



**NEW ORLEANS  
FILIPINO AMERICAN LIONS CLUB  
DISTRICT 8-S  
2009 THAILAND VISION MISSION  
EXECUTIVE REPORT**





# **NEW ORLEANS FILIPINO-AMERICAN LIONS CLUB, DISTRICT 8-S 2009 THAILAND VISION MISSION**

## **Executive Report**

Dear Fellow Lions,

We offer this report of our second trip to Thailand to donate eyeglasses to those who might not have otherwise had access to them. Our review, analysis and recommendations of the New Orleans Filipino American Lions Club 2009 Thailand Vision Mission is set out for you below.

### **PROJECT HISTORY**

This project was put into motion by the remarks of Lion Chris Carlone, Development Director of the Lions Eye Foundation at the 2007 New Orleans Filipino American Lions Club Potluck Picnic in Lafreniere Park. Lion Chris spoke proudly about the work the Eye Foundation was doing and suggested that overseas projects may be a good way for our Club to provide service. Lion Carlone was helpful in directing us to Lion Don Pastor of the Harahan Lions Club, who walked us through all of the finer points of collection, testing and packing this eyewear.

The New Orleans Filipino American Lions Club has worked at collecting used eyeglasses for some time. The work is primarily done through a collections center at WRBH Radio (Radio for the Blind and Print Handicapped <http://www.wrbh.org/>), which is where the club's meetings are held. This event marks our second attempt at the project. In the two attempts made so far, the project has been executed jointly between our club and the Dok Khamtai Lions Club, District 310 A-2, Thailand.



## **PRELIMINARY WORK**

Our work on this project began with identifying a site for service. We selected Ban Nonglao Amphur Phusang, Phusang District, Phayao Province because of our familiarity with it and because it is in a region of Thailand obviously underserved by other organizations.

Once we selected our service area, we contacted the Ban Nonglao Amphur Phusang Obitor Phayom Seejun to determine how many of the residents in the area were in need of glasses. We also reached out to Lion Warawit Booranisiri (former District Governor of District 310 A-2) of the Dok Khamtai Lions Club, who assisted us in locating and paying for an optometrist to assist in testing the eyes of those people that did appear to request assistance. The eye care professional did the testing for ₱50 (\$1.25) per person. He produced a list of roughly 334 residents and associated prescriptions of our use. This year, the Dok Khamtai Lions Club agreed to pay the cost of the vision screening, so the villagers incurred no cost for that service. When the screening was completed, the Dok Khamtai Lions provided us with a list of prescriptions needed and the corresponding amount of each prescription.

Now we had to fill the order. As with our previous project, Lion Don Pastor of the Harahan Lions Club assisted us in finding eye glasses and explaining how the eye glasses recycling program worked. Lion Don was very patient with us in both providing glasses and in taking back the eyewear we could not use.

We sorted the eyeglasses to match each of the prescriptions on our list, making sure that we had enough glasses to fit the needs of the residents listed, and paying attention to the gender of the recipients and the types of glasses we selected. We tried to take a few more eyeglasses than were needed in order to provide some degree of choice and to accommodate for different facial shapes and sizes.

We also obtained embroidered baseball caps for trading with the Dok Khamthai Lions Club. The caps were ordered from the Lions International website at a cost of \$120.00. The mesh panel cap (Product A305) was embroidered with the Lions emblem on the front and out club name on the back. As seen in one of the attached photos, the caps were well received.



## LOGISTICS

This was our second overseas eyeglasses donation project in Thailand. In the preceding effort we were perhaps overly concerned about our cargo being damaged in transit and elected to carry approximately 360 eyeglasses in our bags personal luggage. This time we elected to ship the glasses via Fedex. This method presented far more expense and difficulty than merely lugging the glasses over ourselves.

We packed the Lions' offering into four shippable boxes, which were shipped from Harahan, LA, on December 6, 2009. Fedex quoted cost of \$374.56 for the shipping, which included sizeable fuel surcharges. There was more than two weeks from shipping to event, so we expected the shipment to arrive in plenty of time. Ultimately, Fedex attempted to raise the charges to approximately \$450.00 after delivery. Several days of negotiations were required before Fedex would honor its quote. We should note here with special emphasis that Lion Robert Romero, President and charter member of our Club, personally underwrote the surprisingly high cost of shipping.

The shipment was seized by customs in Thailand, which demanded payment of duties and also payment of a tax we were unaware of. Fedex did not notify us of the problem and we would not know of it unless we were closely monitoring the shipment. Fedex further charged us an additional fee of ₱1,400 (\$40.00) for retrieval of the package from customs.

