping, this savory sauce can be combined with food in plenty of ways. CHIGAS makes for an excellent seasoning when cooking meat, seafood, soup,

pasta, and vegetables. It can also be used in meat buns and even chocolate cakes, giving it that unique, sweet and spicy flavor.

Consumers will love it even more since every bottle of CHIGAS has provided job opportunities from farming to production. The freshly-picked chili peppers and wild garlicks are sourced from local farmers in Mindanao the company is supporting. This is also one of Happi Tummy’s missions: to create more jobs through their products.

For chili sauce lovers out there, CHIGAS is available in different variants: original, kalamansi, spicy dilis, and extra spicy.



Using a knife with their dexterous hands, these weavers can create high-quality woven products.

Weaving Wonders with Their Hands

Residing in the quaint barangay of Talogoy, Malita, in Davao Occidental is a group of Tagakaolo weavers known as the Talogoy Weavers Association. Headed by Leopoldo Bancil, the association is made up of 25 members who are adept at creating quality woven products patronized locally and abroad.

Using nito vine which naturally grows in their area, the weavers have created a stable livelihood out of their inherited tribal skills. Nong Poldo, as Bancil is known in the community, shares that he first learned to weave when he was in elementary. The talented weavers are able to create high-quality woven products such as plates, coasters, placemats,

and food covers. Some of their newest additions include hampers, boxes, decors, and small tables. To create these made-to-order products, they allot a few days in crafting each piece to perfection.

Their products are incredibly beautiful and intricate that one of their constant buyers is Davao City-based exporter Yvette's Bags and Beads Collection. Its owner, Yvette Marie Celi, buys the trendy fashionable bags the weavers create. These are then added with embellishments for their company's domestic and international markets. She even trained the weavers herself to expand their skills on producing different bag designs. The group has a strong stream of buyers



Nong Poldo, the head of Talogoy Weavers Association.

today, it must be noted though that weaving was not a promising livelihood for them before. Giving their products exposure to potential buyers can be difficult, especially that they live in a remote area. Nong Poldo recalls that before the association was formed in 2016, there were times when they had very few orders, sometimes none at all.

“Kung naay order, makahimo mi. Kung walay order, dili mi kahimo. Kaning amoa, paningkamot lang gyud ni.” (“If there are orders, we will have something to make. If there are none, we do not have anything to make. This is purely hard work and persistence.”)

Fortunately, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has helped this small association grow. They are now registered and recognized by DTI as a small business. By providing them with trainings, programs, materials (blowtorch, knives), and development interventions, the weavers have become more productive and efficient.

DTI also promotes the association by letting them join trade fairs and festivals to gain customers and insitutional buyers. Their products are currently displayed in their office, allowing customers to order through DTI. Additionally, DTI provides the weavers with new designs and prototypes of woven crafts so they can offer new products.

At present, Nong Poldo is passing his weaving skills to the people in his community, as well as to those in Sta. Maria, Davao Occidental. They conduct trainings for these next generation of weavers in the center donated by their barangay. And although he admits that they still require plenty of practice, small progress is better than nothing.



The weavers use nito grass which naturally grows around their area.



Some of the talented weavers of Talogoy Weavers Association.



Some of Talogoy's woven products: food covers, plates, and coasters.



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NEGOSYO CENTER



What is Negosyo Center?

- It is a one-stop shop for services intended to support existing and start – up small businesses.
- Its establishment is provided for in Republic Act No.10644 (Go Negosyo Act) authored by Senator Paolo Benigno “Bam” Aquino IV, and was signed into law on July 15, 2014.
- It provides an array of services categorized into three major classifications:
 - a) business registration assistance
 - b) business advisory
 - c) business information and advocacy
- It also conducts several training programs to further develop MSMEs.





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