



Aeqvitas

The Voice of the San Domenico Social Justice Club, named in honor of the Roman goddess of justice & fair dealings.

Volume 5, Number 5

Study. Reflect. Act.

December 2011

Students and Teachers Attend *Bioneers* Conference on Activism

By Olivia Ayanruoh '13

In mid-October, ten San Domenico students joined Biology teacher Hilary Staples and Social Justice teacher Kristen Levine to attend the 21st annual *Bioneers* conference, held annually at the Marin Civic Center in San Rafael. By their own admission, a few of the students didn't understand what a "Bioneer" was, but this became clear as soon as they joined hundreds of people—students, activists, scientists, among others—for seminars and presentations from environmental and social justice leaders from all over the United States.



leadership activities to women's activism talks.

Junior Lynn Falesoga was excited to learn about sustainability efforts on other campuses. "My favorite presentation was about the young children in Maine making their own school more environmentally friendly by planting their own gardens," said Falesoga.

This convention lasted three days and several of our very own San Domenico students got the chance to listen and meet social activists not much older than they.

After a healthy and tasty lunch of burritos, the students attended workshops held by many different organizations and professionals. Many local, sustainable stores and companies displayed games, food, and products in their booths. The workshops ranged from conversation circles, youth



change the world, including world-renowned oceanographer Sylvia Earle.

Through the men and women working on individual and group projects in their communities, the definition of *Bioneers* started to make sense. A *Bioneer* is someone who sees need for change in their community and works to make a difference no matter how big or small. Although many of the students who attended didn't know what to expect, it was agreed that San Domenico should offer this opportunity for many years to come.

San Domenico Hosts The Body Positive's Peer Education Conference

By Alessandra Jurick '12, *Aeqvitas* Co-editor

During our long weekend in October, six San Domenico students, along with Director of Counseling Kathy Laughlin, attended The Body Positive's three-day leadership training conference, hosted by San Domenico.

With 60 student participants from eleven universities, high schools, and even middle schools from around California, this was The Body Positive's largest multi-generational training. The conference, led by The Body Positive's co-founders Elizabeth Scott and Connie Sobczak, included seminars and lectures about intuitive eating and exercise as well as cultivating of self-love and suppression of one's "critical voice."

Participants engaged in discussions, meditations, and interactive activities. The weekend's emphasis was not only on learning, but also on leading, as each team brainstormed ways to bring the messages of The Body Positive back to their own schools and communities.

Junior Vanessa Luna, who has been involved with the program for two years, appreciates the peer education strategies. "We have learned how to teach other, and when we teach each other, we reinforce it for ourselves," said Luna. "We know what other teenage girls are going through, because we experience it ourselves."

San Domenico first connected with The Body Positive in January 2010. Since then, the high school's chapter has hosted, attended, and even facilitated three conferences, and our school was featured in The Body Positive's nationally-distributed documentary, *BodyTalk for Teens*. The group looks forward to applying skills obtained during this weekend and expanding within the San Domenico community next semester with another conference. "San Domenico is a perfect place for the Body Positive," Luna said. "Our environment is supportive of all that it stands for—accepting others, accepting ourselves."

Aeqvitas is published by the student members of San Domenico's Social Justice Club. Aeqvitas Editors: Alessandra Jurick and Edna Siljdedich Contributors to this Issue: Olivia Ayanruoh, Alessandra Jurick, Mijoon Kwak, Edna Siljdedich Student Coordinators: Alessandra Jurick and Erica Lee Faculty Moderators: Kristen Levine and Ian Sethre The San Domenico Social Justice Club is committed to creating awareness among ourselves and our community concerning social injustices, both locally and globally. We act upon this knowledge in solidarity with the global community in order to positively impact the world. As a group of young women, we are dedicated to fostering respect and equality, and we strive for equal opportunities for all.

“Experience of a Lifetime”: Service Spotlight on Vietnam

Minh Thao Vo Helps Home to Vietnam to Work with Local Orphans

By Edna Sijldedich '14, Aeqvitas Co-editor

Last summer, senior Minh Thao Vo traveled back to her home country of Vietnam to work at SOS Children's Village, an orphanage facility in Saigon.

Initially, Vo had applied to work with affected survivors of the Vietnam War in the 1970s, particularly those scarred by the usage of “Agent Orange” a napalm chemical agent used to clear jungles during the conflict, but she was too young. Determined to complete her community service project in Vietnam, she pursued the opportunity to work with children orphaned by other circumstances.

Vo was accepted as a volunteer tutor at SOS Children's village, and she was assigned to work in one a group of nine orphans, aged five to well into their teens, living in one of the 40 children's homes in the facility. A week later classes began, and Vo worked as a math and English tutor. She even came in on the weekends to play badminton and board games with the kids.

Vo remembers that it was initially difficult to connect with the children, who were shy. “At first, it was hard to connect with the children because of the language barrier,” says Vo, who has been studying in the United



Minh Thao Vo (far right, back row), with the children in Saigon.

States for four years. “But it was easier as once we got into games and activities.”

Vo saw the opportunity for service in Vietnam as a way to reconnect with her roots and “give back” to her home country. “This was the experience of a lifetime,” Vo reflected. “I will definitely be coming back next summer.”

Rita Chang Helps Build Homes and Rebuilds Lives in My Tho City

By MJ Kwak '13

Earlier this year, senior Rita Chang spent two weeks volunteering in Vietnam, where she helped build a house for a homeless family of six in My Tho City. Chang organized this service opportunity through i-to-i, a British organization that arranges volunteer travel programs. Chang chose this project because she is interested in architecture and she wanted to help build something useful.

During their work on the project, Chang worked with thirteen other volunteers, most of whom were European college students. The team was on site to build the foundation, digging eight deep holes to set reinforced concrete pillars. They carried sand, rocks, and other construction materials, mixed the cement, and built walls with bricks. As funds and resources were limited, Chang also spent a lot of time with the other women in the group, cleaning and preparing old bricks and reusable materials in the nearby river

The challenging parts of the work were the heat and language barriers with locals. Since the two local professional builders who led the volunteers could not speak or



Rita Chang smoothing brick mortar.

understand English, and there was no translator, the volunteers had to rely on gesturing for communication.

However, as most of the other volunteers were from Europe, Chang enjoyed the opportunity to speak English during her summer away from the United States. “This trip was the process and achievement for me to

become a person who sees the world widely and wisely,” said Chang, a native of Taiwan, “It taught me to be a responsible person, and be the one to reach out a helping hand.”

Despite some challenges, Chang emphasized that there were much more rewarding aspects of the experience, such as meeting many different kinds of people and eating delicious local food, such as coconuts, dragon fruits, sweet corns, hot sweet potatoes, watermelons, rambutan, longan fruit, pomelos, and papaya, which was provided by local families and neighbors.

Chang added that she learned the value of teamwork with others with different backgrounds working toward the same goal. Chang was on hand to help finish half of the construction of the house, while some volunteers remained longer to complete construction.

“There is nothing more worthwhile than building a safe and comfortable home for a family,” Chang said of her experience. “Through this experience I found my potential to help others and develop our society and community. I would love to do this service again whenever it is available.