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First Balfour maintains triple ISO certification for 19 straight years

By Dolly Pasia-Ramos

FOR the 19th straight year, First Balfour has maintained its compliance with the requirements of ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management System (QMS), ISO 14001:2015 Environmental Management System (EMS) and ISO 45001:2018 Occupational Health and Safety Management System (OHSMS).

TÜV SÜD PSB Philippines Inc. formally approved the maintenance of the QMS certification following a successful surveillance audit on Sept. 21, 2021.

First Balfour's head of corporate quality Joey Lagdan said: "For the second straight year, there were no major or minor nonconformities found during the remote audit. An on-site audit in one of our projects will be held by October this year and we hope to have zero nonconformities too. Kudos to our internal audit team and all the support departments who have painstakingly worked hard to

comply to the mandatory requirements. The positive outcome of this surveillance audit is a clear manifestation of our solid commitment to continuous improvement."

Positive aspects

In the closing meeting, TÜV SÜD lead auditor Marijane Comaling said they found six opportunities for improvement and two positive aspects.

TÜV SÜD also recommended the company's recertification to the environmental and occupational health standards after the successful recertification audit on Sept. 22-24. The news was announced during the audit closing ceremony attended by First Balfour executives, TÜV SÜD auditors and department representatives.

Zero nonconformities

Audit findings, as noted by TÜV SÜD lead auditor Albert Diuco, showed zero nonconformities for both the EMS and OHSMS standards, the first time this has happened since 2003.

In his closing remarks, head of environment, safety and health Joselito Vicente said: "Thank you to the whole First Balfour team. Over the years, each one of us has contributed to the vast improvements when it comes to the way we are operating our business. This is the difficult part now, to sustain the good performance and maintain our best practices going forward."

First Balfour received its first ISO 9001 certification in 2002 and its first ISO 14001 and OHSAS 18001 certifications in 2003, making it one of the first triple ISO-certified construction companies in the Philippines.



TÜV SÜD's Marijane Comaling (top row, 4th from left) cites First Balfour for its continuous implementation of online systems to accommodate client requirements and management's thrust towards a decarbonized and regenerative future

De Jesus makes 'Modern Governance 100' list

By Joel Gaborni

AGNES de Jesus, the chief sustainability officer of First Philippine Holdings Corporation (FPH), has been recognized by a US-based governance, risk and compliance (GRC) company as one of the world's top 100 GRC leaders for driving FPH's efforts toward greater diversity, sustainable practices and sharper insights for company leadership.

Diligent Corporation, a leading GRC software-as-a-service (SaaS) company, announced on its website that De Jesus is one of the honorees in its list of "Modern Governance 100" global leaders of 2021.

De Jesus received the honor under the "ESG [environmental, social and governance] and Diversity Trailblazer" category for her role in the accomplishments of FPH and its subsidiaries in environment and human rights protection, promoting gender diversity and equality, and in recognizing the rights of indigenous people on top of preserving their cultural heritage.

She won the recognition based on the nomination coming from the Center for Social Responsibility of the University of Asia and the Pacific.

De Jesus was appointed to her FPH post in 2014. Prior to her current position, she served as senior vice president for environment and external relations and concurrent compliance officer of Energy Development Corporation.

Diligent is the leading GRC SaaS company serving more than one million users from over 25,000 organizations around the globe. Its modern GRC platform ensures that boards, executives and other leaders have a holistic, integrated view of ESG data, audit, risk, information security, ethics and compliance across the organization.



Agnes de Jesus

AS families continue to bear the routine of being at home because of the pandemic, they may be on the lookout for entertainment and ways to bond.

Rockwell, FGEN declare dividends

THE board of directors of Rockwell Land Corporation, at its regular meeting on Oct. 7, 2021, approved the declaration of cash dividends of P0.0353 per share to common shareholders, and P0.0006 per share to preferred shareholders representing 6% per annum cumulative dividends for the

period July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021.

The dividends have a record date of Oct. 21, 2021 and are payable on or before Nov. 17, 2021.

The board likewise approved a P5-billion long-term facility with BDO Unibank Inc. to partially fund capex and other

general corporate requirements.

Meanwhile, the board of directors of First Gen Corporation on Sept. 23 also declared cash dividends on the company's Series H preferred shares in the total amount of P545.36 million with a record date of Oct. 12, 2021 and payment date of Nov. 4, 2021.

Special Feature

RE leader echoes IPCC 'code red' on climate change

By Frances Ariola



Nasulo Geothermal Power Plant in Negros Oriental

UNLESS there are immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, limiting global warming within 1.5 to 2 degrees Celsius will be beyond reach.

This is the alarming reality sounded by renewable energy (RE) leader Energy Development Corporation (EDC) at a landmark "Zoominar" organized by the Ecumenical Initiative Forum, a gathering of faith-based organizations against climate change guided by the Laudato Si' encyclical of Pope Francis.

Dubbed "Climate Change: The Greatest Crisis of Our Time," the digital meet brought together stakeholders from the business sector, civil society, academia and the Catholic Church led by Focolare Movement Philippines, Season of Creation Pilipinas and the National Laudato Si' Program organized by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines.

Most daunting

"Contrary to what a lot of us may think, the COVID-19 pandemic is not our greatest problem. Even when we get out of this pandemic, the biggest crisis of our time still remains and that's climate change," said EDC president and chief operating officer Richard Tantoco as the forum's keynote speaker.

Tantoco bared the findings of the latest assessment report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued in August. The sixth in a series of periodic reports put out since 1990, it is the most daunting and alarming to date, pointing to irreversible consequences of climate change if no drastic action is taken to decarbonize the atmosphere.

