



The Philippine

# Starweek

THE SUNDAY MAGAZINE OF THE PHILIPPINE STAR

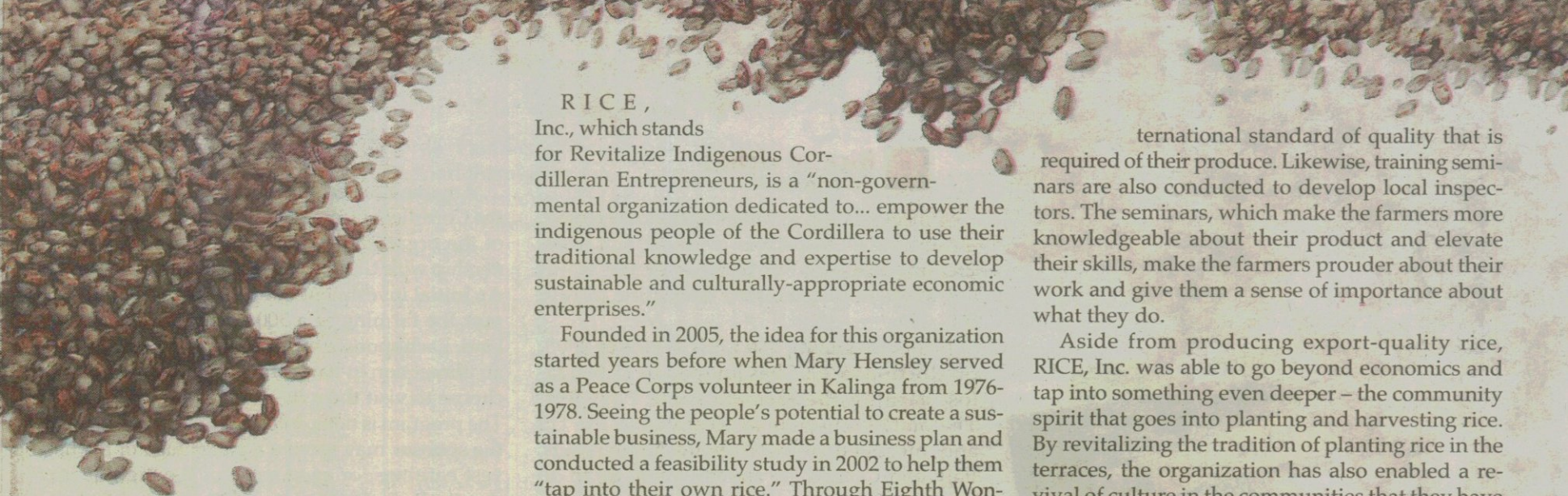
VOL. XXII • NO. 16

MAY 25, 2008



The story of RICE INC.

## RICE to RICHES



By Ida Anita Q. del Mundo

**RICE, INC. WAS NEVER intended to be formed. Years before the organization was created, its executive director, Vicky Garcia, had been approaching different non-government organizations with an idea and a proposal formulated by her former classmate at the School for International Training in Vermont, Mary Hensley. "No one thought it was possible," she shares. Eventually, finding no one to support their project, but still firmly believing in their vision, Vicky decided that there was no other way but to start their own organization. With that, the seeds of RICE, Inc. were planted.**

RICE, Inc., which stands for Revitalize Indigenous Cordilleran Entrepreneurs, is a "non-governmental organization dedicated to... empower the indigenous people of the Cordillera to use their traditional knowledge and expertise to develop sustainable and culturally-appropriate economic enterprises."

Founded in 2005, the idea for this organization started years before when Mary Hensley served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Kalinga from 1976-1978. Seeing the people's potential to create a sustainable business, Mary made a business plan and conducted a feasibility study in 2002 to help them "tap into their own rice." Through Eighth Wonder, a socially responsible, shared-equity business founded by Mary, the processed rice is exported to the United States and sold as exotic, gourmet rice. The program's components include partnership with local government units and agencies, recruitment and informational campaigns, production support and capacity building for farmers, and market development of the product.

