

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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DepEd pays tribute to the Thomasites

Baguio Teachers' Camp Centennial Celebration

In recognition of their contribution to Philippine education that led to the birth of the Baguio Teachers' Camp (BTC), the Department of Education (DepEd) today held a "Tribute to the Thomasites". This is one of the centennial activities of BTC, which marks 2008 as its 100th year.

The county's public school system owes much to the Thomasites – young idealistic American teachers -- who came in waves in 1901 to introduce the American brand of education to Filipinos emerging from the shadow of centuries of Spanish colonization.

The event today was highlighted by a reenactment of BTC's Foundation at the BTC Grounds with performances from the students of Baguio City National High School and the Philippine High School for the Arts.

Education Secretary Jesli Lapus said, "The Philippine Education system especially teacher training owe much to the legacy left by the Thomasites. The Thomasites were the first US Peace Corps and have forever endeared themselves to a grateful nation. For example, who can forget the songs 'Planting Rice' and 'Guavas are Ripe'?"

"More than US politics, Hollywood, or the military occupation, it was the Thomasites' missionary zeal which captivated the hearts and minds of Filipinos," he added.

DepEd Undersecretary Vilma Labrador, Undersecretary Ramon Bacani and Assistant Secretary Jonathan Malaya, who is also the officer-in-charge of BTC, spearheaded the festivities.

US Ambassador Kristie Kenney gave the keynote address.

Asec. Malaya also unveiled BTC's centennial memorabilia such as the commemorative stamp, BTC centennial calendar, and commemorative car plates. Proceeds from the sale of the memorabilia will be used to help in the camp's restoration. The Education Department currently gives the BTC an annual subsidy of P10 Million for its operation.

In May this year, Secretary Lapus and Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita led the BTC grand centennial celebration kick off with the ceremonial declaration of BTC as a National Heritage Site. With the theme: "BTC: Celebrating 100 Years of Educating the Nation, BTC's centennial went into full swing.

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Lapus has directed the Special Task Force to make recommendations on improving the Camp's fiscal position so that it will no longer need subsidy from DepEd.

The Department has also embarked on a training program for employees in partnership with the Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP) to improve service to guests and visitors. DAP has also been tapped to develop a quality management system for the BTC so that it can become eligible for ISO 9001:2000 certification.

As BTC takes on the role of center of culture and arts of the North, DepEd has commissioned the UP Redevelopment Volunteers and the Heritage Conservation Society for the drafting of a Master Redevelopment Plan.

Another activity during the tribute was a guided tour by Professor Lino Dizon of the recently-opened BTC Museum.

A ground breaking ceremony and unveiling of an architectural design of the Thomasite Memorial also took place. The event was highlighted by a message from Joselito Aseniero, president of Thomasites Descendants of the Philippines.

BTC's centennial celebration will culminate with the Educators' Congress in December.

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