Among the undeniable facts the IPCC report established was that human activities have unequivocally warmed the oceans, land and atmosphere, when it was merely deemed a possibility eight years ago. It has been

confirmed that the scale of the recent climate system changes as a whole is unprecedented within a period of thousands of years of Earth's existence.

"Global surface temperatures will continue to increase at least until 2050," explained Tantoco. In terms of exceeding the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference or COP 21 limit of global temperature increase, "under most scenarios, crossing 1.5 degrees will happen in the early 2030s. [But] in the absence of deep carbon cuts, 2 degrees will be exceeded during this century."

Practical steps

In response, Tantoco outlined practical steps that nations and enterprises can take, such as accelerating the pursuit of renewable energy in powering not just homes and industries but transportation as well, coupled with "green" investing and an unequivocal rejection of fossil-based fuels such as coal. Forest cover rehabilitation and regeneration is critical.

For communities, resilience against extreme weather disturbances needs to be of utmost priority for local government units. For families and individuals, simple but impactful lifestyle practices such as conservation of natural resources and decreased material consumerism continue to be a big help.

"While we can no longer undo the environmental mistakes that humanity has made in the past, it is up to all of us to do something to prevent them from happening again—to be a part of the solution to the greatest crisis of our time," said Tantoco.

Shake up your quarantine routine with AirConsole from SKY

AS families continue to bear the routine of being at home because of the pandemic, they may be on the lookout for entertainment and ways to bond.

AirConsole through SKY allows parents to join their kids in gaming with its array of games for all ages.

"You really collaborate with your children and explain to them some strategies on how to get further, which is surely

also a beautiful aspect of the platform—to spend quality time with your loved one, especially now in these times," said AirConsole COO Anthony Cliquot at a media event.

As a special treat to existing and new SKY Fiber subscribers, not only can AirConsole be experienced seamlessly with its fast and reliable internet connection, but access to the premium AirConsole Hero plan comes free

for six months, worth P249 a month for regular subscribers.

AirConsole's edge over other gaming platforms today is its accessibility and affordability.

"That is the core of the console and its functionality. We make playing games together really easy. Players can play together on AirConsole without buying any additional hardware. All you need is a SKY Evo box and the smartphones that you

First Balfour short-listed for Investors in People Awards

By Dolly Pasia-Ramos

FIRST Balfour has made the final short list for Overseas Employer of the Year in The Investors in People Awards 2021. In a record-breaking year for entries, with nearly 300 organizations involved, First Balfour made it to the top 10 in the Gold category.

The Investors in People Awards celebrate the very best organizations and individuals from around the world across various organizational, people, well-being and leadership categories. Each year hundreds of organizations from the UK and abroad battle it out to take home one of the trophies to show their award-winning commitment to investing in their people.

Human resources head Carlos Pedro Salonga said: "It is a privilege to be short-listed for this award, a clear indication of the dedication and hard work the team has invested in the business. People first when it matters most. This is a lofty standard that First Balfour upholds. It is deeply embedded in our cultural DNA and is what we believe sets us apart. We need to continue to evolve, adapt and regenerate."

Investors in People CEO Paul Devoy noted: "Now in our eighth year, it always makes me feel immensely proud to see so many fantastic organizations staking their claim to be the best. And every year, the entries do get more and more competi-



and the judging even tighter. Reaching the final short list is a testament to the amazing commitment these organizations are making to make work better for their people, and they truly deserve this recognition."

Winners will be announced in an online ceremony on Nov. 23, 2021. For the full short list and more information about Investors in People, visit www.investorsinpeopleawards.com.

Bounty Fresh powered by 24/7 renewable energy

LEADING chicken brand Bounty Fresh has taken steps to provide consumers with healthy products while having a lasting positive impact on the environment.

Bounty Fresh, true to its brand promise of "grown farm-fresh," ensures it doesn't use hormones and steroids on its poultry products even as it constantly finds ways to make its products affordable, available and accessible to every Filipino family.

During the first enhanced community quarantine in March 2020, Bounty Fresh organized an internal task force to launch an online ordering site within one week that will bring

its chicken products closer to consumers.

Said Carl Chung, a member of the task force: "Through the Meat Market, one can easily buy whole chicken, chicken cutups and marinated and breaded chicken products that have become a vital part of our everyday meals without leaving our homes."

To make Bounty Fresh chicken products more sustainable, the brand has shifted to renewable energy or RE for its source of power in its poultry farms and facilities, including geothermal power.

Geothermal is a clean and reliable alternative energy and can provide an uninterrupted source of power 24/7, or what

Energy Development Corporation (EDC) refers to as "Geo 24/7."

"We believe that our country is rich in natural resources which should be used for the benefit of our *kapwa* Filipinos. Switching to renewable energy not only helps create a greener future, it also realizes the ambition of a developed and self-sustainable Philippines," said Chung.

Bounty Fresh envisions bringing happiness to families through life's bounty, and this means taking care of stakeholders and communities to ensure long-term sustainable growth and prosperity, which is in line with EDC's vision of a regenerative future. (F. Ariola)



Exec Movements

New EVPs, VP at FPH/FGEN

FIRST Philippine Holdings Corporation (FPH) has two new executive vice presidents (EVPs) in Emmanuel Antonio "Noel" Singson and Victor Emmanuel "Lito" Santos Jr. after the company's board of directors approved their promotion on Oct. 7, 2021.



