



Jan / Febr / March 2017 No.50  
**Solar Serve News**

**Dear friends,**

When you receive this newsletter it is already 2017, but we are still preparing ourselves for the Vietnamese New Year at the end of January. You can compare this preparation with the excitement and expectations of Christmas. There will also be a New Year's Eve which will be different each year according to the lunar calendar. It will be followed by three days of celebrations (28, 29 & 30 Jan), similar to Christmas and Boxing Day with lots of food and enjoying each other. So, for us it is never too late to say happy new year. May our friendship be stronger in love and grace this year.



**Solar Light Christmas gift**

We made a suggestion to friends in Vietnam that our solar lamp "Light of the World" was available as a Christmas gift to bless families, friends or staff of their organization. We have done this with our own staff and they were very happy with it. The good thing about our lamp is that it is a solid product that can be used for years in comparison to the cheaper ones on the market. The lamps are still available for other occasions to bless people in areas where electricity can be a problem. Even mobile phones (etc.) can be recharged with it. Watch our video clip ([click](#)):

**Book on Vietnamese social enterprises**

A Vietnamese book has been published by the British Council and other agencies with the purpose to show examples of social enterprises in Vietnam. The aim is to acknowledge the importance of creative ideas for social goals through social enterprise models. Please click here to download the Vietnamese pdf file of the book. Information about Solar Serve can be found on pages 55 to 58 ([click](#)). It was an honor for us to be mentioned in this book. Social enterprises are still not fully recognized in Vietnam.



**A football adventure**

Vu, one of our deaf workers, loves to play football at three o'clock in the morning because playgrounds are limited in the city. He was invited to play for the national deaf team at the (click) [ASEAN Deaf Football Championship](#) in Malaysia. Although his family found it hard to release him, they finally gave permission. We also gave him time off from work and were very proud of him. They played very well and even reached the semifinals, but lost sadly to Malaysia. It was a special experience for Vu to play abroad for the first time. He is back at our factory and again plays with his deaf friends at three o'clock in the morning.

**Help in Emergency**

The number of clean stoves in our storage has been growing. Two months ago an emergency came up after heavy rainfall and floods in three provinces in the north. There was a call for help and we decided to support the flood victims in Quang Binh province with 1000 clean stoves from our storage. Another organization provided blankets, clean water and small amounts of money. Not all of the clean cookers could be distributed due to limited transport, so we decided to support half of the 1000 stoves for poor families in the mountains. It was very meaningful for us but also well received by the victims and poor families.



**Charity, Social Enterprise and Family Business Training**



We want to make it clear that Solar Serve is a social enterprise and also a charity. But some of us have been trained by Swiss Create to teach others in Vietnam how to start a small family business. So we teach them also to apply principles that we have experienced in Solar Serve. Although we do this beside our normal work in Solar Serve, we are considering to be officially registered. Now we have many stories to tell how lives have been changed and that is why you find testimonies in this letter. It became a part of what we are doing as a social enterprise, charity and family business training.

### A change of thinking in the Mountains

A Sôn belongs to the De minority and attended our family business course. He thought he could never be successful in any kind of business. But during the seminar he heard the success stories of other participants. It changed his thinking and one day he walked in his rice field and a question came to his mind: 'Why not change this field into a fish farm?' So he started to be creative and made the field deeper and guided a water stream to his field. It became a pond and he started to grow a special kind of fish that people loved. Now he is selling his fish to many customers. It was a small action but it became a big change.



### Helping the poor in Cambodia

We were invited to explore the possibility to hold a family business course in Cambodia. There are many Vietnamese families who live there for almost 12 – 20 years. Nearly 90% of them have no passports or identity cards. They are not able to return to Vietnam, so the local government allows them to live there. They are very poor, slaves of bad employers and sometimes they have to sell their children for money in order to survive. Hopefully this year we can teach them to stand strong with practical steps through our family business course. In other words: Teach them to fish and not to rely on others for fish.

### Being misused in Malaysia

Mr. Hung was often on the road as a driver. One day he found his wife with another man and divorced her. He went to Saigon and met a woman in a bar. She told him about the opportunities in Malaysia. Together they decided to move there, but soon his papers were taken. He was trapped because the woman had set it up. He started to use drugs, but one day he met some others in a similar situation. They helped him and soon he was involved in our family business training last year. He changed a lot and after he was able to return to Vietnam, he applied the FBT principles and started a chicken farm with his mother and raised already 700 chickens.



### Miracle at home

The 6 year old son of Tuan, one of our workers, was playing on New Years day at his neighbor's house. They had a large TV with two speakers sitting on an unstable dresser in the living room. The boy is very active and tried to climb the dresser in order to change the TV channel. Suddenly the whole thing started to move and fell on the boy. The heavy TV landed over his head and hit him slightly and caused a head wound. He survived and everyone was very grateful that the boy's life was spared. A similar accident ([click](#)) was posted as a warning on YouTube almost happened the same day. Shocking to see!

### Valuable visitors

Several relatives of our Solar Serve friends came to visit us during their holiday in Vietnam. We are always open to receive people like them and happy to explain what we are doing. If the sun is shining we can demonstrate our solar devices and tell them about our purpose of running the center. Some of them wrote us later that their trip and visit was unforgettable. A Vietnamese young man from the USA also spent a whole day with us asking questions about how he could help his own people in the near future. We were impressed by his compassion and wished that he could join Solar Serve, but that is up to him.



