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Metro Employees Join Medical Mission to the Philippines



Metro's Willie Atienza, upper left in blue T-shirt, and Rose Sanchez, center in blue T-shirt, with college scholarship candidates in Banna. Jerry Ramos is lower right in yellow T-shirt. Below, volunteers in yellow T-shirts distribute pharmaceuticals to patients crowding a makeshift clinic in Banna.



- **Photos tell stories of poverty to Jerry Ramos, Rose Sanchez and Willie Atienza**

By REINA V. SLUTSKE

(March 2, 2006) As Jerry Ramos, Rose Sanchez and Willie Atienza go over photographs from their recent two-week medical and dental mission in January to the Philippines, each one seems to have a story.

For a photo of an open warehouse crowded with people, Ramos says, "Two hundred patients were there in the morning, and more came through the day."

Another picture, with people having their teeth extracted, and Ramos says, "There are no dental chairs when they do extractions. They have to hold the head of the person."

There are even stories that need no photographs. "There was one little boy, and when he was born, his navel was bleeding. It was always bleeding," says Sanchez, her voice quivering slightly.

Ramos, Sanchez and Atienza have participated in missions to the Philippines for many years. This year they worked with the poor in the towns Meycauayan and Banna on the main island of Luzon.

Ramos is a senior auditor in Contracts and Grant Audits; Sanchez is a supervising auditor in IT Audit; and Atienza is a senior auditor in Internal Audit.



Dentists working at the clinic in Meycauayan extracted teeth and performed other dental work in less-than-ideal conditions.



Metro's Jerry Ramos, in yellow T-shirt, helps a volunteer during patient interviews in Meycauayan.

Main goal is to survive

As volunteers, along with numerous doctors and dentists, they helped give vitamins, toothbrushes and toothpaste to people who couldn't afford them. For those people, the main goal is to survive.

"Not even cleaning their teeth is in their priority," says Sanchez.

Because many children in the Philippines can't afford to go to college, a college scholarship program for public school students was added to this year's mission.

Sanchez and Atienza interviewed ten scholarship candidates in Banna, all in the 95th percentile in public schools. Three students will receive \$1,200 a year to attend college.

Sanchez remembers a girl who wants to be a lawyer.

‘Could be the future president’

“They’re so intelligent, they communicate very well, and the only thing holding them back is that they can’t afford to go to college,” she says. “That little girl could be the future president of the Philippines.”

Ramos, a native of Banna, knows that there is very little that can done to help alieviate poverty in the Philippines.

“We know we are covering up the real problem,” he says. “To me, it’s better than nothing, just like the vitamins we provide.”



Metro’s Rose Sanchez, in blue blouse, was in charge of volunteers dispensing pharmaceuticals at the Meycauayan clinic.

In the future, Ramos, Sanchez, Atienza and their fellow volunteers will visit other islands in the Philippines, especially the southern island of Cebu, where they would be able to treat 6,000 to 10,000 patients with the help of a private non-profit organization.

“Have I given enough?” Ramos asks himself. “And to me, it’s not enough.”