Emmanuel Antonio Singson Victor Emmanuel Santos Jr. Ernie Imperial

The board of First Gen Corporation (FGEN) had also approved their promotion to EVP on Sept. 23.

As chief financial officer and treasurer, Singson had led, structured, negotiated and implemented multiple financing initiatives for the FPH/FGEN group. These include the \$1.5-billion Energy Development Corporation (EDC) acquisition in 2007, the \$544-million Santa Rita refinancing in 2008 and the \$360-million acquisition of British Gas shares in the First Gas companies in 2012,

among others. He holds a bachelor's degree in business management from the Ateneo de Manila University.

Santos heads the FPH Legal and Regulatory Group and serves as its compliance officer, in addition to being regulatory compliance officer of EDC. He is a member of the board of trustees of the Philippine Independent Power Producers Association and director of the Philippine Electricity Market Corporation. He has a bachelor's degree in management of financial institutions from De La Salle University (DLSU) and earned his MBA (with

finance and international business concentration) at Fordham University.

Also on Oct. 7, the FPH board approved the appointment of Ernie Imperial as vice president and chief digital officer. Imperial is an experienced transformation and technology executive who held leadership roles in various companies. He holds a bachelor's degree in computer science, major in information technology, from DLSU. He was also appointed as vice president and chief digital officer of FGEN effective Oct. 1, subject to board approval.

HYBRID...
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AFTER tending to his plants first thing in the morning, Michael Ramos checks his calendar for meetings and emails before taking on his daily tasks as marketing and communications officer at Knowledge Channel Foundation Inc. (KCFI). He buys lunch at midday or sometimes prepares it himself, bookending the day with some exercise (“dancing, cardio or resistance training”).

Ramos, who also handles events and PR for KCFI, is on a



The work setup of senior marketing associate for PR and communications Anina



Michael Ramos, KCFI marketing and communications officer, says he enjoys WFH but misses doing fieldwork

“semi flexi” arrangement, noting that the foundation is not very strict about sticking to a traditional schedule.

“What’s important is that we produce our expected outputs, attend meetings and stay productive throughout the day,” he explained.

The setup has given him more time for work and rest; with no transportation expenses to factor in, he spends less as well.

“I enjoy work from home (WFH) because there’s no stress due to traffic and the daily commute which takes up to four hours of my day,” he said.

But Ramos, who is in his 30s, worries that he ends up sitting for hours. And with no office to go to, he’s had to say goodbye to bonding moments with colleagues and even to having a dedicated workspace. “I miss doing fieldwork as well,” he added.

Anina, a senior marketing associate for PR and communications based in Marikina, had to adjust to the WFH setup when the lockdowns began.

“We work from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. I’m able to keep my schedule on track even when I’m at home since our team tries to keep all our projects moving as much as possible,” she stated.

But she had been mall-based pre-pandemic and thrived in the daily hustle and bustle of retail life, which is why a rejigged shifting schedule that now includes two weeks on-site per month has helped the twentysomething manage tasks better.

“Since I do PR, I write a lot of articles. In this aspect, working from home helps me focus more. However, part of PR also requires doing event coordination and logistics, which is much easier when I’m on-site,” Anina shared.

In Taguig, Sanny Fernandez (not her real name) typically spends her day answering emails and Viber messages, writing reports and attending meetings on Zoom. Her corporate communications team sticks to a 10 a.m.-7 p.m. schedule, but they are allowed to log off early when they finish a big report or presentation.

She cited the upsides of working from home: “No need

to travel, *mas tipid*, I manage my time better, I can multitask and it’s more convenient. As a bonus, the company provides food reimbursement for some virtual office activities.”

But Fernandez, 41, admitted it was easier to communicate with her teammates when they were all in one office, especially when they were in a rush to complete crucial projects.

Shift to hybrid

All over the world, companies are starting to make the shift to hybrid work or are considering doing so.

Joel Esguerra, in his presentation titled “Empathetic Leadership: Leading Virtually in a Hybrid Work Environment” at the Lopez Group HR Council’s third-quarter general membership meeting on Sept. 30, shared how his company made the transition.

Esguerra is currently the talent management and organization development lead at Novartis Oncology in Basel, Switzerland.

When the COVID-19 pandemic was declared in early 2020, Novartis responded by shutting down their offices and distributing masks and disinfectants to their more than 100,000 employees.

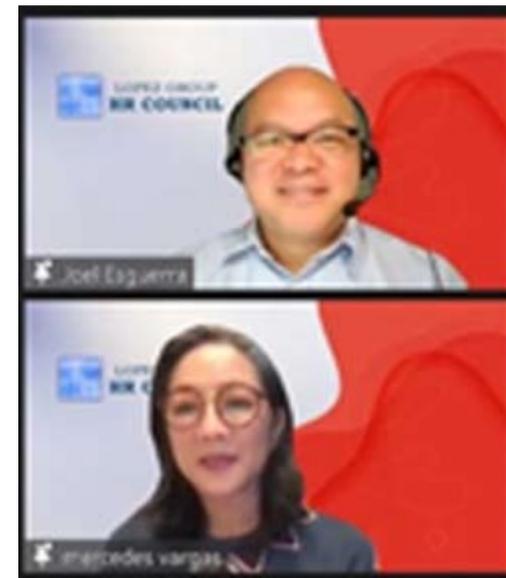
It then rolled out programs for everything their employees might conceivably need. These ranged from extending financial assistance so they could set up home workstations to leveraging virtual-working technologies (Miro, Microsoft Teams) and other team tools and resources to boost effectiveness.

