

‘Connected to Care’ winners share backstories on charitable projects

Several Catalysts division (CC) employees were among the winners of the recent BASF “Connected to Care” global corporate volunteering team contest, which was designed to provide funding for 150 employee-sponsored charitable projects in honor of the company’s 150th anniversary.

Nearly 500 BASF employees from around the world submitted proposals, and approximately 35,000 employees cast votes for their favorite

projects. BASF will provide €5,000 in financial support for each winning project. In addition, every employee on one of the winning teams will receive a paid day off to help implement the project.

pulse contacted three of the award recipients from CC, who shared stories about what inspired them and their team members to undertake these worthy endeavors.

► **More:** <http://on.basf.com/1RCyked>

■ Project: ‘Vietnamese orphans’ and other challenged children

Ever since Binh Nguyen moved to the United States in 1992, when he was 17 years old, he has been busy studying, earning degrees, establishing his career, getting married and starting a family. Humanitarian work was not a top priority, but in the back of his mind, he always wanted to do something to help the less fortunate.

Then, inspiration struck when he read a news article several years ago. The story was about the hundreds of babies that were airlifted out of what was then known as Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) at the end of the Vietnam War. It chronicled some of their

lives, how they fared, and how some are now in search of their roots, trying to connect with fellow “orphans” three decades later and uncover information about their families, cultural history, and even their birth dates.

“The photos and stories included in that article really touched me,” says Nguyen, Staff Chemist, Polymerization Catalysis Research (GCC/CP), Pasadena, Texas. “It brought back my own memories of growing up in Vietnam shortly after the war and made me realize how the war changed people’s lives. It destroyed so much and

we had so little. My own father died in a Communist prison camp when I was four years old. I never met him. I was the youngest of seven children in my family.”

Hobby becomes fundraiser

Nguyen says he wanted to do something to help orphaned children in Vietnam, but always thought charity work should be something personal – something you did quietly, without drawing attention to yourself. So he started a small fundraising campaign, selling CDs of the Vietnamese music he composed and then produced in Vietnam.

After talking with friends who knew about nonprofit orphanages and schools in Vietnam that desperately needed money, Nguyen identified two charities for his contributions. One is a shelter for approximately 70 orphans, located inside a Buddhist temple in CanTho, the city of his birth, about 100 miles south of Ho Chi Minh City. The other is the School of Disability and Blind in BinhThuan. Located about 100 miles north of Ho Chi Minh City, the school is run by Catholic nuns and serves approximately 30 autistic, blind and intellectually disabled children.

“Once BASF colleagues learned what



Binh Nguyen uses proceeds from the sale of CDs containing music he composes to support an orphanage and a school for blind and disabled children in Vietnam.

The School of Disability and Blind in BinhThuan is one of the charities that Nguyen supports.



I was doing, I could no longer keep it quiet,” he says. “They wanted to help and they started spreading the word. I soon realized that I could raise more money and have a greater impact on the lives of the children if I joined forces with colleagues, friends, and even BASF customers.”

Co-workers also introduced Nguyen to employees at BASF Vietnam. As it turns out, there were BASF Vietnam employees who were very interested in teaming up with Nguyen to raise money for charitable efforts. In fact, at BASF Vietnam’s annual Family Day event, held on June 14, Nguyen’s CDs sold out quickly and colleagues placed an urgent order for more.

Nguyen’s plan was to take the \$6,000 he had raised from his CDs, along with some BASF matching funds, and donate it in person to the two charities while on a three-week trip to Vietnam this summer.

Enter ‘Connected to Care’

Then BASF’s “Connected to Care” program came along. Nguyen’s proposal was one of the winners and, as a result, he has garnered an additional €5,000 for his Vietnam charities.

With a total of about \$11,000 to donate to his two charities, Nguyen traveled to Vietnam at his own expense in July with his wife and two daughters, ages 2 and 8. They spent three weeks visiting family, the BASF Vietnam facility, and the two charities.

Joined by several colleagues from BASF Vietnam, Nguyen also visited both the orphanage and the school to assess their needs and talk to them about their priorities and how he could help. The BASF team also brought milk, candy and baby items that had been donated by employees at BASF Vietnam.

“The visits went very well,” says Nguyen. “It helped to see firsthand what their needs are, and it was an

eye-opener for my children who had not been exposed to kids with so little.”

The CanTho shelter for orphans was in very bad shape, according to Nguyen. Sanitation was poor and they did not have separate toilet facilities for the 60 to 70 children housed there. There was no proper kitchen or food storage area, and they were in desperate need of food, clothing, books and sandals. Nguyen will contribute \$6,000 of the money that was raised to their renovation efforts, which will likely focus first on building a restroom. An architect has volunteered his services to help with the project.

The BinhThuan School of Disability and Blind was in better overall condition, and was well organized, but physical conditions had deteriorated since its establishment in 2001, and the children needed clothing. A rusted roof must be

replaced and there is no proper dining area for the children. The kids currently take their meals in a corridor. Nguyen will contribute the remaining \$5,000 to their renovation efforts, which will likely focus on building a dining area.

Nguyen says the visits provided an additional benefit: they encouraged the people who ran the facilities to consider their priorities and learn about fundraising.

“I am very grateful to BASF for helping with this effort, especially colleagues from BASF Vietnam,” he says. “The company’s volunteer and matching gift programs, and now the Connected to Care program, provide wonderful opportunities for employees to help the less fortunate around the world.”



In July, Binh Nguyen, center, in black shirt, and his wife and two daughters and several colleagues from BASF Vietnam, visited the two charities he supports. They are pictured here with representatives of the School of Disability and Blind.