"They were so overwhelmed," Vicky says of how the local farmers reacted. Many still remembered Mary from the years she spent in their village as a volunteer and were surprised that she had not forgotten them and had actually come back to help them once again. "Sometimes it takes an outsider to see what we have," says Vicky on how Mary's vision for the small villages in the Cordillera has grown into this monumental project.

Among the programs offered by RICE, Inc. are quality control seminars, and informing the farmers of the in-

ternational standard of quality that is required of their produce. Likewise, training seminars are also conducted to develop local inspectors. The seminars, which make the farmers more knowledgeable about their product and elevate their skills, make the farmers prouder about their work and give them a sense of importance about what they do.

Aside from producing export-quality rice, RICE, Inc. was able to go beyond economics and tap into something even deeper – the community spirit that goes into planting and harvesting rice. By revitalizing the tradition of planting rice in the terraces, the organization has also enabled a revival of culture in the communities that they have touched. "Many younger generations are coming back to their provinces to help with their family's rice planting and harvesting," reports Vicky, adding that most were forced to migrate to the cities to look for work. She adds that now they are more interested in their own culture and in upholding the community's traditions.

**W**e are breaking ground," says Vicky on what the organization has been doing – both literally and figuratively. In three short years, RICE, Inc. has accomplished much more than was initially expected. There has been a drastic increase in municipality participation in the program – starting with only two, the program now reaches 18 municipalities in Kalinga, Mountain Province and Ifugao, which translates to 1,358 farmers involved in the program. The organization has succeeded in forging a memorandum of agreement with the local government units of Ifugao-Kalinga. So far, Vicky has conducted over

Next page, please ➡



# RICE TO RICHES

*Planting seeds of hope: Mary Hensley carries newly-harvested bundles of rice during one of her regular visits to the rice terraces.*

## Rice to riches

From page 3

300 meetings and seminars all over the region, producing 60 inspectors, with the aim of increasing that number to 90 after the training workshop scheduled from June to July this year.

From producing 869 kilos of rice in 2005, production in 2007 has jumped to 17,000 kilos, earning the farmers some P899,995. The market consists of 13 states in the US and interested buyers from the Netherlands, Italy, and Canada are already lining up to do business. The rice was also used as a gift at the UNESCO Conference in 2007.

Most of all, RICE, Inc.'s success has enabled farmers to go from subsistence farming to making it their source of livelihood. "We even had to teach some farmers how to count beyond 100 when their income started to increase," Vicky shares one poignant experience. Before, they were not even certain of what they would eat for the day, but now, Vicky says that "the farmers are able to plan for their future." Many have now been able to renovate their homes, receive much needed medical attention, start businesses, and send their children to school. Vicky reports one business-minded farmer who was able to buy a generator. He now rents it out to RICE, Inc. during the harvest season.

Anyone can become involved in RICE Inc. and the Cordillera farmers' endeavor, says Vicky. One of the organization's newest programs, in partnership with UNESCO, is called Adopt-a-Terrace. An initial investment of P5,000 is enough to support the farming of a 300-square meter piece of land. Each sponsor will also be able to experience an immersion in harvesting and planting, if they choose to visit their sponsored farming families. The program is not a dole-out. Come harvest time, the sponsor may receive a percentage of the harvest earnings, or even some of the high quality rice itself, depending on what terms they have decided with the farmers.

At the moment, rice produced through RICE, Inc. is exclusively for export. Vicky says that they have found that foreigners are willing to pay a higher price for the product. Penetrating the Philippine market is a greater challenge. Many Filipinos are concerned about paying the lowest possible price, especially when the product is local, she says. To address this issue, the organization is starting to use information campaigns to show that buyers should be willing to pay a fair price for high-quality local products.