Going big on learning

With schools and learning centers shut down, Novartis went “big on learning” by encouraging employees to enroll in online courses on NVS Learning, Coursera and LinkedIn, and extending the offer to their family members, Esguerra noted.

The pharmaceutical company took a more input- and feedback-focused approach to performance management that emphasized check-ins and coaching over ratings even as it preached “Choice with Responsibility”—to balance flexibility (“the choice to decide how, where and when they work”) and accountability (“taking personal responsibility to inform managers and align with teammates”).

To identify pain points that might come up, the company regularly conducts engagement surveys and pulse surveys, Esguerra said.



Lopez Group HR Council chair Cedie Lopez Vargas awards a certificate of appreciation to Joel Esguerra

Novartis has made hybrid working in the time of COVID-19 more enticing with schemes like open bars/café, game nights, meeting-free Fridays, meeting-free weeks during the Christmas and summer breaks, shorter (25 minutes) and less frequent calls, asynchronous work where team members have different “shifts” during the workday instead of everyone working from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and monthly team check-in with managers. However, “FOMO” (fear of missing out) becomes “JOMO” (joy of missing out) as employees may opt out of joining some meetings.

Esguerra said companies could carve out time for well-being check-ins to give struggling employees an opening to ask for help.

“At first you’ll get canned answers, but eventually people become more open,” he noted.

While hybrid working has somewhat freed employees from traffic jams, jostling crowds, floods and other discomforts of life on the road, the shift to hybrid working has not been obstacle-free.

Top sources of stress

In the 2021 hybrid work employee survey conducted by Gartner, respondents pointed to digital distractions as the number one stressor in the hybrid working setup; these include personal emails, PMs or private messages, unscheduled personal calls and social media notifications. Per Gartner, hybrid employees are 2.54 times more likely to encounter these

diversions compared to in-office workers.

On top of these are work distractions (work emails, unscheduled work-related calls, work instant messaging notifications and meeting requests) and personal distractions (housekeeping responsibilities, for example).

Virtual overload, where employees feel “cognitively drained” from being on air or on screen for huge chunks of time is the second top stressor; as a result, employees are 1.12 times “more likely to feel they are working too hard” than their counterparts in traditional setups.

Respondents specified being “always on” as the third top stressor, with hybrid employees being 1.27 times more likely to have a harder time switching off. How does an employee get off work when his or her home is the workplace? Can one be “Dad” or “Mama” while he or she still has their HR or finance hat on?

Esguerra pointed out that not being able to engage in quick chats with coworkers resulted in slower decision making, while the lack of face-to-face interaction and unclear directions meant lower accountability on the part of employees.

Now, almost two years into the pandemic, the focus should not just be on the “wheres,” but also the “hows” of working in the new normal.

New choices

According to Esguerra, if companies in 2020 (“past”) were focused on addressing their

employees’ needs, the “now and next” step this year is for leaders and teams to make new choices and to redesign how they work together. By 2022 (“later”), these “hows” should be brought to scale across the company so the “where” and “when” are clearer.

He cited the Gartner survey which indicated that 67% of employees agree that they have higher “expectations for working flexibly” and 55% agree that “whether or not they can work flexibly” will factor in their decision to remain with the company.

Given this mindset, some of the “hows” to ask then include: How can we master more hybrid ways of working—virtual, face to face, synchronous and asynchronous? How can we transform the way we meet and collaborate, and become way more efficient, effective, connected and creative? How do we leverage the different digital tools and platforms that are available to us?

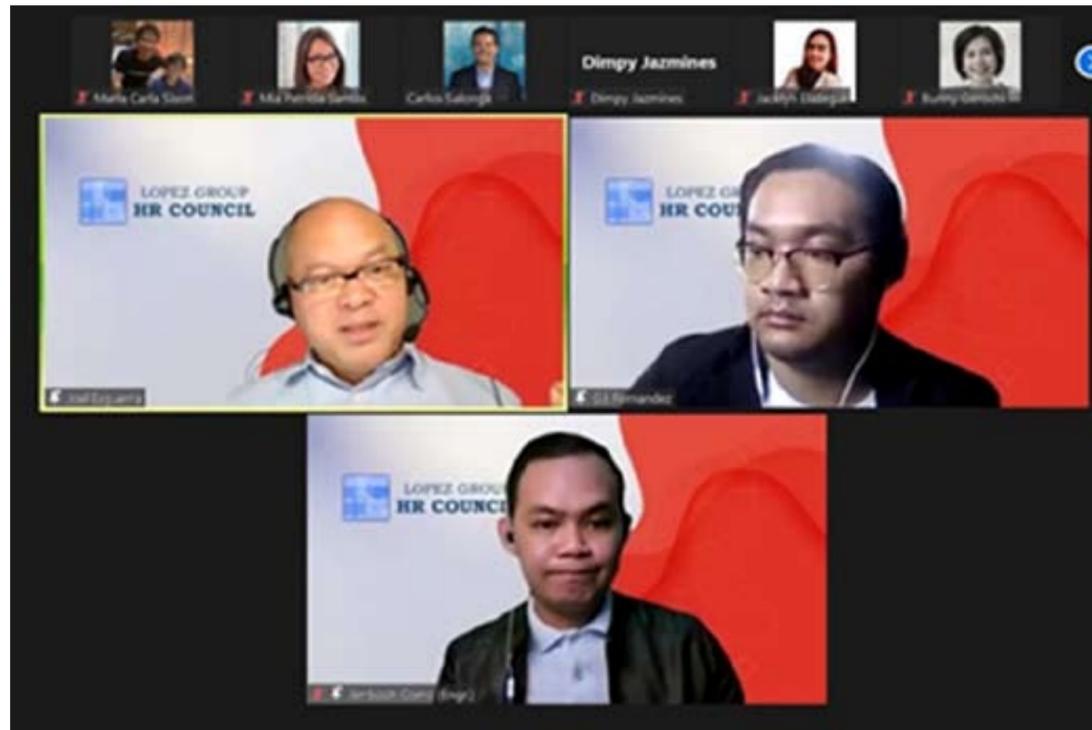
“Try to experiment which will work, share so it will be replicated,” Esguerra added.