It took us several days of absorbing abuse from a "Mr. Suchat"(02-667-7206) in the Thai customs agency and the payment of a "fine" in the amount of \$1,391.00 (\$39.74) in order to obtain the shipment. The customs official repeatedly challenged the authenticity of our project, even when presented with photographs of the prior project. During that time, we enlisted the assistance of our contact from an earlier project, Wg. Cmd. Lion Suchat Tongdee, President of the Lions of Lumloogga, Pathumthani (<http://www.oknation.net/blog/lions/2008/02/16/entry-1>) and Lion Warawit Booranisiri of the Dok Khamtai Lions Club to see if they could impress upon the customs official the benevolent nature of the package, but that proves useless as well.



In the days leading up to the event but only after our shipment was dislodged), we were unexpectedly contacted by a Senator of the Thai national government whose district included our selected service area. He expressed a strong interest in the project and insisted on participating behind the scenes only at this time because of the political unrest in Thailand at the time. The senator indicated that he did not want the project to be politicized and believed his support of it should be muted for the time being. His unsolicited overture signals that this project has attracted positive attention for the local Lions and underscores the value of the project.

We relied heavily on Nonglao Amphur Phusang Obitor Phayom Seejun and Village Chief Phum Wongyai to provide a venue where the distribution could be done safely and efficiently. The village chief was pleased to be a part of a project so that was previously successful and needed by his constituents. In addition to Obitor Phayom Seejun, the village chief arranged for the assistance of other administrative officials in the village to assist in the distribution.

Lion Worawit again helped us get together with the Dok Khamtai Lions Club to assist us in the distribution of eyewear. Their club planned a blanket donation project to coincide with our eyeglasses donation project, and they were again very eager to serve with us. They have indicated again a desire to partner with us on future projects in Thailand.

### **EXECUTION**

Because of the delay brought on by Thai customs, our project had to be pushed back a day from a Saturday to a Sunday. The delay limited the number of Lions that could participate because of the scheduling conflicts it caused. On the day of the distribution, the Village Chief issued a reminder of our program over the village PA system. We arrived at the Nonglao Amphur Phusang Community Center about 10:00 a.m. Distribution was scheduled to begin at 11:00 a.m. It was immediately apparent that the local residents were aware of our purpose and were eagerly awaiting the program. Nearly as soon as we arrived, locals began to file into the community center. By 10:30, more than 250 villagers were seated in the room.



The Dok Khamtai Lions Club brought 150 new heavy blankets for simultaneous distribution. These blankets were purchased with their own club funds. In fact, we ran out of blankets, and Lion Worawit pulled money from his pockets for recipients to purchase blankets later.

We began distribution a little before 11:00 a.m. The village administrators assisted in the distribution, which gave the program an additional air of authority. All of the Lions present rolled their sleeves up and waded in to the physical work of the distribution. The program ran efficiently, but we could see that better control of the crowd could make the program run a little better.

We did fall short of the glasses needed for the program. We simply could not match some of the prescriptions sent to us. While in Thailand, we spent \$80.00 on glasses that met the prescriptions of those that we could not match from donated glasses.

### **RECIPIENT REACTION**

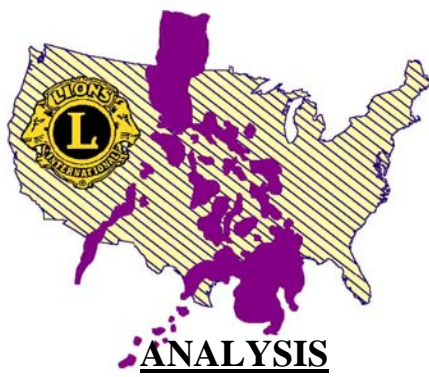
With our first project in Thailand, we were most surprised by the reaction of the residents who received donated glasses, nearly all of whom expressed sincere gratitude on a personal level. That outpouring was repeated on this occasion as well. The traditional Thai manner of thanks is to hold the hands together in a prayer-like manner called a “wai” and say “khaup khun khrup/ka.” As the program ended and we were packing up to leave, we walked down an aisle at the community center lined with thankful Thais who each took their turn to wai and say thank you to each of the Lions that passed. Words again fail to express the feeling we left with that day.

