

## **PIONEERING DEAF COOP OPENS COFFEE SHOP FRANCHISE**

Embodying the rallying spirit that “the Deaf can,” a group of Deaf alumni from De La Salle-College of St. Benilde School of Deaf Education and Applied Studies (DLS-CSB SDEAS) has successfully launched its own Deck Coffee franchise recently. Situated within the campus cafeteria, the coffee outlet is fully owned and operated by the pioneering Deaf Benildean Multipurpose Cooperative (DBMC).

The idea to form a Deaf cooperative was born when a group of Deaf business students from SDEAS joined and won the top prize at the Youth Employment Spark\* Business Plan Competition early this year. Spark\*, a youth entrepreneurship project coordinated by the Philippine Resources for Sustainable Development, Inc. (PRSD) and initiated by the Dutch National Youth Council (DNYC), is supported by the National Commission for Sustainable Development and International Cooperation (NCDO) of the Government of the Netherlands. Local supporters for the project were the Office of the President and the National Youth Commission. DBMC was formed with Jose Benjamin Sigua as Chair and other members of the writing team as core leaders.

Spark\* aims to contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly Target 16 which seeks to provide decent and productive work for youth, and as a concrete example of realizing the Earth Charter principles. “A great number of young people have the potential to be successful entrepreneurs. Through Spark\*, we are not only making this happen, we are also providing them an opportunity to be jobmakers, not merely jobseekers,” shares Robert Sagun, Executive Director of PRSD, Inc.

DBMC received a loan from TSPI Development Inc. worth P350, 000.00, backed up by a guarantee fund provided by the Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO), which they used as seed capital for their business. Initially the plan was to put up a pizza parlor but the group soon decided to pursue a “more established option” says Matt Navalta, Employment and Business Opportunities Coordinator of SDEAS.

With several branches operating all over Metro Manila, Deck Coffee offered better opportunities for the DBMC to succeed as regular training for operations, service and management are provided as part of the franchise package.

The members of DBMC are aware that what they have is an extraordinary opportunity. “There are very little opportunities in the Philippines, especially for the Deaf. Therefore we are very lucky that we have received proper training and guidance from DLS-CSB and the opportunity that the Spark\* project has given us. I hope that we can be a role model for other young Deaf people and that we can pass on our experiences. I see entrepreneurship as an opportunity for deaf people to create their own changes to achieve more in life,” signs Sigua.

For the past two years, with generous assistance from Postsecondary Education Network-International, an international partnership of colleges and universities serving the postsecondary education needs of deaf and hard-of-hearing students, SDEAS has intensified its efforts to encourage more companies and organizations to give its Deaf graduates a chance to prove their competence in the work place. DBMC's achievement, both as business planners and owners, is a solid testament to DLS-CSB's belief that, given equal access to opportunities, support, direction and training, the Filipino Deaf can become productive members of society.

DLS-CSB does not only provide quality education for Deaf students, it has also taken the next step by opening its doors for the DBMC to establish their business within the campus. “We do not only convince others about the capabilities of our graduates, we ourselves are convinced, and the presence of DBMC Deck Coffee serves as proof of that belief,” Dean Techie dela Torre remarks.

A small gathering marked the formal opening of the Deck Coffee franchise which was made possible by the generous support of PRSD and DNYC through the Spark\* Project; and PEN-International. Guests of honor included Ma. Luisa Valdez, DLS-CSB AVP for

General Administrative Services; Ric Hettinga, Royal Embassy of the Netherlands' Deputy Chief of Mission and Counsellor (Economic Affairs); Hon. Priscilla Marie Abante, Commissioner at Large of the National Youth Commission; and Robert Sagun, PRSD Executive Director. (END)

Members of the Deaf Benildeans Multipurpose Cooperative (DBMC) with distinguished guests during the launch of their Deck Coffee franchise



**Seated (L-R):** Annabelle Salazar, Erik Villegaz, Paulo Angelo Aquino, Robert Sagun (executive director, PRSD), Brahman Cantiller, Manrico Metiong

**Standing (L-R):** George Lee (past president, RCUDM), Domingo Brum Jr. (president, RCUDM), Techie de la Torre (Dean, SDEAS), Benjo Sigua (Chair, DBMC), Ric Hettinga (Deputy Chief of Mission and Counsellor (Economic Affairs), Royal Embassy of the Netherlands, Wovi Villanueva (Head, DLS-CSB Campus Improvement and Maintenance Group), Priscilla Marie Abante (Commissioner, National Youth Commission), Father Froilan Briones, SS, Jessie Lapuz, (director, TSPI) Leo Hernandez (Consultant, Office of the Vice Mayor of QC), Charlie Jayco (Business Track Coordinator, SDEAS), Matt Navalta (EBO Coordinator, SDEAS) and Leo Sulse (Head, OPD SDEAS)