Meanwhile, more than a year into their adjusted work environments, Anina, Fernandez and Ramos look forward to the new work normal, whatever it may be.

“I’m really optimistic about returning to the regular work setup soon. As someone who works in the retail industry, working on-site really helps us get a feel of our market, in turn allowing us to come up with initiatives that will be more suitable to them,” Anina stressed.

Fernandez said she is “more productive, less distracted and more focused” as her energy is used for working instead of traveling. But when things normalize, she hopes to return to a hybrid workplace. Maybe two WFH days and three in-office days, she offered.

“Following a hybrid work setup would be ideal as this will be the future of work. Work will no longer be limited to one place. As long as you have your laptop with you and an internet connection, you can work anywhere. At least for a profession like mine,” Ramos affirmed.



Hosts GI Fernandez of First Philippine Industrial Park and Jimboho Como of First Philec lead the Q&A session

Spotlight

Children’s rights advocates seek support as Malabrigo project starts

THE Children’s Rights and Development cluster of Lopez Group Foundation Inc. enjoined Lopez Group employees to come on board as sponsors, donors or volunteers as it presented its pilot project during the Learning Synergy in Action session of the HR Council membership meeting (GMM).

Knowledge Channel Foundation Inc. (KCFI) operations director Edric Calma and ABS-CBN Foundation Inc. (AFI)-Bantay Bata 163 program head Vicky Libao updated the GMM participants on the cluster’s project in Brgy. Malabrigo.

The group has chosen the barangay in Lobo, Batangas, considered a geographically isolated and disadvantaged area with a high poverty incidence rate, to be the pilot site for a child’s right community model. It aims to raise the local children’s awareness of their rights while boosting the parents’ and other caregivers’ awareness of children’s rights and positive parenting. As well, it hopes to train child



development workers (CDWs), barangay health workers (BHWs), barangay nutrition scholars (BNSs) and other local stakeholders in child abuse prevention and response.

In all, it hopes to reach 200 children, 120 parents and six CDWs, BHWs and BNSs in Brgy. Malabrigo.

The initial rollout, set for this month, includes training 30 parents of ECD children on online safety and using social media responsibly.

Calma and Libao said Lopez Group employees can participate in the project by sponsoring one child for P200 or a parent for P300 to

cover training costs and access to information, education and communication materials plus internet access for the latter, or by donating books and toys.

The group also welcomes volunteers who can do events and communication, resource mobilization and

advocacy work. Those who are interested may get in touch with Calma at edric.calma@knowledgechannel.org, 0917-3604802 or 0975-7920641 (Marianne) or with Libao at MFLibao@abs-cbnfoundation.com, 0917-8969401 or 0977-8263528 (Levi).

Aside from KCFI and AFI-Bantay Bata 163, the Children’s Rights and Development cluster includes Ang Misyon Inc., ABS-CBN News and Current Affairs and Phil-Asia Assistance Foundation Inc. from the Lopez Group and external partners ECPAT Philippines and Save the Children.

EDC convenes net zero carbon business alliance

By Frances Ariola

ENERGY Development Corporation (EDC) has launched a multi-sectoral movement toward attaining net zero carbon emissions among businesses in the Philippines.

Dubbed the Net Zero Carbon Alliance, EDC is spearheading the movement for the country to become carbon neutral in line with the Department of Energy's goal to reduce carbon emissions by as much as 75% as part of the government's nationally determined contributions or NDCs to the landmark global COP 21 Paris climate change agreement.

"We are putting into action our revitalized mission in the Lopez Group to forge collaborative pathways for a decarbonized and regenerative future' by seeking partnerships

and synergies with fellow enterprises in the country," said EDC president and chief operating officer Richard Tantoco.

The Net Zero Carbon program is strategically developed to provide partners with a road map to attain carbon neutrality through the sharing of best practices and scaling up of carbon emission offsetting and tracking. As well, it aims to extend assistance in obtaining third-party certification of carbon emissions and offsets, and even access to "green" financing, among many other capacity-building tools.

EDC's guidance will be primarily based on its experience as a carbon negative company through its 100% RE operations and protection and restoration of the forests

within its geothermal project sites. With EDC's established decarbonization mechanisms, partners can adopt these practices and leverage them toward carbon offsetting and sequestration.

The pioneering members of the Net Zero Carbon Alliance include First Balfour, Arthaland, Drink and Silliman University as well as the local operations of Coca-Cola, Knowles Electronics and Uni-lever.

"We are extremely excited with the enthusiastic participation of our partners and we are looking forward to working with more and more enterprises in the local business sector as we move toward our common goal of mitigating the global challenge of climate change," said Tantoco.

Sumitomo sponsors learning resources for 48 schools

By Michael Ramos

SUMITOMO Mitsui Banking Corporation (SMBC) donated Knowledge Channel Portable Media Libraries with a one-day Knowledge Channel Teaching in the New Normal teacher training session to 48 schools in Northern Samar, Eastern Samar, Quezon and Surigao del Sur.