### **SPECIAL THANKS**

A project like this cannot be done without the assistance of a lot of different people. On behalf of the New Orleans Filipino American Lions Club, and individually, we wish to acknowledge our debt of gratitude to the following, which are not ranked in any order of importance:



- New Orleans Filipino American Lions Club members, who continue to support this project in word, deed and wallet;
- Lion Robert Romero, who has encouraged this project from the beginning and who provided his own personal funds to cover the cost of shipping;
- Lion Warawit Booranisiri, who took our overseas calls and helped with our attempts to free our eyeglasses from Thai Customs;
- The Dok Khamtai Lions Club, who showed up and worked like Lions, for finding an eye specialist and for absorbing the cost of eye screening. The Dok Khamtai Lions that worked on this project included Lion Banyat Hawbanlukit, Lion Anan Promduang, Lion Sawrasak Somchat, Lion Phadon Thaechatworawat, Lion Naree Booranisiri, and Lion Seerot Nanchaigrang. Additionally, Leo Club members Ajan Tongsee Kasom (teacher), Leo Gamonchanok Sureeyachai; Leo Thinapok Rakrai and many more also participated. This is the second year we have worked with them, and we have seen what a fine example they set for all Lions Clubs in Thailand;
- Lion Don Pastor and the Harahan Lions Club for their patience and assistance in grading, cleaning, processing and supplying the eyeglasses to be donated;
- Lion Chris Carlone, who helped germinate the idea;
- Wg.Cmd. Lion Suchat Tongdee, President of the Lions of Lumloogga, Pathumthani, for his assistance with the intractable Thai Customs personnel; and
- Nonglao Amphur Phusang Obitor Phayom Seejun and Village Chief Phum Wongyai, together with all of the village Obitors, for their logistical assistance and for providing other officials to help with the project.



It is fair to say that the New Orleans Filipino-American Lions Club 2009 Thailand Vision Mission was again a success. However, there remain some things we can improve on. With the assistance of the Harahan Lions Club and the Dok Khamtai Lions, the New Orleans Filipino American Lions Club of District 8-S was able to service nearly 340 individuals who otherwise would not have had access to corrective eyewear. We were further able to participate in the distribution of winter blankets during the middle of the Thai winter. We managed to further cultivate relationships with Thai Lions that will assist us greatly in managing future projects more efficiently and thoroughly. In short, we did what Lions do: we worked together selflessly to serve others in need. In doing that, we proved that the Lions are more than a collection of individual clubs sprinkled across the globe. We showed that Lions are a cohesive and symbiotic international organization that works together across oceans, borders and language barriers to assist wherever assistance is needed.

The success of our second outing continues to encourage future similar missions. Our Club can carry out the project perhaps more efficiently than any other because we have members traveling to the region on business almost annually. Already, like-minded clubs have volunteered to assist in securing eye testing and screening locally, and even paying for that service. However, we still can be more efficient by avoiding some of the mistakes made on this project. Some of the areas we must focus on are:

- We can be more efficient in sorting glasses here in the USA by bringing more volunteers to that task.
- We must learn what is necessary to avoid exposing ourselves to the considerable personal expenses that comes with the unexpected fines and taxes levied on us in the name of the Thai government. Frankly, repeats of that unhappy surprise may be enough to kill the project entirely or move it to another, more receptive, country. We may be able to avoid that by performing certain paperwork, or by shipping to the address of a Thai Lion.



- We also must find a far lower cost to ship eyeglasses overseas, or return to lugging them with us as personal baggage.
- We should consider limiting the number of people that we can serve. The success of our first mission led to a 50% increase in the people who came out for our second mission. Success breeds success, and with the attention of local and national Thai authorities now at hand, the number of people requesting service could quickly get out of hand. Limiting the number to 300 will assist us in planning, budgeting and logistics.
- We must discontinue special purchases to meet special needs. This element of the project could quickly make it cost prohibitive. Where special needs cannot be met from donated eyeglasses, we must find a method to meet those needs through an existing Lions program such as the Eye Foundation.
- We should prepare bilingual instructions to control the distribution to permit for better crowd control, more orderly service and a better experience for all involved.
- Solicit the participation of local and national authorities. The unsolicited overture by a Thai senator only serves to show that the word is out about our project. Allowing local politicians to participate will elevate the profile of the Lions in the area and could serve to ease our efforts in dealing with foreign governments when shipping eyeglasses. At the same time, it will not serve to dilute our service efforts at all. In fact, such exposure would serve to raise the profile of the local Lions and of Lions in general. We should start approaching such officials early and lining up their commitments.
- We should consider identifying local newspapers and television stations so that a press release announcing the project can be issued. While self-aggrandizing publicity has never been a trademark of the Lions, nor should it be, tasteful news designed to educate the public to the selfless deeds of



Lions will assist in raising interest in Lionism and driving membership both around the service site and at home.

- The New Orleans Filipino American Lions Club should to more to publicize this project as a model for other local Lions. With a little planning, our Louisiana Lions Clubs can make service a part of any overseas vacation or business trip they may take. Making Lionism a part of overseas vacations can go a long way toward serving our purpose as Lions, and would have the additional benefit of making those trips far more satisfying.

