

Viet Nam Friendship Village Project

THE MISSION of the Viet Nam Friendship Village Project USA is to cultivate reconciliation and heal the wounds of the Viet Nam War by



uniting veterans and caring citizens through international cooperation in the building and support of the Village of Friendship, a living symbol of peace.

Viet Nam Friendship Village Grand Opening



Dennis Kosellek

The Viet Nam Friendship Village

by Earl Huch, VFVP-USA's Representative at the Grand Opening Ceremony

HANOI—The Grand Opening ceremony was held Thursday, October 29, 1998 at the Friendship Village. I arrived in Hanoi on Monday morning along with George Mizo, his wife Rosi and son Michael. Along with the Mizos were Michelle Mason and her husband Jeff Schutts who were making a video of the Grand Opening Ceremonies and the Village Project. The trip, for me, was one of excitement and wonder along with pangs of sadness as I went to trace the last days of my son, Jeff "Paco" Huch (then—U.S. Director), who died in Hanoi on March 27, 1996 on the eve of a VFVP International Committee meeting.

Members of the Viet Nam Veterans Association greeted us at the airport and drove us to our hotel. After formal greetings from the Vice President of the Viet Nam Veterans, Colonel General Dao Dinh Luyen, and the President, Colonel General Tran Van Quang, we spent the next two days seeing sights in Hanoi and attending a wonderful banquet hosted by the veterans.

The Viet Nam Veterans orchestrated the Grand Opening Ceremonies, opened by Lt. General Vu Xuan Vinh, who oversees the Village Project. The opening was followed by a short statement by George Mizo, President of the International Committee, and a reading of the Declaration of Commitment of the International Committee by Mr. George Doussin, Vice President. Delegates from the other countries present at the ceremony then read the commitment in their respective languages. Next came presentations of gifts from various representatives of the member countries. I was honored to present a check for \$1,000 to the project committee from VFVP-USA [\$5,000 had been wired to Viet Nam earlier in 1998]. A ribbon cutting by Madam Bin, Vice President of the Country of Vietnam, General Quang, and George Mizo symbolized the official opening, as the children of the Village released a large number of balloons into the air. As part of the

ceremony, Madam Bin and George Mizo planted a banyan tree and then General Quang and I planted a tree in honor of my son in front of the house named for him.

After the ceremony, visitors were taken on a tour of the Village to see where the children and elders live and where they receive rehabilitative services. It is amazing to see how far construction has progressed. All of the residences are completed and some of the trees have grown quite tall already. The Friendship Village is a reality! The project consists of eight two-story houses, a health clinic, a garage, a playground, fish pond, and flower garden. In the future the Construction Committee would like to add an administration building and a school.

Presently there are about 45 children living at the Village along with 35 older residents. All suffer in one way or



General Quang, Madam Bin and George Mizo cut the ribbon at the Grand Opening of the Viet Nam Friendship Village.

another as a result of the "American war" in Viet Nam. The hope and intent of the Viet Nam Friendship Village Project is to assist as many children and elders as possible in the future. The children will be given therapy and offered the opportunity to learn ways to survive and earn a living as they become adults. Older residents will be assisted in efforts to alleviate physical problems.

It was a real honor for me to be able to represent the VFVP-USA Committee at the Grand Opening, and to witness the progress made these past few years on this great project. I know my son would have been very excited and pleased to see the fruition of everyone's efforts. It was especially wonderful to actually meet the children living at the Friendship Village. It is a living, breathing, symbol of peace—a heartfelt gesture of friendship from the veterans and citizens of the U.S., and our partners from Germany, France, Japan and England, toward Viet Nam.



TOP RIGHT: Mr. Nguyen Khai Hune (left), Director of the Friendship Village, pictured with Earl Huch
BOTTOM RIGHT: A close-up of the plaque on the front of the Jeff Huch Memorial Building



Search for New Director

VFVP-USA urgently needs a new leader. This volunteer position entails networking nationwide to raise funds for the Friendship Village. Must be honest, self-motivated and have a genuine desire to help the people of Viet Nam. For more information please call (831) 429-9197.

Friendship Village Cares for Agent Orange Victims

THE VISION conceived in 1989 by George Mizo has come alive—alive with hope for those who had nothing; with cooperation between former adversaries working together toward a shared vision; and with possibilities... Who knows what we can accomplish when we all come together in peace? As the residents move into the Friendship Village (to date, 38 children and 27 adults), we are all thankful for the global support and healing process that is taking place. We have a long way to go, but are hopeful we can accomplish our goal of the village becoming self-sustaining, educating the residents and surrounding community and caring for their health needs



A few of the boys, shown with their nurse

while providing a home for these persons displaced due to war.

Many of the first children to live at the Village were born with dioxin poisoning (from Agent Orange). Their symptoms are far ranging, from muscular deformities and twisted limbs to brain damage and impaired eyesight. Between 1965 and 1971 nearly 20 million gallons of Agent Orange was sprayed by the U.S. over 6 million acres in Viet Nam, to strip away the jungle cover and reveal the enemy. No one knows how long this poison will remain in the soil, water, fish, the food chain. In Viet Nam the number of Agent Orange victims is estimated at two million.

“With Agent Orange, the land mines were planted deep in the very essence of life—in the genes of men and women,” said a Red Cross official. “That this war is being fought again, with their grandchildren, is a horrific thought.”

It has been a long battle here in the U.S. too, as hundreds of thousands of veterans exposed to Agent Orange have experienced death, chronic illness and birth defects. George Mizo, founder of the Viet Nam Friendship Village Project, is one of these vets, so it is particularly meaningful that the Village will bring care to other victims of this toxic warfare. The Friendship Village and a dozen other peace projects scattered around the country care for as many children as possible, but the need is still tremendous. This year, Prime Minister Pan Van Khai has ordered Viet Nam’s first nationwide study on the effects of Agent Orange, which will be completed next year.



A pharmacist and M.D. at the Friendship Village medical clinic



Some of the girls pose with Earl Huch, George Mizo, and George’s son Michael, as he presents a check symbolizing \$5,000 received through Pittsburgh Veterans For Peace.

Fundraising Update - Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

In Fiscal Year '97-'98, ending Sept. 30, the VFVP-USA Committee received a total of \$8,020 in donations, and we wired a total of \$6,000 to Viet Nam to build the Friendship Village. A large part of our total income during the past year was raised by the Pittsburgh chapter of Veterans For Peace, through a fundraising effort led by Sanford Kelson and Peter Shaw (see photo at right). To date, their campaign has brought in about \$7,500. We sincerely thank all those who have contributed to this project, whether \$10 or \$1,000. It all helps!



Your ongoing support is much appreciated!

Although the Friendship Village is now officially open, housing many residents, there is still a great deal to be done to complete construction and reach the goal of self-sustainability. Your tax-deductible donation, in any amount, is most welcome and greatly appreciated. Please consider becoming a Sustainer in 1999. We are happy to lend ideas and advice to anyone who wants to organize a fundraiser in their local community,



The Friendship Village means hope for the future of this little girl.



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