In a turnover ceremony held online, officials from SMBC, Knowledge Channel Foundation Inc. (KCFI) and the Department of Education (DepEd) as well as principals and teachers from the beneficiary schools gathered to celebrate the partnership.

In her opening remarks, KCFI president and executive director Rina Lopez lauded SMBC for their generosity in supporting the education of learners especially during the pandemic.

"Teachers and parents were scrambling for digital learning resources for the students and kids. We started distributing the Knowledge Channel Portable Media Libraries or hard drives with content with it. Thank you so much to our generous education partner, Sumitomo Mitsui Banking



Representatives from May-it Manasa Elementary School in Quezon were among those who received Knowledge Channel Portable Media Libraries

Corporation," Lopez said.

She presented a certificate of appreciation to SMBC for their contribution.

SMBC country head and managing director Kentaro Shigei also thanked KCFI and DepEd.

"Together with our partner organizations such as Knowledge Channel Foundation and Department of Education, we can contribute and continue to provide support to communities, nation-building and a brighter future for the Philip-

pines," he said.

The DepEd schools district supervisors (SDS), for their part, shared messages of gratitude.

Northern Samar SDS Dr. Gorgonio Diaz Jr. said: "Our school cannot do it alone. We need partners like Knowledge Channel Foundation and Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation who have a big heart to help the little minds of our learners."

Over 400 teachers benefited from the project.

PH's first off-grid e-community switches on

THE residents of Brgy. Puhagan, Valencia, Negros Oriental will no longer have to travel for at least 40 minutes to Dumaguete City to get free WiFi, thanks to the wireless internet connection that Energy Development Corporation (EDC) has provided with the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), the Negros Oriental Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NOCCI), and the Valencia local government unit (LGU).

The combined on-site and Zoom event for the switch-on ceremony for the country's first off-grid e-community was symbolic of the new normal way of holding meetings, gatherings and even connecting with family and friends since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Little did we know that a good internet connection will become essential for people to cope with their daily lives as students, employees, even as priests and other religious people, for companies to actually do business and, most of all, for all of us to emotionally connect with our loved ones both near and far. Having an internet connection has become a must for all of us to live," said Atty. Allan Barcena, head of EDC's



L-R: EDC Negros CSR head Norreen Bautista, Gov. Roel Degamo, DICT regional director 7 OIC Frederick Amores, PCCI Region 7 governor Ed Du, barangay captain Leonarda Sarita, DICT provincial director Aurelio Tinapay and NTC provincial director Engr. Felipe Gumalo

CSR and PR division in his message during the switch-on ceremony.

Located in an off-grid or geographically isolated mountainous area, Brgy. Puhagan is one of EDC's three partner barangays in the municipality that also include Caidiocan and Malaunay.

DICT spearheaded the procurement of the fixed wireless broadband network with a 40-Mbps bandwidth, Valencia mayor Edgar Teves and the LGU extended logistical and regulatory support, while NOCCI supplied the fixed

wireless solar technology and a redundant broadband network design. EDC shouldered the cost of labor and the purchase of materials and equipment.

"This initiative is part of our mission to forge collaborative pathways for a decarbonized and regenerative future—which is essentially about creating exponential positive impact by elevating our environment and our stakeholders," added Barcena.

This pilot project will soon be duplicated in other EDC partner barangays in the municipality. (F. Ariola)

FilSciHub, CISTEM to help train science teachers for APP project

KNOWLEDGE Channel Foundation Inc. (KCFI), Center for Integrated STEM Education Inc. (CISTEM) and FilSciHub (FSH) have entered into a tripartite agreement as part of the rollout of the Agham Para sa Pagbabago (APP) Project of the Lopez Learning Synergy Summit Education Cluster.

CISTEM and FSH will be helping KCFI in the training of science teachers under APP.

During the ceremonial MOA signing event, FilSciHub founder and president Jeffrey Camacho Bunquin emphasized the importance of the partnership in improving STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education in the country.

"Napakaganda po ng magiging kinabukasan ng ating bansa kung mas mapapahusay pa

natin ang kakayaban ng ating mga kababayan lalo na ng mga kabataan pagdating sa areas ng science, technology, engineering and mathematics," Bunquin said.

CISTEM executive director Sheryl Lyn Monterola echoed the importance of collaboration.

"This convergence, this coming together of different organizations is a step towards really establishing that ecosystem to support learning in the country. We cannot do it alone, we have to converge, we have to synergize our efforts so that we will be able to create greater impact," Monterola said.

KCFI president and executive director Rina Lopez believes the APP Project will help spark change in teaching STEM in schools.

"Sa kalagitnaan ng learning

crisis, naniniwala ako na labat ay kaya natin garwin basta't tayo ay magtutulungan. Magtutulongan tayo labat para maiangat ang kalidad ng edukasyon ng mga batang Pilipino, ang bagong henerasyon ng mga Pilipinong siyentistang banda sa haman ng 21st century," Lopez emphasized.

The Education Cluster composed of 12 Lopez Group organizations is led by Lopez with Atty. Amina Amado of Lopez Holdings Corporation as cochair.

APP is a pilot project in the coastal area of Lobo, Batangas that supports Malabrigo public school students. Grade 3 and Grade 7 students who benefit from this project will receive tablets and special learning kits that will allow them to participate in an advanced and innovative science and technology curriculum. (M. Ramos)

3 companies reallocate 10K vaccines for Batangas LGUs

By Joel Gaborni

THREE Lopez Group companies have reallocated 10,000 doses of their COVID-19 vaccines to the cities of Santo Tomas and Tanauan in Batangas in support of government's overall aim of controlling the spread of the dreaded virus.