Finally, as we did last year. our Club should continue its eyewear collection drive to avoid depletion of the reserve of donated eyewear deposited at the Harahan Lions Club. Our goal should be to at least meet, if not exceed, collecting as many used eyeglasses as we took with us for distribution in the preceding year. With these improvements we may be able to serve even more people better than we did this time.

We are pleased to respond to any questions the membership or other Lions may have about our project.

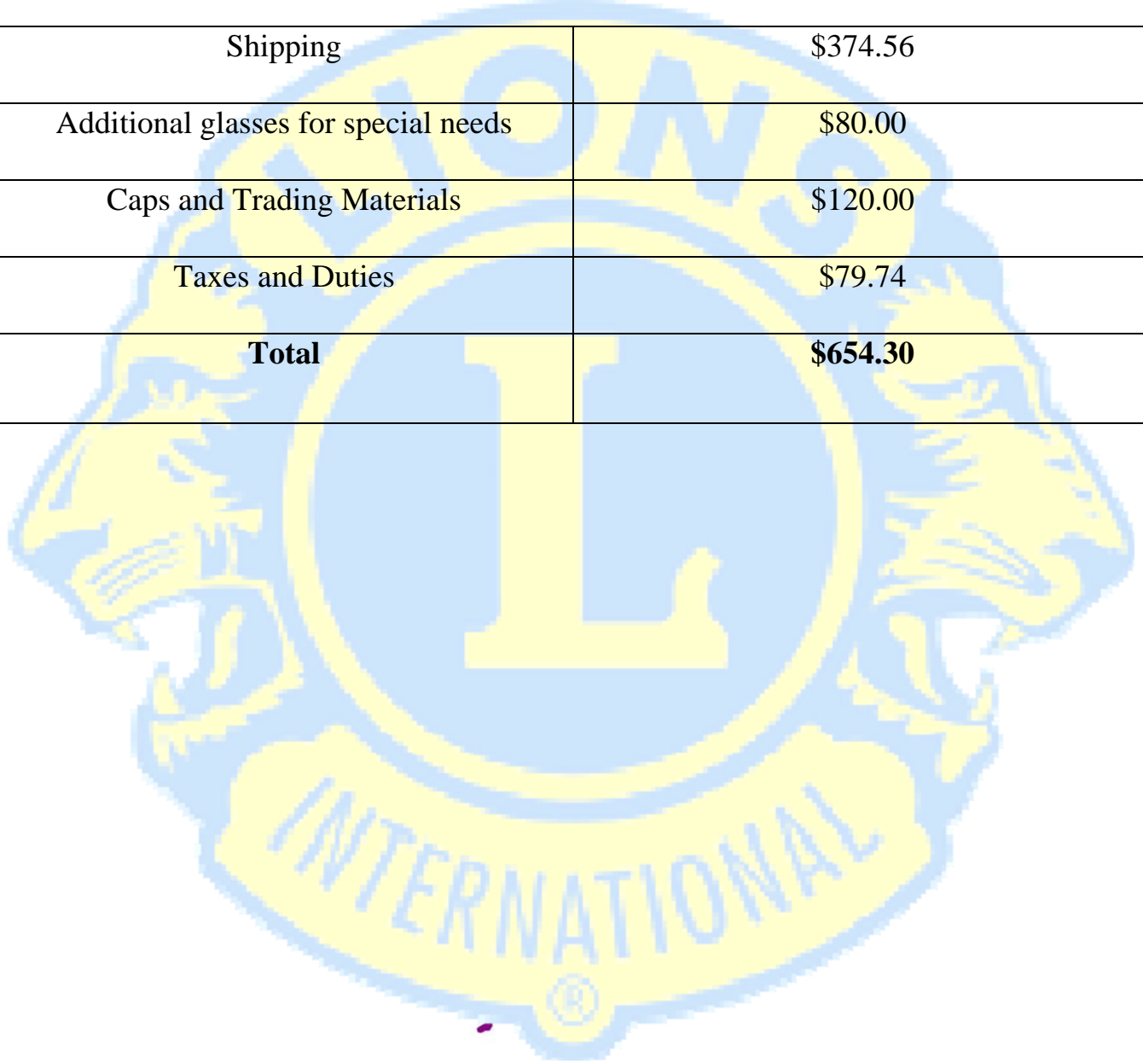
Respectfully submitted,

Lion Wimol Harwell



**2009 Total Costs**

Shipping	\$374.56
Additional glasses for special needs	\$80.00
Caps and Trading Materials	\$120.00
Taxes and Duties	\$79.74
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$654.30</b>





The Dok Khamtai Lions and their blankets in the Nonglao Amphur Phusang Community Center



Lions Across Borders





New Orleans Filipino American Lions and the Dok Khamtai Lions working together. The Leo Club sponsored by the Dok Khamtai Lions is also shown here.



Check out those snappy looking hats!