RICE, Inc.'s efforts have been given a boost by the attention it has received after winning a P1-million grant from the Peace and Equity Foundation through the Panibagong Paraan, an event or-



Executive director Vicky Garcia mans the RICE Inc. booth at the Panibagong Paraan exhibition (top). Eighth Wonder products ready for export (above). The Cordillera rice may be pounded using traditional techniques, but its quality meets international standards (above right). RICE Inc.'s produce is transformed into gourmet dishes by chefs in the United States (above, far right). Because of the organization's success, many more generations have become interested in their culture and traditions. Young women from the Cordilleras celebrate their village's bountiful harvest (far right).

Catalina Tuguinay, a farmer from Hingyon, shares, "This project was once only in my dream that one day our native rice will be sought by many people from every race and nation."

Jenny Rosite, a farmer inspector from Lubuagan, adds, "Mary Hensley came back with the desire to help us help ourselves...we now value our rice even more, not just as a source of food but also as a source for everything we need." Hearing these and seeing a vast improvement in the life of each of the farming communities she has visited, Vicky says "I feel like all my work has already been compensated."

ganized by the World Bank, where non-government organizations, civil society groups, academic institutions and other organizations are given the chance to showcase their work and vie for various grants.

With so much progress in only three years, one can only imagine how much more RICE, Inc. can accomplish. "We envision the further expansion of the project in the near future," says Vicky. "There will be an increase in production and an increase in the number of farmers going back to farming. We are committed to maintaining a globally-competitive product."


While final packaging is currently done in the

States, improvements and acquisition of equipment are ongoing so that all production can be done in the Philippines. Vicky adds that her dream for the farmers is that "every farmer will have a quality life," with access to what were once luxuries like education and healthcare, to such basic necessities as electricity.

"What was impossible is now possible," says Vicky proudly. When no one believed in the project, Vicky Garcia and Mary Hensley strived on, because they believed in the farmers of the Cordilleras, and they saw value in the rice of the uplands. Because of RICE, Inc., many farmers have become equipped with the knowledge they need to produce rice that meets international stan-

dards. Families are now able to support themselves through their own self-sustainable businesses.

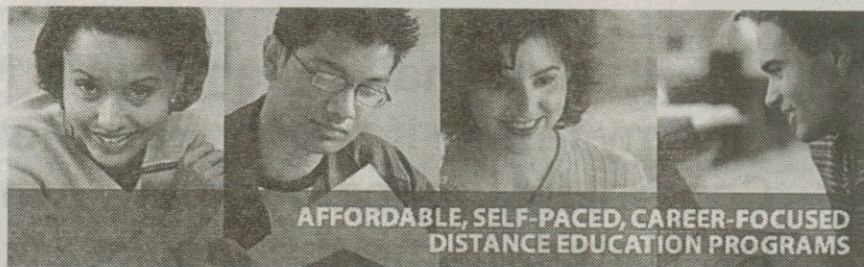
The culture in the Cordilleras is flourishing. The iconic rice terraces are being revitalized and valued. "We have made them go back to dreaming again," shares Vicky, highlighting how, ultimately, the organization's success lies in sowing hope in each farmer.

RICE Inc.'s story is truly one of rice to riches – producing not only material wealth, but even more important, enriching the lives of each farmer. 

For more information on RICE, Inc. and Eighth Wonder, e-mail [contactus@heirloomrice.com](mailto:contactus@heirloomrice.com) or visit [www.heirloomrice.com](http://www.heirloomrice.com).



# Earn Your Degree or Career Diploma at Home!

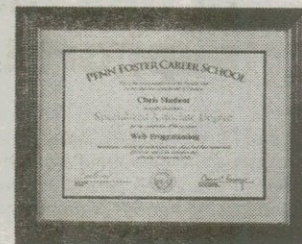


Earn your Degree or Career Diploma that could change your life without attending college. At Penn Foster Schools, we've spent more than a hundred years training people for exciting, profitable careers. From our beginnings in 1891, we have become a world leader in training for business, industry, science and technology. More than 13,000,000 students have enrolled with us, more than 2,000 corporations have used our training systems for their own employees — including Sony, Mobil, Ford, IBM, AT&T and GE.