The local government units (LGUs) of Santo Tomas and Tanauan used the reallocated vaccines from First Philippine

Industrial Park (FPIP), FIRST College and First Balfour to conduct the vaccination of their respective LGU constituents between Sept. 30 and Oct. 4, 2021.

FPIP helped in coordinating the vaccination, which also benefited over 3,000 workers of companies located inside FPIP's ecozone in Santo Tomas and Tanauan.

The vaccines for the two LGUs come on top of, and separate from, the COVID-19 shots that Lopez Group companies are administering for their own employees. Other Lopez Group companies, like First Gen Corporation, are also reallocating thousands of COVID-19 vaccines to various LGUs.

FPIP was established by the Lopez Group through First Philippine Holdings Corporation together with Sumitomo Corporation of Japan. Over 140 companies with more than 64,000 workers have so far located to its 520-hectare, world-class industrial park, bringing in close to P200 billion in investments.

FIRST College inside FPIP is a senior high school offering mechatronics and electronics programs. Its innovative curriculum, developed in partnership with industry locators, equips and prepares students with the needed skills and knowledge to be job-ready upon graduation.

First Balfour has played a crucial role in completing hundreds of landmark buildings and vital infrastructure. It is one of the three partners behind Cebu Link Joint Venture, the company contracted by the Metro Pacific Group to build the Cebu-Cordova Link Expressway.



A health worker administers a COVID-19 vaccine shot during a vaccination activity inside FPIP

Knowledge Channel welcomes new school year, airs lessons for 1Q

SCHOOL year 2021-2022 officially began on Sept. 13 for over 24 million Filipino learners as announced by the Department of Education.

In support of the opening of classes, Knowledge Channel Foundation Inc. (KCFI) geared up its "School at Home" campaign once again as children, parents and teachers continue to engage through distance learning methods during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Knowledge Channel now airs video lessons for the first quarter from kinder to Grade 10 and the Alternative Learning System or ALS. Giving priority to learners in the early years, it airs Grade 1 video lessons in Filipino and English—"Wikaharian" hosted by Michelle Agas and "Ready, Set, Read" hosted by Seth Dungca.

Produced under Knowledge Channel's "Basa Bilang," the shows aim to address the Philippine learning crisis affecting young learners by helping improve their foundational skills in reading. Episodes of "Wikaharian" were sponsored by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts with the support of Rep. Loren Legarda, while episodes of "Ready, Set, Read" were sponsored by Security Bank Foundation.

"Wikaharian" and "Ready, Set, Read" also air on School at Home on A2Z weekdays at 7 a.m.

In addition, Knowledge Channel offers video lessons on agriculture and the environment.



Sponsored by the Agricultural Training Institute, "AgriKids" is an animated series on teaching kids basic agricultural concepts, from planting to farm production. Educational show "Puno ng Buhay" sponsored by Forest Foundation Philippines and hosted by Maymay Entrata and Khalil Ramos teaches learners the importance of caring for the environment.

Knowledge Channel brings learning to the digital space with "School at Home" on Kumu SeenZone and Knowledge Channel's Facebook Live weekdays at 11 a.m. Catch "Wikaharian Online World" every Monday, "Team Lyqa" every Tuesday,

Kim Atienza's "Knowledge on the Go" and Robi Domingo's "MathDali Math Talks" every Wednesday, "Money Lessons with FQ Mom and Sons" every Thursday and "Art Smart with Teacher Precious" every Friday.

Moreover, KCFI joined the country in celebrating National Teachers' Month (NTM) in September. A teacher's prayer video produced by ABS-CBN and KCFI was released during the NTM kickoff event. "He's Into Her" cast members Donny Pangilinan and Belle Mariano led the prayer along with Kaori Oinuma, Rhys Miguel, Jeremiah Lisboa, Vivoree Escrito, Joao Constanca and Criza Taa.

Lifelong Wellness

Study participants needed

Asian Eye refractive surgery director Dr. Robert Ang

By Charizze Henson

ASIAN Eye Institute refractive surgery director Dr. Robert Ang received the Best Paper of Session Award at the annual meeting of the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery.

Held in Las Vegas, Nevada from July 23 to 27, 2021, the annual meeting served as a venue for ophthalmologists from different parts of the world to come together and share their knowledge of the latest surgical techniques and devices. Ophthalmologists submitted abstracts of their research projects for a chance to be selected and to present their work during the annual meeting.

Ang's winning research paper, entitled "Implantation of Small Aperture Intraocular Lens (IOL) in Post-Refractive Surgery Eyes," showed that patients who previously had LASIK or PRK (photorefractive keratectomy) surgery enjoy clear vision after being implanted with an IC-8 IOL during their cataract surgery. The IC-8 is a small-aperture IOL produced by American company Acufocus.

"Over the past 25 years, millions of people had refractive surgery, such as LASIK and PRK. These patients enjoyed good vision, but many of them are now

beyond 60 years old and have developed cataracts," Ang shares.

Cataracts are an age-related eye condition where the normally clear lens of the eye becomes cloudy. If not treated, it can lead to blindness. Fortunately, surgery can be done to remove it. The ophthalmologist will remove the lens with cataract and replace it with an IOL. There are different kinds of IOLs available, all designed to improve vision.

Through his research, Ang discovered that the IC-8 IOL can provide clear vision by blocking unfocused peripheral rays, reducing the aberrations

caused by complex corneas. It can also provide additional correction for presbyopia.

