

MONICA PADILLA
WEDS CARLOS LEVISTE

A DAY WITH
TESSA MENDOZA

STEVE AND MICHELLE SOLON:
WHAT TO DO IN SARANGANI

TOWN & COUNTRY

LIFE AT ITS BEST

Generations of BEAUTY

Anne Marie Cu Unjieng
Karen Concepcion
Ingrid Sala Santamaria
Cathy Santamaria
Babygirl Fricke
Tania Lichauco

Sailing the
**CRYSTAL
SEAS**

Auctions
**MADE
EASY**

Cedie Vargas
in Escada

Cedie LOPEZ VARGAS

CELEBRATES
THE ARTS

#TrialByHashtag

Cocktails With
**MANUEL
OCAMPO**

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SCREEN TIME

Students congregate at PeaceTech's Empowerment for Peace Through Environment Information and Communication conference at Western Mindanao State University in Zamboanga.

Below left: Philip S. Goldberg, U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines, speaks to the audience.

Common GROUND

While some terrorist organizations use the Internet and social media to spread fear, a Philippine NGO uses these tools to build bridges of peace among Christian and Muslim youth.

BY SUNSHINE LICHAUCO DE LEON

THROUGH THE USE OF MASS VIDEOCONFERENCES AND giant screens, PeaceTech brings together thousands of young people on opposing sides of conflict to listen to one another, allowing them to see that the “enemy” has a face. By sharing their experiences, hearing stories of those affected by the conflict, and playing interactive games and songs, the youth begin to see that they may have more in common with each other than that which divides them.

Just last year, the U.S. Embassy in Manila and PeaceTech used videoconferencing to bridge thousands of young adults from conflict-affected areas in Central Mindanao with their peers in Zamboanga City, Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi. As a build up, workshops taught 100 out of school, at-risk youth about conflict resolution and peace building.

Past videoconference events have brought together up to 30,000 predominantly Christian high school students from the north with Muslim students from the south. A program beneficiary, Anthony Jamid, 28, of Tawi-Tawi, lost his home and then his uncle in armed conflict.

He was amazed by what he discovered about those he met through the video screens: “I used to only see media reports of violence in Cotabato so I thought it was a city of war. Now I see their faces and I see we are the same. Interacting with them made me realize we have the same fears, questions, and dreams.”

Anizar Anapi, 22, says, “The Internet helps us connect with other people. If people from other areas see we want peace, they will not fear.”

PeaceTech does not only run programs for those directly affected by armed conflict or those who are at risk of being recruited by

insurgent groups. The NGO, which has held programs throughout Indonesia, also focuses on high school students.

This year, the Department of Education and PeaceTech will start institutionalizing videoconferencing into the high school curriculum. Through technology, thousands of students in Luzon and Mindanao

will soon be able to learn alongside each other during classes in Social Studies, Values Education, English, and Science. This is part of a wider partnership with TELUS International Philippines and Hope International Development Agency. A telecommunications company is also expected to join the program.

“The immediate objective of the program is to improve learning, and so far, we find that class sections are more engaged precisely because videoconferencing with a classroom somewhere else is more interactive,” says PeaceTech co-founder Robin Pettyfer.

PeaceTech, which has been recognized by cross-cultural peace advocate Queen Rania Al-Abdullah of Jordan, aims to use Information Communication Technologies to reduce conflict while improving learning in the classroom. But Pettyfer says an overall benefit is still peace between regions: By enabling class sections to learn together daily, PeaceTech is gradually building familiarity between different groups and reducing stereotypes even if they are just talking about science. And, as Anapi says, “With peace, we can dream again.” *Find out how you can help through their website: peacetech.global.*