### Great compassion

Although we are a social enterprise our profit is limited because our hearts are also connected with helping the poor. We are not sponsored by big organizations but we have many Solar Serve friends with a great compassion for the people in Vietnam. Recently some of them have been raising support by selling syrup waffles, flower wreaths, cards, contacting recycling shops for donations and other creative activities. All of this helps us to do our work as a charity, beside our enterprise and teaching. Through the years it has impacted many people and we are very thankful to all those individuals.

### A woman we all love

We still want to honor Madame Dau, an elderly women from Hanoi who has been very important to us. She was more than 70 years old when she worked with us in the country side. ([click on this no.8 Newsletter link](#)) She was a great encouragement for our workers but also for the people. In the past she was one of the trans-lators of the late president Ho Chi Minh. We have been visiting her in Hanoi and now she is more than 80 years old. Recently she started to forget things. It was sad to see her struggling, but it brought so much joy when she recognized our workers by showing her some old pictures of 2005.



That's all for now. Let's finish with a Vietnamese New Years greeting: Chúc Mừng Năm Mới

Greetings,

Solar Serve team

**Called to Serve**

**More information:** [www.vietnamsolarserve.org/](http://www.vietnamsolarserve.org/) or write to: [solarserve@yahoo.com](mailto:solarserve@yahoo.com)

# Danang News (Excerpts of Vietnamese newspaper articles)

## Learning to swim

Swim Viet Nam has provided free swim courses for pupils and swimming facilities in Da Nang. In 2017 it will build a big swimming pool, as well as providing swimming education and training for teachers, and introducing drowning prevention skills to them. According to Swim Viet Nam, over 17,500 children have already been taught how to swim since its operation started in the central region in 2008, and over 160 adults have been trained as swimming instructors. Da Nang was the first city in Vietnam to provide swim courses for local primary pupils.



## No building permits

Hundreds of houses in the Ngu Hanh Son District have been built without proper permits, resulting in lots of trouble and headaches for their owners. A local resident who purchased one of the houses said that she first became aware that the houses lacked a building permit when she was unable to finalize the legal procedures for ownership to be transferred to her name. Though local authorities are aware of the situation, they have not penalized the project developer because the land plots are owned by the military.

## Underwater tunnel approved

After strong opposition the construction of the tunnel beneath the Han River has been approved, although the cost to build and maintain the tunnel is much higher than that of a bridge. Construction has been scheduled to begin in 2018. The project would require the relocation of 210 residents. According to the original design, the submarine tunnel will run a total of 1,315 meters, 900 of which will be submerged under the river, connecting the city's Hai Chau District with Son Tra District. It will be wide enough to accommodate six lanes of traffic.



## New traffic regulations

Authorities in Da Nang are considering reducing personal motorbikes and cars in the near future as traffic has recently become more difficult. Traffic jams are causing lots of trouble for local commuters at rush hour. There are nearly 60,000 cars and over 800,000 motorcycles in the city. Da Nang's infrastructure must catch up with the rapid increase in population and number of personal vehicles. A solution will be a one-way traffic system downtown and more parking lots. Also bus fares should be subsidized to encourage local residents.

## Special tour buses

Double-deckers will be used as tour buses in the streets of Da Nang soon in order to boost tourism. A local business will use about 30 buses, including sightseeing double-deckers, for the new service starting in January. The open-top double-decker buses will take passengers to attractions around the city. The service has been planned for quite a long time. Many countries have similar services and converted the open-top as a restaurant as it travels through the streets. It is not known if the buses will also be operating during rush hours.



## Harley-Davidson showroom

The first American-made motorcycle, the iconic Harley-Davidson, has introduced its first showroom in Da Nang. The company will provide full service, spare parts, and accessories for modification among motorcycle lovers. It already has showrooms in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. Harley Davidson was made popular in Ho Chi Minh City during the American war in the 1960s, but now the motorcycle has become a favorite on Hanoi streets. 8,682 motorbikes with engine capacities of more than 175 cc were imported to Vietnam between 2014 -15.

## An apology from Korea

The Korean-Vietnamese Peace Foundation has presented many touching pictures collected from the Korean people and social organizations, relating to the massacres of civilians in the Vietnam War, to Da Nang Museum. This is an effort to heal wounds caused by Korean troops in the war. This year the Chairman of the Foundation humbled himself and bowed down in apology to the Vietnamese people at the 50th commemoration of one of the massacres. People burst into tears when they told the delegation about the massacre in their village.



## Getting real about drugs.

Da Nang's top leader has admitted that the plan to develop the city free of drugs has failed and is urging officials to be honest about the situation. He admitted that there was a sense of hiding drugs being used in an attempt to paint a positive image of the city. "We cannot be soft anymore," he said. "We need to take bold and tough actions as the stakes are very high." The last two years drug users have increased 60%. Using drugs is not treated as a crime but addicts are sent to rehab centers. Drug smuggling, dealing and production are punished by death.

## Rock climbing in Da Nang

A new tourist attraction was added recently: rock climbing. It is run by a Vietnamese tour company on Thuy Son Mountain, the largest out of the five Marble mountains. Those who are taking the trip will be given a short lesson. Players move down with two climbing ropes. One is used by the players to control their descent while the other is controlled by the guides to ensure the players' safety. Some areas in the cave are very dark so players have to watch carefully. Ticket price is US\$57, quite high for Vietnamese travelers so the majority of the players are foreigners.