Presbyopia is another age-related eye condition. It causes the eyes' natural lenses to lose their flexibility and ability to focus on nearby objects. That is why people over 40 years old experience difficulty reading text from books, restaurant menus, magazines, computers and mobile phones. Without their reading glasses, they need to extend their arms and squint their eyes to read clearly.

"Patients have expressed their satisfaction after their cataract

surgery. They now enjoy good vision for far, intermediate and near distances with minimal need for eyeglasses. This lens is a possible game changer, especially for patients who have had LASIK surgery and will soon get their cataracts removed," Ang adds.

The good news is that this study is still ongoing at Asian Eye. Patients who had previous LASIK or PRK surgery and now have cataracts can join and be part of this landmark research study. For more information, call Asian Eye's research department at tel. no. 8898-2020 loc. 109.



Asian Eye refractive surgery director Dr. Robert Ang



Director Mae Cruz Alviar with '2 Good 2 Be True' stars Kathryn Bernardo and Daniel Padilla

Norway's top-tier seafood gets 'Casa Daza' treatment

METRO Channel and the Norwegian embassy have teamed up for a three-part special featuring Norway's trademark seafood treasures to be showcased in "Casa Daza."

For the first episode which premiered on Oct. 17, host and chef Sandy Daza used one of his favorite ingredients—the Norwegian Atlantic salmon—in four easy, under 30-minute recipes: salmon tonkatsu, salmon head tom yum, salmon head curry and salmon belly teriyaki.

In the next episodes, chef Sandy will further spotlight Norway's top-tier seafood produce by crafting a mouth-wa-

tering menu using the Norwegian Atlantic cliffish and the country's favorite crustacean, the red king crab.

Norway ranks as the second-largest seafood exporter in the world. The country prides itself on being recognized for its sustainable management of its ocean resources.

Satisfy your seafood cravings by tuning in to "Casa Daza: Norway Seafood Specials" on Metro Channel and Metro.Style's YouTube channel. Metro Channel is available on SKYCable Ch. 52 (SD) and Ch. 174 (HD), Cignal Ch. 69 and G Sat Ch. 70. (K. Choa)



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'Direk' Mae's promise to 'KathNiel' fans, viewers

By Kane Choa

IN her reunion project with Kathryn Bernardo and Daniel Padilla, director Mae Cruz Alviar vowed to make "2 Good 2 Be True" a project that will bring entertainment and inspiration to viewers.

"We will do our best to

offer a project that will give people a breather from what they are going through right now. This is our mission. This is our vision. And this is what we will aim to do," the director said during the series' cast reveal.

"2 Good 2 Be True" signifies not only the return of the country's premier love team, but also marks "KathNiel's" reunion with direk Mae, who worked with them on "Crazy Beautiful You" in 2015 and "Can't Help Falling in Love" in 2017.

"2 Good 2 Be True," which begins taping this October, is produced by ABS-CBN Entertainment's RGE Unit, the team behind "Bagong Umaga," "Ipaglaban Mo," "Nang Ngunmiti Ang Langit" and "Pamilya Ko."

Get your groove on with 'Disco Plantito, Disco Plantita'

THE CompanY sings about the joy of gardening in their new retro-disco tune "Disco Plantito, Disco Plantita."

"People are doing their very best to just survive mentally, emotionally, psychologically in this pandemic, so we thought of coming up with a song that is happy, celebratory and joyful, and also speaks of the resilience of the human spirit, especially *tayong mga Pinoy*," said member Moy Ortiz via a MYXclusive interview.

As the title suggests, the tune speaks of how Filipinos are able to find bliss and maintain sanity through one of their fa-

vorite pastimes today.

"Ultimately 'Disco Plantito, Disco Plantita' is a song of hope despite what you're going through, despite the challenges of living every day in the pandemic," added Moy, who wrote the song's lyrics with Edith Gallardo.

The song is intended for a brand-new musical produced by Pinoy Playlist Music Festival 2021 dubbed "Da Pinoy Pandemic Palabas," which will premiere on Nov. 6 on YouTube and Facebook.

It is also the lead single off The CompanY's 29th album, which is currently in the works and will be



released under Star Music.

Aside from Moy, the singing quartet is composed of

multi-hyphenated artists Sweet Plantado, Annie Quintos and OJ Mariano. (K. Choa)

The Rockwellist Guide

Get your kits on shop.TheRockwellist.com!

Kids, Bruno needs your help!

By Anina Reyes

AFTER a year and a half of kids being cooped up at home, it's time to give them an adventure-filled Halloween celebration with Rockwell's interactive activities and virtual event on Oct. 31, 2021 dubbed "Rockwell Timescape: A Time-Twisting Halloween Adventure."

This year, kids are on a mission with Dr. Atom Ogopogo to find Bruno the Chihuahua, and will take on a time-twisting adventure across different eras with their very own Time Travel Kit, which can be purchased on shop.TheRockwellist.com, Power Plant Mall's e-commerce website.

This special kit includes Timescape Tasks that kids

can accomplish throughout their time traveling journey.

Aside from these activities, they'll be able to virtually bond with their fellow time travelers as Madison Events has prepared a fun-filled live Zoom session right on Halloween.

Lastly, it's not a Halloween celebration without treats! The Time Travel Kit contains sweets and other goodies that kids will enjoy.

Don't miss out on the opportunity to embark on this enjoyable experience—purchase the limited-edition kits on shop.TheRockwellist.com. Learn more on TheRockwellist.com and on Power Plant Mall's Facebook and Instagram pages.