## AN IDEAL WAY TO LEARN

Our graduates tell us they like home study because you go as fast or slow as you want, waste no time travelling to class, and never have to miss a paycheck. Yet skilled instructors are ready to help you whenever you ask.

So if you want more security and a better future, send for FREE facts. No obligation! Mail the coupon today!



**PENN FOSTER**  
CAREER SCHOOL

- Accredited by the DISTANCE EDUCATION AND TRAINING COUNCIL (DETC) in Washington, DC
- Licensed by the Pennsylvania State Board of Private Licensed Schools
- Reviewed and approved as a Certified Provider of Continuing Education and Training Programs by the INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION AND TRAINING (IACET)

Cut out and mail coupon or write to:

**PENN FOSTER SCHOOLS**, Dept. B8554  
P.O. BOX 14500 Ortigas Center Post Office 1605, Pasig City  
or visit: Suite 907 OMM Citra Building, San Miguel Avenue, Ortigas Center, Pasig City  
E-Mail: [edirect@info.com.ph](mailto:edirect@info.com.ph)  
[www.PennFosterGlobal.com](http://www.PennFosterGlobal.com)

**MAIL COUPON OR CALL 632 0608 • 637 5590**  
or FAX 637 5587 today for FREE information!

### BUSINESS, FINANCE & MARKETING

Accounting for Non-Accountants \*  
Advanced Management \*  
Advertising & Public Relations \*  
Basic Management \*  
Bookkeeping/Accounting  
Hotel/Restaurant Management  
Industrial Management \*  
Inventory Management & Control \*  
Marketing Management \*  
Small Business Owner  
Professional Secretary

### HEALTH SERVICES

Dental Assistant  
Fitness & Nutrition  
Medical Transcriptionist  
Occupational Therapy Aide  
Physical Therapy Aide

### ART

Basic Commercial Art \*  
Cartooning \*  
Artist

### WRITING/COMMUNICATION

Business Communications \*  
Freelance Journalism \*  
Freelance Writer  
Effective English \*  
Practical English \*  
Practical English/Command of Words \*  
Short Story Writing \*

### EDUCATION

Child Day Care Management  
Child Psychology \*  
Mathematics Review \*  
Teacher Aide

### FASHION/INTERIOR DESIGN & CATERING

Caterer  
Dressmaking and Design  
Interior Decorator  
Interior Design \*

### ENGINEERING/BUILDING SCIENCE

General Drafting \*  
Power Plant Engineering \*  
Structural Engineering Technology \*

### ELECTRICAL/ELECTRONICS

Basic Electronics  
Electronic Instrumentation & Control \*  
Electronics Technician  
Industrial Instrumentation & Process Control Technician \*

### TECHNICAL/INDUSTRIAL

Automotive Repair Technician  
Automotive Mechanics \*  
Heating, Ventilating & Aircon Technician  
Combination Welder \*

### COMPUTER SCIENCE

Computer Graphic Artist  
Java Programmer

PC Fundamentals \*  
PC Maintenance and Repair  
Visual Basic.NET Programmer  
Visual C++ Programmer  
Web Page Designer

### OTHER COURSES

Mathematics Review \*

### US DEGREE PROGRAMS

Accounting  
Business Management  
Civil Engineering Technology  
Early Childhood Education  
Electrical Engineering Technology  
Electronics Technology  
Finance  
Human Resources Management  
Industrial Engineering Technology  
Marketing  
Mechanical Engineering Technology

### US HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM

\* Certificate Courses



**PENN FOSTER SCHOOLS**, Dept. B8554  
P.O. BOX 14500 Ortigas Center Post Office 1605, Pasig City

Please send free facts on how I can train at home for the career I have chosen. No Obligation.

I am interested in: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_